What happens to people when they choose to unhook from the rules and modes of thought whiteness requires and expects of them?

Whiteness promotes a form of hegemonic thinking, which influences not only thought processes but also behavior within the academy. Working to dismantle the racism and whiteness that continue to keep oppressed people powerless and immobilized in academe requires sharing power, opportunity, and access. Removing barriers to the knowledge created in higher education is an essential part of this process. The process of unhooking oneself from institutionalized whiteness certainly requires fighting hegemonic modes of thought and patriarchal views that persistently keep marginalized groups of academics in their station (or at their institution).

In the explosive *Unhooking from Whiteness: Resisting the Esprit de Corps*, editors Hartlep and Hayes continue the conversation they began in 2013; they and the chapter contributors are brave enough to tell a contemporary reality few are brave enough to discuss.

"In this groundbreaking and revolutionary sequel volume to *Unhooking from Whiteness: The Key to Dismantling Racism in the United States*, Nicholas Hartlep and Cleveland Hayes and a group of fearless scholars-activists continue to manifest liberative counternarratives, counteraccounts, personal memoirs, poetry, and testimonios of ‘humanity destroying crimes’ of racism, white supremacy, and ‘academic lynching’ that pervade the academic psyche through epistemology, ontology, and axiology in the United States. This radical work poses a troubling challenge to humanity not only to unhook from, but also to contest, transgress, and liberate from, white supremacy to cultivate extraordinary human potential in a trembling and unjust world."

– Ming Fang He, Georgia Southern University

Nicholas D. Hartlep is an award-winning Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations at Illinois State University and co-editor of *Unhooking from Whiteness: The Key to Dismantling Racism in the United States* and *Critical Storytelling in Uncritical Times: Stories Disclosed in a Cultural Foundations of Education Course*. He lives and writes in Normal, Illinois.

Cleveland Hayes is an Associate Professor in the College of Education and Organizational Leadership at the University of La Verne. Dr. Hayes teaches Secondary and Elementary Science Methods in the Teacher Education program and Research Methods in the Education Management and Leadership Program. He lives and writes in Upland, California.

Cover image by Tak Toyoshima
Unhooking from Whiteness
CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: CURRICULUM STUDIES IN ACTION

Volume 10

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Scope

“Curriculum” is an expansive term; it encompasses vast aspects of teaching and learning. Curriculum can be defined as broadly as, “The content of schooling in all its forms” (English, p. 4), and as narrowly as a lesson plan. Complicating matters is the fact that curricula are often organized to fit particular time frames. The incompatible and overlapping notions that curriculum involves everything that is taught and learned in a particular setting and that this learning occurs in a limited time frame reveal the nuanced complexities of curriculum studies.

“Constructing Knowledge” provides a forum for systematic reflection on the substance (subject matter, courses, programs of study), purposes, and practices used for bringing about learning in educational settings. Of concern are such fundamental issues as: What should be studied? Why? By whom? In what ways? And in what settings? Reflection upon such issues involves an inter-play among the major components of education: subject matter, learning, teaching, and the larger social, political, and economic contexts, as well as the immediate instructional situation. Historical and autobiographical analyses are central in understanding the contemporary realities of schooling and envisioning how to (re)shape schools to meet the intellectual and social needs of all societal members. Curriculum is a social construction that results from a set of decisions; it is written and enacted and both facets undergo constant change as contexts evolve.

This series aims to extend the professional conversation about curriculum in contemporary educational settings. Curriculum is a designed experience intended to promote learning. Because it is socially constructed, curriculum is subject to all the pressures and complications of the diverse communities that comprise schools and other social contexts in which citizens gain self-understanding.
Unhooking from Whiteness

Resisting the Esprit de Corps

Edited by

Nicholas D. Hartlep
Illinois State University, USA

and

Cleveland Hayes
University of La Verne, USA

SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI
ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
UNHOOKING FROM WHITENESS

“Unhooking from Whiteness: Resisting the Esprit de Corps is a powerful collection of essays that speaks to the current historical moment that is marked by new and virulent forms of racism and white supremacy. As such, this volume serves as a gloved fist raised on the podium of cultural struggle, a sign that a new day is coming where white supremacy will receive its reckoning in the court of social justice. This is a profound example of scholarship put in the service of the public good, organized to integrate education into activism and movement building. It is a book whose message is clear, concise and urgent, a book that should be read not only by educators but also by all who are interested in building a commons marked by freedom and dignity.”

“I applaud the editors of this collection of chapters centered on issues swirling around whiteness and the everyday impacts of those issues on the lived experiences of the individual authors and others. Although the book focuses on the academic or higher education context, its advocacy of ‘disrupting whiteness’ will be felt in a broader social context. It is well worth a read by all of us.”

“Unhooking from Whiteness: Resisting the Esprit de Corps is a must read for anyone interested in critically analyzing and understanding the multilevel and multidimensional nature of racism in America, particularly the role whiteness plays in the everyday lived experiences of people of color and the impact of whiteness on social institutions in ways that limit the ability of communities of color to thrive, while simultaneously insuring continued access to unearned powers and privileges for members of the dominant racial group in America. Unhooking from Whiteness: Resisting the Esprit de Corps brings together some of the nation’s premier scholars on the study of whiteness, and they are singing in one voice. The contributors to the edited volume call upon scholars and the broader society to narrow the gap between whom and what we say we value and how we engage around issues of race and racism.”
– Lori Latrice Martin, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology and African & African American Studies Louisiana State University, author of White Sports/Black Sports: Racial Disparities in Athletic Programs (2015)
# Table of Contents

Foreword: Double Consciousness for All  
*Suzanne Soo Hoo*  
ix

Preface  
*Nicholas D. Hartlep*  
xiii

1. The Spook Who Sat by the Door: The Challenge of Unhooking from Whiteness in the African American Faculty Experience  
*Micheal E. Jennings*  
1

2. Unhooking from Whiteness and the Assault That Follows: Lynching in the Academy  
*Cleveland Hayes*  
13

3. The Paranoid Professor: Invisible Scars from Unhooking from Whiteness and Their Impact on Teaching  
*Nicholas D. Hartlep*  
27

4. Resisting the *Esprit de Corps*: White Challenging Whiteness  
*Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner*  
35

5. The Other Made Black  
*Matthew T. Witt*  
47

6. Towards Equity and Justice: Latinx Teacher Auto-Ethnographies from the Classroom  
*Rosa Mazurett-Boyle and René Antrop-González*  
63

7. Unhooking from Whiteness: Are Historically Black Colleges and Universities Good Enough?  
*Antonio L. Ellis and Christopher N. Smith*  
75

8. White Tundra: Exploring the Emotionally Frozen Terrain of Whiteness  
*Cheryl E. Matías*  
89

*Brenda Juárez Harris, Darron T. Smith and Cleveland Hayes*  
101

10. Lifting the Dumbbells of Whiteness and Hegemonic Masculinity  
*Brandon O. Hensley*  
117
TABLE OF CONTENTS

11. Challenging Whiteness and the Violence That Follows: A Poem of Reflection 121
   Veronica Escoffery-Runnels

12. Stop Showing Your Whiteness and Unhook 123
   Cleveland Hayes, Brenda Juárez Harris and Nicholas D. Hartlep

Afterword: To Right the Blight without White Is Not too Bright: Still Seeking to Understand the Role of White People in a Racialized World 139
   Paul R. Carr

About the Contributors 147

Name Index 153

Subject Index 159
The clarion call from creators Hartlep and Hayes is to “unhook from shackles of whiteness…to assist people of all races, cultures, and backgrounds and educate them about the importance of unhooking oneself from whiteness in order to dismantle racism in the U.S.” (preface). This book is for people of color (POC) and people of non-color (whites) to unhook from the normalcy of white dominance; to unhook from the mind numbing influence of hegemonic complacency and to unhook from ideological iron cuffs that prevent us from disabling the white status quo.

This book builds on whiteness work of other scholars in the past two decades. Several scholars in higher education (Chávez-Chávez & O’Donnell, 1998; McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Monzó & SooHoo, 2014) have secured courageous first person accounts about racial travesties they or colleagues have experienced or witnessed. In this rich body of literature, one sees how whiteness is framed (Feagin, 2010), scanned (Carr, 2007), manifested, and “called out” of its invisible neutrality. This collection of work and its authors accomplish what Feagin describes as “racist realities that are taken ‘out of the closet’ so that they can be openly analyzed and, hopefully, redressed or removed” (p. 21). And indeed, is this not the life’s work and struggle of what we do as critical educators and as cultural workers? Distinguished Freirean scholar Antonia Darder (2015) reminds us, “The political work of the oppressed has always required the unveiling, naming, and challenging of asymmetrical relations of power and their consequences within schools, communities, and the larger society” (p. 38). The authors in this book zero in with laser sharp acuity on the cancerous racism that invades academic spaces, recognizing that racism makes ill not just red cells but also white cells. Organizations and cultures suffer together when racism goes unchecked and unchallenged. Our call collectively as authors and readers as Freire puts it is “to unveil the contradictions and courageously challenge practices that objectify, dispirit, and dehumanize, preventing our political expression as full cultural citizens” (p. 44).

Some people may be uncomfortable with this challenge. Within white neutrality, there is comfort in white invisibility. To suddenly recognize others are watching you with 3D lenses and examining your behavior as a course of study can be annoying. We all know how being the object of study through colonial research practices most often results in characterizations that are not our truths. It can make one paranoid.
not only because of the scrutiny but also in the power of the Other to define. What happens when the Other engages in ethnographic examinations on whiteness? What happens when the Other becomes the researcher and whiteness becomes the researched? Imagine the audacity of being studied, analyzed, and interpreted without one’s consent?

Peter McLaren (1995) cites bell hooks (Black Looks), who notes that white people are often shocked that black people have the ability to critically assess whiteness. “Their [white people’s] amazement that black people match white people with a critical ‘ethnographic’ gaze is itself an expression of racism” (p. 110). Behind that shaken awareness is apprehension of what is being said. For most of white America who have not had the opportunity or the courage to examine their white privilege, they are not accustomed to being framed/scanned by Others and they have not heard our counter stories to racism and whiteness—counter stories that occupy large spaces in our mental landscapes. Anti-racist counter frames are pragmatic literacies among people of color and other disenfranchised groups that have “called out” racist issues, deconstructed its causes, and re-storied how to move practically within “the contours and realities of everyday life” (Feagin, 2010). Counter framing is not taught in schools or in media but are grounded in communities of interests such as homes, churches, barbershops, and beauty salons. Feagin characterizes black beauty salons as places “where black beauty is routinely defined, honored, and enhanced—in resistance to the conventional white framing of black women” (p. 179).

Counter frames to racism are found in this book, accessible to everyone. For people of color and people from other marginalized groups, they will find these folk stories of our racist experiences in the academy disturbing, affirming, inspiring, and challenging as we continue to seek solidarity among all groups encountering white oppression. We look to these stories for strength and truth to power in recognition of racism’s omnipotence throughout organizational structures and everyday micro-aggressions.

Last month I waited for a car to pull out of a space marked faculty. A white gentleman was hanging his suit jacket up in the backseat and positioning himself to leave.

I asked, “Are you leaving?”

His response: “These spaces are for faculty.”

With irritated disbelief, I exclaimed, “I wonder what faculty looks like?”, leaving him quite puzzled. I should have replied, “Where are your credentials?”

While stories like this occur on a daily basis, our white colleagues are often not aware of or have dismissed these incidents as socially without warrant. They perceive these as “paper cut” transgressions that can be ignored because white has the power to define what is important and what is not, by validating some experiences and subjugating others (Sefa Dei, 2007). Disregard and indifference are manifestations of the “arrogance of the powerful” according to Pope Francis (D’Emilio, 2016), who in this New Year’s homily emphasized the need to “let
ourselves be reborn, to overcome the indifference which blocks solidarity, and to leave behind the false neutrality which prevents sharing.”

White allies have listened and learned to act on our behalf, recognizing that this racist world requires attention, conversation, and action by all of us. Acts of opposition by marginalized groups to address institutional racism are necessary but not sufficient in changing the structures that maintain its immortality (McLaren, 1995). Freire maintains that dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor is key to developing critical consciousness in which we establish a dialectical relationship and bring our mutual unfinishedness towards a conscious awareness of limit situations. POC must name limit situations. Whites need to question white normativity. Here lies hope and possibility for a more humane existence among all people of the world.

What can this book do towards this end? How can this book along with other great works around similar lines “stimulate conversation and activism in eradicating racism and other forms of oppression and inequity” (Carr, 2007, p. 13)? Can this book evoke conversations and potential action whereupon both whites and people of color develop a double consciousness; a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others as a means to inform action (Du Bois, 1903)? For African Americans and other minoritized groups, this sense making and folk literacy was taught and sustained through intentional socializing by one’s own community to ensure political and social survival within white dominance—a necessary and pragmatic way to deal with racist issues, not a literacy of choice. But what if this burden was shared? What if double consciousness was in fact a desired outcome of dialogical relationships? Self-monitoring and consciousness of white neutrality would mean whiteness can no longer maintain invisibility and racism no longer can live in the shadows of our institutions. This might entail uncomfortable conversations, translations, and negotiations within untested feasibility (Freire, 2002), but it is here that hope and possible transformation lies. Instead of both claiming the other as culturally deprived, we recognize, from a stance of humility and love (SooHoo, 2015), that we must offer our mutual unfinishedness as the foundation for our co-constructed agenda to eradicate racism. Dialogue initializes proximity to action. It is within emancipatory praxis that we formulate pathways for counter-hegemonic action. For after all, our ultimate goal in the academy is to legitimatize colorized ideologies and epistemological pluralism that we believe is central to the mission of universities and democracies.

REFERENCES


PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

In Unhooking from Whiteness: The Key to Dismantling Racism in the United States, professor Hayes and I attempted to petition people of color (and also whites) to unhook themselves from the shackles of whiteness. Our Unhooking volume included the auto-ethnographic accounts of African American, Native American, Asian American, European American, and Latinx academics and K–12 educators who have attempted to “unhook” from whiteness.

The present volume is equally committed to such a project. Unhooking from Whiteness: Resisting the Esprit de Corps examines the consequences of deciding to unhook from whiteness. In other words, what happens to people when they choose to unhook from the rules and modes of thought whiteness requires and expects of them? From the outset, professor Hayes and I need to make clear that we have not edited Resisting the Esprit de Corps for white people exclusively, although Carrie Morris writes that “[r]acism is never subtle to the victim. Only White people say race doesn’t matter” (as cited in Smith, 2005, p. 439). In other words, whites can be victims of whiteness too, albeit in different ways. The edited volume that stands before the reader is for all people, of all races, and all cultures, because although racism is a “white” problem, its consequences, invariably, affect us all, especially people of color (e.g., see Hayes & Hartlep, 2013; Lipsitz, 1995; Smith, 2013).

A few more points of clarification need to be made earlier than later. First, European Americans unhooking from whiteness is not merely race traitorship; although traitorship is a facet of it. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (1996) identify the principle of race traitorship as “treason to whiteness” which, according to them, is “loyalty to humanity” (p. 10). Second, this volume builds upon the important work of whiteness and racialization scholars—such as George Lipsitz (1998), Zeus Leonardo (2002, 2013), Noel Ignatiev (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996), Cheryl Matias (Matias, 2012; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014), and others who are not named here. We hope that the chapters in this book can assist people of all races, cultures, and backgrounds and educate them about the importance of unhooking oneself from whiteness in order to dismantle racism in the United States, especially during this “third wave” (Twine & Gallagher, 2008).

We strongly believe that this edited volume will be an essential read for those who are passionately interested in disrupting whiteness’ influence in society, especially within an academic or higher education context. Professor Hayes and I believe that
academics cannot seek societal transformation (such as the elimination of racism),
when we ourselves as academicians and theoreticians create the same injustices
we critique in our scholarship. In other words, the problems we face inside the
academy are related to the problems we create by not unhooking ourselves from
institutionalized whiteness.

Professor Hayes and I invited contributors to provide chapters that considered
how individuals could push back or disrupt whiteness. Nine auto-ethnographic
accounts were published in Unhooking from Whiteness: The Key to Dismantling
Racism in the United States (Hayes & Hartlep, 2013). We sought to include more
voices and alternative forms of expression in Resisting the Esprit de Corps. For
example, this volume includes poems. In this book Hayes expands what he has
termed “academic lynching” (see Juárez & Hayes, 2014), while I share my thoughts
about the psychological and physical manifestations of whiteness.

Why This Book? Why Now?

Why not now? Professor Hayes and I believe that the hypercompetitive and
neoliberal conditions in higher education do not encourage faculty to cooperate.
The “dog-eat-dog” higher education system shows no mercy or humanity; we
suspect Ignatiev Garvey (1996) might say it is unloyal to humanity. Hayes and I
have become embittered by what we label here, for lack of better terms, an esprit de
corps or a coterie of whiteness. The esprit de corps refers to the spirit of the academy
that is based on whiteness, while the coterie of whiteness refers to faculty and
editors who serve as gatekeepers of knowledge production and dissemination, who
curiously perpetuate exclusivity rather than inclusivity or diversity of thought. Peer-
reviewed research publications are the medium of exchange in the academy—but
few consider how that supposedly “blind” and “meritocratic” system is whiteness,
reinforced by the supposed proper forms of citing, such as what is required by the

We are sure that others reading this book have come across “critical” scholars
who write against oppression, inequality, and oppression yet who also maintain
inequality and racism by oppressing other junior faculty members and undergraduate
and graduate students through various insidious behaviors. Whether that oppression
is “academically lynching” those who do not conform or intentionally misadvising
pre-tenure faculty members and doctoral students, there is no shortage of this going
on in the academy. It’s a shame, and it’s time to speak up and out about it.

Moreover, why are academics required to publish in journals that make it difficult
to access such privileged “cutting-edge” information? Who actually reads what
we write as teacher educators and academics, and more importantly, how many
practicing K–12 teachers read it? It has been asked, “If a tree falls in a forest and no
one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” Similarly, “If no one reads what we
write, have we written anything?” Certainly the esprit de corps can refer to critical
scholars who write about social justice but don’t live it out in their daily (private)
lives. But it also can include those individuals who falsely say they are freedom fighters or antiracists, when in actuality they are not.

Indeed, there’s no shortage of scandals in the world that have involved allegedly “progressively-minded” people, “freedom fighters”—be it Greg Mortenson, the man who built schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan for girls, who was later found out to be a con artist who enriched himself at the expense of Afghani and Pakistani girls (cf., Krakauer, 2011), or Jesse Jackson Jr., the son of Civil Rights leader Jesse Jackson, who embezzled campaign funds (Gray, 2013). These two individuals may be rare, but what do we make of the professor who attends conferences and stays at hotels that cruelly underpay their maids and staff, who are homophobic, and who don’t tip the maitre d’?4 We certainly are talking about the contradictions between public personae (published life) and private realities (private lifestyle), but we can be talking about other problematic behaviors and uncritical mindsets too.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Working to dismantle the racism and whiteness that continue to keep oppressed people powerless and immobilized in academe requires sharing power, opportunity, and access. Removing barriers to the knowledge created in higher education is an essential part of this process. The process of unhooking oneself from institutionalized whiteness certainly requires fighting hegemonic modes of thought and patriarchal views that persistently keep marginalized groups of academics in their station (or at their institution). As editors of this volume, we know full well that its contents will be highly polemical for some; but irrespective of its reception, the book is highly necessary from our perspectives as pre-tenure and tenured faculty members. Because speaking truth to power is never an easy thing to do, we appreciate Sense publishing such critical and unpopular work, as “unhooking” from whiteness is perceived by those still hooked into whiteness as heresy and less than scholarly. If writing must adhere to whiteness to be considered “scholarly,” then I don’t want to aspire to be a scholar.

Similarly, the perception that open-access articles are less scholarly than traditional print journals benefits whiteness. It’s possible that academics who benefit from institutional or personal connections are more apt to want to maintain the idea that open-access journals are substandard when compared to print- and pay-walled journals; after all, these individuals thereby maintain material advantages.

Meanwhile, I have a personal experience with the whiteness that publishers benefit from. When I published an article in Equity & Excellence in Education, a prestigious peer-reviewed journal, I chose to pay a fee to make my article open-access. I chose to do so because I felt that having a pay wall would make the knowledge exclusive and not open to the public. The fee I had to pay was over $2,000!5 Taylor and Francis and the Copyright Clearinghouse are benefiting from erecting barriers to accessing knowledge. What I find deeply troubling is that the publishing process is a virtuous cycle. The more that you buy into it, the more you benefit from it.
Jealousness, bitterness, and competitiveness are not what professor Hayes and I are talking about *per se*, and we aren’t describing a scenario in which it’s white professors against all other professors of color. We’re addressing an unwillingness to “unhook from whiteness,” which strengthens the “possessive investment in whiteness.” We’re also discussing when people of color choose to remain hooked to whiteness for fear of losing the little power and prestige they may currently enjoy. Some faculty members of color perpetuate the processes illuminated above for reasons that seem logical. But when the logic they use is examined deeply, it becomes obvious that failure to unhook from whiteness is hegemonic. Antonio Gramsci would refer to minoritized and oppressed academics—who continue to be ensnared in the clutches of whiteness—as the “petite bourgeoisie.” In relation to intellectuals, Gramsci argues that people who somewhat benefit by the dominant power structure remain complacent in the system they know exploits them, out of fear of losing their marginal position (Gramsci, 1971).

Worth quoting at length, George Lipsitz (1995) writes the following:

All whites do not benefit from the possessive investment in whiteness in precisely the same way; the experiences of members of minority groups are not interchangeable. But the possessive investment in whiteness always affects individual and group life chances and opportunities. Even in cases where minority groups secure political and economic power through collective mobilization, the terms and conditions of their collectivity and the logic of group solidarity are always influenced and intensified by the absolute value of whiteness in American politics, economics, and culture. (p. 383)

Therefore, knowledge of whiteness is critical for ending it, or at least slowing its spread and the harm it does within both the academic and non-academic worlds. And this is highly consequential because, oddly yet predictably, research has found that whites believe they are victims of racism at rates higher than people of color (cf., Norton & Sommers, 2011). According to Norton and Sommers’ (2011) research, whites have now come to view anti-White bias as a bigger societal problem than anti-Black bias! It’s clear that speaking truth to power will be met with resistance.

**TOWARD A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHITENESS**

Whiteness promotes a form of hegemonic thinking, which influences not only thought processes but also behavior within the academy. This behavior and mode of thought is normalized through ubiquitous things such as academic conferences, wherein presenters frequently share their research studies via PowerPoint presentations rather than oral story format. For instance, at a Critical Race Theory conference in New York at Columbia University, professor Hayes and I refused to share our presentation via PowerPoint. We stated that we wouldn’t behave
according to social modes of thought in the academy that we didn’t participate in creating. Who says we need to use PowerPoint? Who makes the rules for conferences?

We also understand that academic and behavioral modes of thought can be socialized by faculty members and diffused through the advice given to doctoral students as well. For instance, doctoral students are socialized to do what is best for themselves at the expense of classmates who, upon graduation, will be competing for a limited amount of faculty positions. Another example of whiteness is how doctoral students are socialized and trained to believe that working at anything besides an R1 means that you are a failure or something less than a true academic. This is complete insanity: professor Hayes and I both work at R2s.

Microaggressions (and micro-invalidations), seen in arrow “A,” serve as daily reminders that faculty members who don’t conform or behave in ways that are accepted are not wanted (Sue, 2010a, 2010b). Academic lynching, seen in Arrow “B” and also explicated in professor Hayes’ chapter (see chapter 1), serves to terrorize non-conformity (Juárez & Hayes, 2014). While microaggressions and micro-invalidations are subtle and often automatic put-downs and insults directed toward people of color (Sue, 2010a, 2010b), academic lynchings are not-so-subtle, and can lead to faculty of color experiencing trauma and racial battle fatigue as the result of macroaggressions (cf., Hartlep, 2014; Hayes, 2014). This can lead scholars to becoming paranoid, something I detail in my chapter (see chapter 3).

Professor Hayes and I would like to thank the many people who read and provided feedback on this project. We would also like to thank by name the following people for their support and contribution to this project: Rene Antrop-González, Paul R. Carr, Paul Chambers, Antonio L. Ellis, Veronica Escoffery-Runnels,
N. D. HARTLEP

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NOTES

1 Here I use Latinx instead of Latin@ to be more inclusive since it is gender non-specific. Listen to the story here: http://www.npr.org/2016/01/29/464886588/latinx-the-ungendering-of-the-spanish-language

2 Here I use the term “European American” intentionally. According to Mukhopadhyay (2008), “European American is a more precise substitute for Caucasian than white—at least as long as we feel the need to classify U.S. residents into a few large groupings” (p. 15).

3 Consider the formatting and standards of publishing that use the American Psychological (APA) Manual, which Thompson (2004) has critiqued for perpetuating and transmogrifying whiteness.

4 A note from Nicholas: I teach my students that Christian privilege exists and tell them that articles and studies have examined how Christians tip less compared to non-Christians in restaurants. I was flabbergasted when one student attacked me after a lecture in which I cited this literature (e.g., Smith, Emerson, & Snell, 2008; Schlosser, 2003). I bring this up because chapter contributor René Antrop-González was the one who introduced me to his practice of leaving a generous tip when checking out of conference hotels. He does this because large percentages of hotel staff are underpaid and come from minority/minoritized populations. How many other academics do this?

5 I had a research budget that covered this expense. I recognize that most scholars would not be able to pay for this.

REFERENCES


Nicholas D. Hartlep

Spring 2016
MICHAEL E. JENNINGS

1. THE SPOOK WHO SAT BY THE DOOR

The Challenge of Unhooking from Whiteness in the African American Faculty Experience

There seems to be a growing conspiracy of silence surrounding the experiences of faculty of color teaching in predominantly White colleges and universities. For many faculty of color, who reside throughout the academic landscape, their silenced state is a burdensome cycle that is rarely broken. Stanley, 2006, p. 701

This chapter presents and analyzes important aspects of my experiences as an African American faculty member in a prestigious midsized university in the northeast United States. My experiences at this university are analyzed within the context of contemporary discussions about the experiences of faculty of color in Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Stanley, 2006). Stanley (2006) describes these experiences as hidden from plain sight by a “conspiracy of silence” (p. 701) that makes the recruitment and retention of faculty of color an amazingly difficult endeavor. In exploring this topic, Stanley (2006) asked prominent sociologist and White anti-racist activist Joe Feagin why so many White colleagues silently ignored this injustice. Feagin’s response was simple: “because it costs white folks” (p. 702). Stanley (2006) later extends this analysis and postulates that there is an enormous cost associated with African American faculty members speaking up about their experiences at PWIs and that this cost often acts to silence them in the face of deep and pervasive injustices.

In an effort to challenge the injustice that is reflective of this silence, it’s important that faculty of color tell their stories and express their truth regarding their experiences in the professoriate. I will undertake this task through an examination of my own experiences as an Assistant Professor in my first tenure track position. These experiences will be written as personal narratives that are intended to convey the “facts” surrounding specific incidents as well as the existence of emotion surrounding these events. The conveyance of emotion in these narratives is especially important because of its centrality in the experiences of faculty, teachers, and students at all levels of education (cf., Boler, 1999; Dirkx, 2008).
THEORETICAL LENS AND METHODOLOGY

To help analyze these experiences and connect them to the larger world, I utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my primary theoretical lens. The use of CRT as a theoretical lens is appropriate for this type of research because it (a) centers the concept of race in the study of narratives that focus on educational experiences, (b) emphasizes an understanding of socio-cultural contexts in education, and (c) allows for a research stance that challenges dominant discourses and advocates for social justice.

CRT has become an important component of the critical analysis of race in education because of its development and use of critical research methodologies that challenge mainstream ideas about the binary of “subjective vs. objective” knowledge that frequently informs discussions regarding methodology in educational research (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Specifically, CRT historically has emphasized the use of narrative and storytelling to challenge prevailing ideas and assumptions about race by “telling the stories of those people whose experiences are often not told” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These untold stories represent an important “counternarrative” that challenges the racist ideology that is used to create, maintain, and justify the use of “master narratives” that advance hegemonic discourses about race in America (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Given that the concept of race was a central focus of my experiences as an African American faculty member, it’s important that an appropriate theoretical lens and a complementary methodology are utilized in the exploration of a personal narrative that examines the complexities of race as manifested in the lived experiences of an individual African American faculty member.

THE ROLE OF THE SPOOK

_They accepted at face value what he appeared to be, because he became what they wanted him to be._ (Greenlee, 2002, p. 48)

In 1969, a former army officer and Foreign Service officer named Sam Greenlee published a novel entitled _The Spook Who Sat By the Door_ (1969/2002). It tells the fictional story of an African American ex-CIA agent and his complex plan to incite urban warfare in American cities during the late 1960s. The book’s title is a play on words: “spook” has multiple meanings that hold particular saliency for African Americans. First, it has been used for several decades as a disparaging descriptor of African Americans. Second, the term “spook” is often used to describe spies and undercover agents. This comes from the fact that the word “spook” is frequently used interchangeably with “ghost,” and spies (like ghosts) are often described as being invisible to detection (Sheppard, 2013).

The book advances multiple themes related to race, racism, politics, and power as reflected in the African American urban experience of the mid-1960s. The book’s protagonist, Dan Freeman, carefully navigates the difficulties of being the
first African-American to work as a CIA agent. He does this largely by utilizing a non-threatening and amiable persona that he hopes will provide him with a sort of “invisibility” from his superiors while training and working in what can be classified as “white space” (Moore, 2008, p. 24). He eventually leaves the CIA and returns to Chicago where he works as a social worker with some of the city’s most notorious street gangs. He uses this position to gain the trust of gang members in a way that taps into their disdain of institutional racism and their general distrust of white society. This allows Freeman to effectively politicize and re-organize the gang for the purpose of conducting urban-based guerilla warfare in a manner that rallies the support of the black community while representing a major threat to the existence of the status quo.

In a similar way, I felt that as a faculty member I would be able to quietly accrue knowledge, experiences and professional capital in ways that I could then use to train and influence students about the nature of race across American society. More specifically, I wanted to teach my students about the role of race and its connection to constructs of power and the formulation of policy in the field of education. It was my hope that my students (all of whom were future educators and educational leaders) would develop a knowledge base that allowed them to work with students and communities in ways that respected student and community cultural wealth while simultaneously fighting against the hegemony that permeates U.S. society (Yosso, 2005).

Like Dan Freeman, my plan was to lay low while gaining knowledge offered in graduate school. I believed that this knowledge would empower me so that I could later make “bold” and “decisive” moves as part of the professoriate. I hoped that the result would be evident in the knowledge base of my students, who would now understand the importance of challenging hegemony in their classrooms, across their campuses, and throughout their communities. Although this now seems naïve, this is what I hoped for and planned for as I moved into becoming a member of the professoriate.

ON SITTING BY CLOSED DOORS

*He who listens at doors hears more than he desires.* (French Proverb)

*That was why it was an advantage to be black. There were millions of peoples and races in Europe whose centuries of subservience made them culturally perfect as raw material for spying. The nigger was the only natural agent in the United States, the only person whose life might depend, from childhood, on becoming what whites demanded, yet somehow remaining what he was as an individual human being.* (Greenlee, 2002, pp. 109–110)

My experiences in the professoriate have ranged across several different types of universities situated in several different geographic locations. Each institution has offered unique experiences, and each has played a role in my professional
development as a faculty member. However, like other African American faculty members, I have experienced discriminatory treatment and racial microaggressions at each institution that I have worked (Pittman, 2012). My first job was as a Lecturer at a well-heeled New England college, while my second position involved evaluation work for a large grant at a major research institution in the mid-Atlantic region. Both jobs had their ups and downs, but what I most desired was a tenure-track position.

When I finally acquired a tenure track position, it was at an “R1” university located in a major east coast city. I was ecstatic to say the least. After two university jobs that weren’t on the tenure track, I was happy to have found a position where I could focus on the duties inherent in being a faculty member. The department I was in was fairly small and very homogenous. I was the only African American on the faculty and the only person of color as well. Perhaps even more disturbing, I was one of only a handful of African American faculty members on the entire campus. Our numbers were so small that on those rare occasions when we would meet on campus we didn’t have enough members to fill a table with eight available seats.

Although my time at this particular institution started out smoothly, it quickly became obvious that I did not truly “fit in” as a faculty member in my department. My recognition of this seemed most obvious in my interactions with my students. One of my duties as a new Assistant Professor was to teach a graduate diversity in education class and an undergraduate introduction to education class. For me, this meant revamping my classes so that they went beyond the idea of multiculturalism and diversity as forms of cultural celebration and instead offered a sustained critique of education through a critical social justice lens (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

The majority of my undergraduate students were white upper middle-class and cisgender. Many had fairly minimal contact with people of color, and most seemed to know little about the working of race, class, and gender in the U.S. My graduate students were more racially and economically diverse, but largely exhibited many of the same characteristics. I frequently asked my students (both graduate and undergraduate) to step outside of their comfort zones by understanding their own positionality in society (Maher & Tetreault, 1993) and juxtaposing their positionality with that of others in society from different backgrounds. This forced many of my students to confront their own privilege while acknowledging the role of institutional racism and sexism in how opportunities are structured in U.S. schools and communities.

I found that many of the same issues related to power, privilege, and positionality also affected my interaction with faculty members in my own department. Most of the department members were over the age of 60 with only a handful under the age of 50. All of them were white, and most had been at the university for many years. During our faculty meetings, I pushed my colleagues to recognize broader issues of race and class not only in relation to our student body but also in relation to the surrounding community (which was traditionally African American and working class).
One particular example that stands out was in regard to the lack of diversity in our faculty. The department had received criticism for a lack of student and faculty diversity as part of a review by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). During a discussion about the implications of the review I was shocked when one of our senior faculty members encouraged the department to respond to the reviewers by telling them that the department “really” was diverse because we had a faculty member who was fluent in several European languages. He explained that the presence of a multi-lingual white female faculty member represented linguistic diversity, something that he felt was just as important (or more important) than racial diversity. I objected vehemently to this idea, but my faculty colleagues met my reaction only with blank stares and silence. For the first time in my professional life, I fully understood how silence could be utilized as a weapon to enforce the hegemony of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1996).

Several weeks later, one of my graduate students arrived at my office and told me that he needed to speak with me immediately. I was busy, but I could tell that he was very upset and angry about something, so I asked him to sit down and tell me what was going on. After taking a seat, he explained that he was furious because one of the department’s senior faculty members had asked him to carry his bags from the ground floor of our building up to his third floor office. Without asking, I already knew that he was referring to the same faculty member who had previously insisted that racial diversity was not a real issue for our department. Unfortunately, I was correct. Despite this, I was stunned to think that this individual would ask any student, but particularly an African American student, to carry his bags as if he were a hotel porter. I thought about confronting the faculty member who had made the request, but I realized that—being an Assistant Professor—I would be taking a huge risk by confronting one of the department’s Full Professors over his treatment of a graduate student.

Although these faculty interactions were difficult, dealing with my students could also be equally challenging. They complained that I spent too much time talking about race and that I “hated” whites. I was also accused of being “lazy,” “unprepared,” “unorganized,” and “too hard.” Comments related to my preparedness, organization, and teaching methods came as a surprise because I put a great deal of time into teaching, and I thought of myself as a good teacher who challenged his students while caring about them as well. When my first teaching evaluations came in, I was surprised to see that some of my students were angered that I had canceled class because of a winter snowstorm. The class was an evening class that I had canceled in the late afternoon. Only two hours after I canceled the class, the university announced that all classes for the evening were canceled due to inclement weather conditions. I couldn’t figure out why the students were upset about a class cancelation—something that most students usually applaud—especially when the cancelation was later reinforced by a campus wide closure.

During the spring semester, I received similar complaints from a graduate class because I ended one of our class sessions only a short while after it started. I’m not
sure why this was an issue since I had explained to them that the reason I had to cancel the class and leave quickly was because my wife was in labor and needed to get to the hospital in anticipation of the birth of our second child. I had even forewarned them at the beginning of the semester that this would likely happen since my wife was six months pregnant when the spring semester began. For whatever reason, this didn’t seem to matter, and I was (again) labeled as problematic for having a “lackadaisical” attitude towards the class.

The following year my teaching evaluations seemed to be just as bad as those from my first year. One of the major complaints was related to a mandatory school observation that was part of the department’s Introduction to Education course. The problem revolved around the fact that I insisted that the students in the class do their observations at a nearby public school. The school had Title I status and served a population made of mostly black and brown students, almost all of whom relied on free and reduced lunch. This was the type of school that I believed our students should spend time at in an effort to understand the realities of urban education and to better reflect on the issues that we discussed in class. The students were highly upset by this requirement because previous iterations of the class had utilized a distinctly different school for the required observations.

Faculty members who had previously taught the course always allowed the students to attend an elite private school that was located near the campus. This allowed the school observations to be done in an environment where the vast majority of students were white and upper middle-class. This gave my future educators a great sense of comfort, but it provided them with a false sense of the realities inherent in urban education. Many of the students were upset by this and reported to the chair and other faculty that I was endangering their safety by sending them to a school in a “dangerous” area far from campus. I pointed out that both schools were nearly equidistant to the campus and that the students needed to spend time in diverse schools with diverse student populations. Despite my admonitions, the students frequently complained about the location of the observations, and each semester I made it mandatory that they visit a similar type of school.

My students’ attempts at distancing themselves from black and brown children and their communities were painful. It pained me on a personal level because by rejecting these children and their communities it felt as if they were implicitly rejecting me as well. After all, I was the product of a working-class African American community like the one they tried so hard to avoid. In that sense, I came to represent the “other” in their construction of black and brown children as being both different and unworthy. On a professional level, their attempts concerned me because I felt that if they had this type of attitude as teacher education students, then what type of attitudes would they have as teachers?

All of these issues overshadowed my first years as a tenure track faculty member. Despite this, I thought very little of the faculty review that I would go through during the fall of my second year. Although very few institutions had second year reviews, I was told that it was an old tradition at the university where I taught and
that such reviews were largely perfunctory. I was told, half jokingly, that the second year review at my institution was utilized mainly to make sure that anyone with an undone dissertation had completed it. As the time for the review approached, my chair told me that she didn’t expect any issues to come up and that I shouldn’t worry. She told me that the review would be conducted at a regular faculty meeting with the entire faculty in attendance (except for myself). This seemed strange to me because this meant that other Assistant Professors would be discussing and voting on my review. She assured me that this was the normal procedure for such a review. She instructed me that on the day of the review the faculty meeting would start a half hour earlier than usual so that the faculty would have adequate time to discuss my review. I was further instructed that if I arrived to the faculty meeting before the discussion was done that the door would be closed and that I was simply to have a seat outside of the meeting room area. When the discussion was over, I would be ushered in so that the regular faculty meeting could resume as scheduled.

The day of the faculty meeting came, and when I arrived at the meeting room I was surprised to see that the door was closed. The door was always open in advance of faculty meetings so that faculty could come and get settled before things got started. Given this fact, I was momentarily confused. Just as I put my hand on the doorknob to open the door, I suddenly remembered that the meeting that day was going to start a half earlier than usual and that I was supposed to sit and wait until I was told that my review was over. A wave of relief washed over me as I realized that I had avoided the major embarrassment that would have occurred had I opened the door and walked into a meeting where a review of my work was being conducted. Having been told that this review was perfunctory, I settled into a comfortable chair outside of the meeting room and sought to pass some time looking over some reading for my class.

I quickly realized that I could clearly hear voices from inside of the room. I stood up to leave because I was sure that being able to hear the discussion around my own review was not something that was supposed to happen. However, as I stood up, the voices from inside became louder, and I could hear my name being mentioned. I felt that I should leave, but a morbid curiosity overtook me. I slowly sat down and decided to listen. After all, the department chair was the one who told me to sit and wait outside until the meeting was over, so I guess that I could stay. In short, I justified my decision to stay by convincing myself that I was only following her instructions.

What I heard can only be described as life changing. I was described as being an angry black man who was overly militant and incapable of accepting the help offered by colleagues. My teaching was characterized as poor because I structured my classes to emphasize student interaction and because I pushed my students to confront and critique the role of race, class, and gender in schooling. Most interesting of all was the charge that I constantly disrespected the university through my critique of its policies around race and its lack of interaction with the local African American community. Nothing was mentioned about my scholarship or service to the
profession or to the university. Instead, the only thing discussed was the belief that I was an angry, race-obsessed individual who terrorized his students, disrespected the sanctity of the university, and refused the help of well meaning colleagues who wanted me to be seen and not heard. It was clear that these colleagues wanted me to teach, conduct research, and carry out service in ways that were deferential to them, non-threatening to the institution, and supportive of the status quo.

I was so overwhelmed by what I heard in those moments sitting by the door that my brain could barely function. My mind swirled in the midst of what can only be described as a fight or flight response. I was filled with anger, sadness, and disbelief all at the same time. Should I wait quietly for the meeting to end and then enter and unleash my rage as soon as the door opened? Should I leave campus immediately and head for the comfort and security of home? I did none of those things. Instead, I went to my office and sat in stunned silence. How could I explain this to my wife? What would this mean for my two young children? Would I ever be able to work again as a professor? The fall semester was about half over, so I mulled over having to enter the job market when I wasn’t prepared to do so.

As I sat in my office that day reflecting on all of the details of my time at the institution, I began to wonder if it was really my fault. Maybe I didn’t work hard enough. Maybe I was too radical, too critical…too black. Having been trained in the Social Foundations of Education (Tozer & Miretzky, 2005), I had a critical perspective on education in the U.S. I recognized the depths of the hegemony that I faced every day and how this hegemony structured and maintained institutional racism in U.S. education. Being an African American faculty member, I frequently connected with colleagues across the country who had similar experiences, so I knew that what I experienced was not at all uncommon for faculty of color teaching at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Bonner et al., 2015; Jackson & Johnson, 2011). Despite these understandings, I was still overwhelmed by what I had heard, and I found myself in a great deal of emotional and psychological distress.

I’m not sure that I ever fully got over the pain. However, I was able to move forward with what had happened because I had no other choice. I didn’t protest or appeal the decision even though I thought that it was blatantly unfair. I realized that even if I had successfully appealed the decision, I wouldn’t feel right continuing my journey at the institution I was working at under any circumstances. That fall, I went on the market and was blessed to secure a tenure track position at a university for the next year. The university I went to was a very different place from the one that I was leaving. I found that my work and my views were respected and that having supportive colleagues as well as a supportive Chair and Dean can make a huge difference. I flourished at that place and was able to reach my full potential. I even received early tenure and was actually nominated for a teaching award as well. My department and my college advocated for social justice as an explicit part of their mission, so many of the battles that I previously fought were no longer necessary. It’s not a perfect place; the specter of whiteness and threat of hegemony still lurk in every corner like a “spook” in the darkness. However, the support of
other faculty of color and a host of white allies have helped me to utilize my previous experiences (both negative and positive) as a means to navigate the difficult terrain that defines faculty life for people of color at predominantly white institutions in the U.S. (Garrison-Wade, Diggs, Estrada, & Galindo, 2012).

UNHOOKING FROM WHITENESS THROUGH GUERRILLA INTELLECTUALISM

_They can forgive a nigger almost anything other than competence._ (Greenlee, 2002, p. 90)

In analyzing my experiences as an African-American faculty member, it became clear to me that race played a major role in how I experienced being a member of the professoriate. Employing the lens of CRT, I view the professoriate and the supporting structures of university life as reflecting the dominance of White supremacy in the operation of U.S. institutions of higher learning (Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002). When I discussed race and white supremacy in my teacher education classes, I was met with a forceful reaction from my students that emphasized anger, denial, and blame. Unfortunately, such a reaction is often typical of white students pursuing teacher education (Fasching-Varner, 2012; Hayes & Hartlep, 2013). The faculty in my department seemed equally resistant to discussions about race and how it affected our department, our university, and the wider local community. In my presence they often exercised their silence as a weapon; however, when discussing me in private they spoke up and utilized their access to institutional power as a means to silence my critique of whiteness both in the classroom and in the department.

It was easy for my colleagues and students to ignore and minimize my critique because of the inherent difficulty in spotting and naming whiteness and its role in education. Berry (2015) addresses this phenomenon by stating that “the difficulty of spotting Whiteness in educational arenas is that it’s the invisible epistemological and ontological construct against which all others are compared and marginalized” (p. 15). Given this difficulty, the reaction of my students and faculty colleagues to critiques of whiteness is reflective of an all-consuming and ever present system of privilege and power that works against faculty of color while simultaneously working for the benefit of whites (Taylor, 2009).

My experiences in the professoriate have provided me with access to a career that reflects an ability to play a major role in both the construction and dissemination of knowledge at the highest levels. Furthermore, working at universities that emphasize research and publication at the highest levels has put me in a very privileged position. Despite the privilege generally afforded to faculty at these types of colleges and universities, they remain sites where faculty of color come face to face with White supremacy in unique and intimate ways. Working at these institutions often yields outstanding professional credentials for faculty of color while simultaneously isolating them and attacking their self-esteem and sense of identity (Stanley, 2006). Given this dichotomy, it’s difficult to believe that institutions of higher education
will ever truly be able to play a major role in the creation of a just and equitable society. Although this may be considered highly pessimistic, it is a belief rooted in the concept of “racial realism” that is a hallmark of CRT (Bell, 1992). This concept recognizes the fact that these institutions are strongly ingrained in incrementalism and face little serious pressure to make sweeping changes that would benefit people of color. In fact, it can be argued that social justice was never the intent of these institutions and that their primary purpose is to maintain paradigms of oppression such as race, class, gender and sexual orientation by supporting and extending these same existing institutional arrangements (cf., Marx, 2008; Spring, 2010).

With this in mind, this auto-ethnography of my first years as an Assistant Professor represents a counternarrative to the story that colleges and universities tell about the freedom, openness, and equity of the academy. Additionally, this auto-ethnography challenges the master narrative that casts African American males as angry and incompetent individuals who have minimal aptitude for the important faculty activities associated with teaching, research, and service. Specifically, my counternarrative challenges this portrayal by highlighting personal struggles against racism and framing them in a critical race narrative that reflects larger constructs of White supremacy and the various elements of faculty agency. Inclusive of this complexity is the cultivation of subversive teaching in conjunction with radical scholarship that challenges the hegemony of the professoriate by encouraging faculty to unhook from whiteness.

This emphasis on unhooking from whiteness has potential to strongly inform the basis of what Guyanese activist/scholar Walter Rodney (1990) referred to as “guerrilla intellectualism” (p. 111). Rodney (1990) coined this phrase to emphasize the necessity of intellectuals of color challenging the “imbalance of power” (p. 111) that exists within the academy. In the context of my journey, the notion of guerilla intellectualism guided me to recognize existing power relationships in the academy and to then consider what resources and strengths that I could bring to my work in the academy. Recognizing the numerous issues that I faced and understanding the personal and professional resources that I possessed helped me to tackle these issues and move ahead in my journey as a faculty member.

In practicing guerilla intellectualism, I’ve found it necessary to challenge the status quo represented by whiteness in the academy. As a guerilla intellectual, this challenge magnified my position as someone occupying a liminal space that embodied being simultaneously rendered as both invisible and hyper-visible (Moore, 2008) within the confines of the emerging neoliberal research university (Gaffkin & Perry, 2009). I understand the difficult of such a position and do not take it lightly because it means that both my existence and my actions will most certainly be seen as a challenge to the institutional status quo.

My past experiences have shown me that challenging the status quo is a necessary part of the scholarly activism that I am committed to. However, it must be approached with an understanding that such challenges will likely engender a host of negative reactions from the institution and its adherents. While there is no definitive right
or wrong way to handle these complex reactions, it’s important to me as a faculty member of color to seek the support of other faculty members of color as well the support of white allies. Likewise, it’s important to draw on resources from outside of the academy (e.g. community, family, faith traditions, etc.) to obtain the necessary support to continue the struggle within a context that recognizes the importance of nurturing one’s mental, physical, and emotional well being (Smith, 2004; Vakalahi & Starks, 2011).

Obtaining this broad spectrum of support is an important step in unhooking from whiteness and countering the hegemony of the academy. Doing this helps to establish a counternarrative of active resistance that challenges the “silent state” (p. 701) identified by Stanley (2006) and helps to break the “burdensome cycle” (p. 701) of anger, guilt, and shame that so often challenges faculty of color in the academy (Stanley, 2006). In turn, as these counternarratives continue to be established and communicated, they will help end the silence about the experiences of faculty of color and instead will help illuminate a path that will allow for increased recruitment and retention of faculty of color in American colleges and universities.

REFERENCES