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Whiteness FAQ: Responses and Tools for Confronting College Classroom Questions

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Abstract

Instructors and students with a critical race perspective are frequently confronted and often marginalized by questions of whiteness in the college classroom. These questions work to reinforce and promote white norms and ultimately white supremacy. This theoretical article and pedagogical tool responds to some frequently asked questions (FAQs) that exude whiteness in the classroom directly, offering critical responses backed by literature, research, and theory. We also respond to the questions subcontextually, naming the assumptions that are embedded in these whiteness questions and deconstructing them. We offer pedagogical strategies for responding to and resisting whiteness in the classroom when whiteness FAQs arise.

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Aspiring race scholars and antiracist educators frequently find themselves in classrooms teaching or learning about race and racism with students, and especially white[1] students who are new to exploring race and whiteness within their own identities or even within our broader society. Embedded in these classroom interactions are interracial, race dialogues that often evoke defensiveness (Allen, 2004; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993), shame (Thandeka, 1999), and emotional outbursts or emotional frozenness from white students (Matias, 2015a). Many of these outbursts are expressed in forms of declarative statements and exclamations such as "I never owned slaves!" or tearful finger pointing such as "Why are you making me feel so bad?" (Matias & Zembylas, 2014). Yet there are those students who channel their emotions and mask them in the guise of thinly veiled questions that often serve the same purpose – to defend, deflect, or accuse the instructor or classmate who has begun to offer a critical race perspective. Sometimes these questions are used to turn the tables to put the person with the critical race perspective on the defense, to force them to cite research and prove their point infinitum as a form of distracting from the original topic of discussion. Other times, they are used by the questioner as a "white intellectual alibi" (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013) to excuse themselves from having or perpetuating any role in or benefit from whiteness in a racist society. Still, in other instances, Matias and Zembylas (2014) suggest that emotional projections of whiteness mask disgust for people of color as care, concern, pity, and/or sympathy for the Other.

At times these questions are genuine in that the questioner is seeking additional information. Yet, even within these honest inquiries, the questions make several

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[1] To symbolically equalize race in our research the authors opted to use lowercase lettering for white and whiteness, just as the phrase "people of color" is not capitalized or recognized as a proper noun.

assumptions about race and whiteness, stemming from a position of white privilege (McIntosh, 1997) and whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). Yet, whether intended or not, these questions carry the same impact for the recipient. Thus, we do not focus on the speaker's intent, but more so on the implications. As part of these implications, we also examine the assumptions of whiteness wherein these questions are embedded.

In defining whiteness, we want to start by saying that we do not directly equate whiteness with white skin. Indeed, people of color sometimes perpetuate whiteness because they may receive benefits if they serve as role models of color perpetuating whiteness (Delgado, 2009). Yet, any benefits received by people of color are always exceeded by those received by whites in alignment with Bell's Critical Race Theory (CRT) of interest convergence (1980). A classic example of this is the Black, conservative character, Gleason Golightly, from Bell's classic CRT work, "Space Traders" (1992). In this parable, aliens come to earth and offer unthinkable fortune to the United States in exchange for all of the country's Black people. Golightly, although ultimately betrayed and offered up with all Black people in the final space trade, has until that point enjoyed prestige and publicity for his collusion with whiteness. As such, whiteness is not the same as white skin. In alignment with Nishi, Matias, and Montoya (2015), we define whiteness as the ideology that works to normalize and promote white supremacy. As they suggest, "[Whiteness] is the attitude and philosophy that positions the white race as superior, whether through intelligence, beauty, or culture/traditions" (p. 461).

We further suggest that even those whites who are actively anti-racist and who strive to be allies still perpetuate some amount of whiteness because they have been socialized into a racial system that benefits them because of their white skin. These benefits received by those with white skin equate to white privilege (McIntosh, 1997). With all this said, the questions of whiteness that we examine and the assumptions we

refute in this piece although they can come from people of color, they most often come from white people who tend to respond to discussions of race with the white emotionality (Matias, 2015b) and fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) we discussed.

This pedagogical paper answers a few of these common questions that subscribe to whiteness ideology in two different ways. We answer the questions directly – the authors cite research and draw from historical and current race theory and research to offer the questioners a straightforward response to their question if it is indeed an honest attempt to gather information and build awareness. The other response is subcontextual. Based on teacher education and whiteness literature (Allen, 2004; Picower, 2009; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005; Vaught & Castagno, 2008), we acknowledge that some of these questions are not genuine inquiries, but are instead used as rhetorical tools to derail discussion, and silence critical race perspectives as well as voices of color in the classroom (see Matias, 2013). This is done through evoking colorblindness defenses (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) or post-racial arguments (Haney Lopez, 2011a; Leonardo, 2013; Love & Tosolt, 2010). In academia, several tactics are regularly applied to silence voices of opposition. Relating to race topics, these questioning tactics include racial microaggressions (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2010). When these tactics silence counterstories and other perspectives critical of whiteness, the dominant perspective of whiteness is restored to its hegemonic racial position. That is, the naturalness of whiteness is maintained as normal.

Within our responses to three whiteness questions, we weave together both the direct and subcontextual responses. This is because it is often difficult to draw a line between the intent and assumptions that underlie these whiteness questions. Although we make several assumptions about what is implied, based on theory and scholarship, it is not useful to differentiate what is explicit and implicit in these questions of whiteness, because whiteness moves in and out of the direct and indirect. As such, we proceed

knowing that a deconstruction of these weavings in and out of whiteness will be instructive as to how whiteness operates in lines of questioning.

We then offer classroom strategies for budding critical race scholars to confront whiteness, including whiteness questions in the classroom. Thus, as a whole, the authors offer this theoretical paper as a pedagogical tool for aspiring critical scholars who want to focus on race, whether they are instructors and/or students, so that they start to build a framework of responses and strategies ready to combat hegemonic whiteness in the classroom. Not only do we provide these to combat whiteness by providing research-based answers and classroom strategies, we also do so because we acknowledge that these questions are built on racial assumptions and tactics, and their expressions curtail the opportunity for genuine critical dialogues about race (see Leonardo & Porter, 2010).

Without such honest dialogues the hope for antiracism or the deconstruction of whiteness will remain aspirational and will not manifest in our reality. Therefore, we hope this pedagogical tool builds the respondents' resources of critical race vocabulary, research, theory, and strategies so that when confronted with a "whiteness question," a respondent can engage with the questioner by confidently answering the question and continuing the dialogue. By also providing a subcontextual answer we hope the respondent will be able to point out and delve into what is *not* being said in the subcontext of whiteness. That is, what is being normalized and taken for granted amidst the hegemony of whiteness. Thus, Whiteness FAQ seeks to be a tool to facilitate and foster Critical Race Praxis in classrooms; a praxis that builds greater solidarity with our critical race community even when we face these battles alone.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical paper draws on both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) to form its core theoretical framework. From CRT, this paper acknowledges the permanence and normality of racism (Bell, 1992), particularly in education – as a site of domination and struggle (Allen, 2004; Freire, 1993). In this way, the authors can assume that these questions are more than straightforward requests for information and knowledge, but also serve to create and uphold the hegemonic racial norms within the classroom. Since CRT encourages transdisciplinary approaches for racial analyses we also build on the work of Bourdieu (1986). Particularly, Bourdieu's conceptualization of "capital," which examines the power dynamics in social settings, defining those in a dominant position as possessing more capital, be it cultural, economic, social, or symbolic. Leonardo (2013) highlights Bourdieu's negligence in addressing the agency of marginalized people in his capital framework. As CRT seeks to promote the voices and agency of people of color, we pay specific attention to the cultural capital of traditionally marginalized voices (see Yosso & Garcia, 2007) as they cultivate a greater power for what Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) coin transformative resistance. We thus offer this article as a tool for transformative resistance, particularly in the college classroom. We also draw from CRT as these whiteness questions are often asked in response to counterstories or counternarratives from students and instructors of color as a way of restoring and maintaining white supremacy. For example, commonly asked questions after a shared counterstory are "Well, isn't that just your experience?" or "Aren't you being a bit too sensitive?" This line of questioning diminishes the power of counterstorytelling, a process that counters majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and recognizes the validity of a person of color's experiential knowledge.

Thus, as mentioned, whiteness questions are a form of racial microaggression (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2010). In that, these questions not only work to promote white supremacy and the white status quo, but they also work to silence voices of color and critical race perspectives. This act of silencing becomes a symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) used against the respondent, which ultimately cuts and wounds the human soul such that one may submit to racial battle fatigue (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Specifically, the fatigue results from compounded back-handed compliments (e.g., "You are so articulate for a Latina!") and passive aggressive racial insults often masked as questions (e.g., "Why do you always have to make such a big deal about race? It doesn't have anything to do with this"); both serve to marginalize and oppress the voices of people of color. Yet, we should say that although whiteness questions often serve as racial microaggressions, frequently the questioner is not intending them as such. The friendly white classmate who tells her Latina counterpart that she is articulate may very well be *intending* the comment as a compliment, not realizing the assumptions of whiteness within the statement that serves as the aggression.

From a CWS perspective, the paper spotlights whiteness to expose its constant relation to promoting white supremacy. This relationship can be illustrated in a couple of different ways. During the 2014 Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA) conference, three of the authors shared a flow chart to show how different mechanisms or elements of whiteness, including white privilege, white racialization, colorblindness, and other white systems and structures all work to ultimately maintain and promote white supremacy (Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2014). In this way, white supremacy is positioned less as an extremist attitude and more as an everyday reality of racial hierarchy that is normalized and hegemonic while also accounting for the individual or group investments that maintain it. Yet, as Daniels (1997) and Delgado (1998) remind us, extremist groups and language serve to support the more subtle forms of everyday whiteness and vice

versa. In this way, extremism and everyday whiteness are symbiotic, both in their affirmation of one another and their ability to keep people of color on edge and marginalized.

Although we focus on the hegemonic myths and spurious tactics of whiteness in this piece, we do so to promote and center people of color's voices, prevent the silencing of such voices, and always bear in mind that such tactics promote a white supremacist agenda. That is, instead of centering whiteness, we expose manifestations of whiteness at work (Yoon, 2012) in higher education classrooms in order to prevent the silencing of people of color's voices. By preventing this silencing we encourage a critical race dialogue that ultimately decenters the stronghold of white supremacy.

Within the transdisciplinary nature of CWS, we draw largely on Bonilla-Silva's (2014) frames of colorblind racism. These frames including the following concepts: "abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism" (p. 75). Below we offer a glossary of these terms. Abstract liberalism is a rhetorical move of whiteness where the user promotes an equality ideology that is generally applied to all positions; a process that nonetheless ignores the systemic and historical realities of racism. Under Bonilla-Silva's definition, abstract liberals might tout how everyone should be treated the same regardless of race, and use this to explain why they are against affirmative action, but they ignore the racialized current/historical consequences for people of color (2014).

Naturalization is the positioning of inequity and discrimination as "natural" or due to a sort of organic choice. For example, some have suggested that racial segregation is a matter of choice wherein people of color choose to live together in the same communities that "coincidentally" are under-resourced and economically disadvantaged. This of course ignores racist systems of gentrification and segregation in housing, schooling, as well as other systems and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Cultural racism refers to the positioning of people of color as culturally inferior to whites. For instance, suggesting that Latino cultures do not value education, Black people are lazy, or Asian people are good at math, but poor communicators, are ways of suggesting that the disparities people of color experience are in fact problems in their values and cultural beliefs (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Lastly, minimization of racism is the dismissal of racism and white supremacism as being the core drivers of racial disparities. It often appears in rhetoric that centers on how discussions of race are actually creating racism. Or, perhaps, it appears as a form of blaming people of color for their own plights because of a lack in their individual character. On the flipside, white people use a minimization of racism to conclude that reasons for their success are based on merit (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

We use these frames to interpret and interrogate the questions of whiteness by identifying the colorblind racist assumptions that the white questioners are building on. In addition to these, we also use Leonardo's characteristics of whiteness (2002, p.32), specifically "an unwillingness to name the contours of racism" as a diversionary tactic in the whiteness questions/discussion. We also acknowledge the tactic of "avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group" (p. 32), otherwise known as a denial of race's real benefits and consequences or disingenuous claims that race doesn't have anything to do with them as whites–that they are not participants in a racially stratified US society.

Finally, we acknowledge the evolution of whiteness and its movement, particularly with the election and re-election of Barack Obama, our nation's first Black president. As such we also draw on theories critical of the "post-racialism" of America (Haney Lopez, 2011a; Leonardo, 2013). Post-racialism is in many ways an evolved form of colorblindness in the way that it diminishes any move toward actual racial justice. Haney Lopez (2011a) argues that post-racialism acknowledges the racial injustices of

the past, and even their impact on today, but summarily rejects any remedy for such. Whilst under post-racialism, you can talk about race and racism, which are taboo under colorblind rules, you just can't do anything about them. We suggest that in the discussion below those asking whiteness questions slip back and forth from colorblind and post-racial arguments.

Methods

This paper applies counter-narratives in a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) style that Preston (2013) applies to explicate whiteness in academia. Particular to our purpose, we use the same style to most effectively frame our theoretical responses as a tool for Critical Race Praxis in the college classroom. Because the discussion of race is wrought with emotional ups and downs we employ counter-narratives, which Preston likens to counter-histories, because they:

> …possess a dual nature. On the surface they exist as fiction using storytelling, characters and settings for effect. On the other they are facts, truths about racial oppression, hard racial realism that can not be captured in white narratives or histories." (Preston, 2013, p. 57)

Preston, himself, uses a Q&A style to create a setting to delve into race truths (2013). We use a similar style to conjure the questions that emulate the dominant, normalized, and naïve nature of whiteness to then deconstruct that same whiteness and present racial Truths.

We also apply a critical race exegesis (Allen, 2008). As Allen describes, "a critical race exegesis is an interpretation of a text or social phenomenon that is rooted in critical race theory (CRT)" (p. 212). The exegesis looks at whiteness FAQs as semantic moves (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) that work to reinforce and normalize white supremacy, but beyond that, recognizes the larger political and social implications of these semantic moves.

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We selected the questions for our FAQs based on our lived experiences both as instructors and as students in college courses that included critical conversations on race. We noted the frequency of such questions, as well as the variations of such questions, and chose some of the most common questions that also represented different whiteness strategies, based on our framework above.

We answer the questions both directly and indirectly using a subcontext. We do not separate these responses to acknowledge the blurred line between the intentional and unintentional forms of whiteness, realizing intent matters not in the projection of whiteness or its consequences. Since we ground our subcontextual interpretations in critical race literature, it is not our intent to position the questioner as a racist. Instead we do so to show how these questions are used as racial weapons. We do not want to absolve whiteness questioners of their responsibility and participation in white supremacy. Rather, in this piece we want to give more gravity to the impact that is felt by the expressed microaggression. However, one cannot possibly stop microaggressive behaviors if she/he cannot identify the hegemonic instruments of whiteness that are being used. Therefore, we weave CWS and CRT to expose whiteness while detailing how such enactments of whiteness, via microaggressions, are wielded.

Because we use Preston's (2013) counter-narrative FAQ style, we employ a casual tone for what is intended as a scholarly piece. This is done to attend to the realism of these counternarratives, but also so that this piece can be easily translated into a conversational tool for those, both students and faculty in the higher ed classroom, who need *real talk* about race.

Question 1: I keep hearing you talking about whiteness; is there such a thing as Blackness?

A direct response to the question is yes, there is such a thing as Blackness, but what it is and its development comes in direct response to surviving racism and white supremacy. Essentially, it only exists because it was forced to exist. And it was forced to exist primarily because it was castigated by whiteness and thus needed to identify itself as something that is not white. Before elaborating, it is important to revisit our definition of race. Race is a social and political construction. In this way, race is not real, but at the same time it has real consequences, because of the meanings and power that white Americans have assigned to it (Leonardo, 2013). Plainly stated, in the context of US race relations, it is whites who have made race real. Although here we are discussing race in the United States, certainly race has been and is constructed in similar and unique ways around the globe, particularly as we reflect on European and African histories and colonialism.

Within a more global context, Fanon (1967) was one of the first scholars to define and explore Blackness. His psychosocial analysis of the development of Blackness through the systemic and everyday racism encountered in Martinique and France marred the overarching identity of Blackness to include inferiority, ignorance, hypersexualization, and a striving to be white or accepted by whites. Currently race scholarship calls this phenomenon internalized racism (see Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). However, one cannot assume that people of color internalize racism or develop what Fanon calls a dependent inferiority complex out of thin air. Rather, the constant bombardment of daily racism and white supremacy has positioned people of color, in this case Blacks, as inferior through colonial tactics and justifications. That is, in order to justify colonization, the colonizer (mostly white) has to impart the ideology that the

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colonized were inferior and were not capable of self-rule (Memmi, 1965). This can be exemplified in the various attempts to label African slaves, Native Americans, and Filipinos, among others, as indolent, lazy, and savages. Such labels render colonization as a justifiable act, which in turn sparks the internalization of inferiority. Fanon (1967) suggests that in a colonial state, a Black man cannot make his way in the world unless he adopts whiteness, knowing he will never be accepted as white.

Yet, Blackness has evolved from perhaps an initial white definition of lack to one of outright resistance and survival. Black resistance movements throughout time, and particularly in the Civil Rights era, the Black Power Movement, and the Black is Beautiful Movement sought to cast Black as beautiful and to celebrate Black history, identity, and culture and promote the equality and validation of Black peoples. These movements were designed not to position Blackness as better than other races, but to struggle against white hegemony and the white definitions of beauty, intellect, culture, and other notions that subtly or explicitly promote white supremacism. This struggle manifested internally in addition to the external movements witnessed by onlookers. hooks suggests that, "No social movement to end white supremacy addressed the issue of internalized racism in relation to beauty as intensely as did the black power revolution in the sixties" (1995, p. 119). Lorde agrees and delves into the complexity of the movement saying, "As Black people, if there is one thing we can learn from the 60s, it is how infinitely complex any move for liberation must be. For we must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves" (2007, p. 135). So, although Blackness was initially developed in a movement for civil rights as an opposition to a white oppressor, it evolved into an empowered movement that sought liberation against whiteness, both external and internalized.

More recently, we see the same phenomenon playing out in the media. The #BlackLivesMatter movement began in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, and grew in the wake of the killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and other Black men and women. Yet, when asked to weigh in on the movement and what it stood for, top 2016 democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Hilary Clinton initially retorted that "all lives matter," to the outrage of movement activists. What these white liberals and larger swaths of white Americans missed, was that it was not "all lives" that were in danger. The people getting harassed and killed on the streets by police officers were not "all people." They were disproportionately Black men, women, and children. So to try and make the statement – Black Lives Matter – one that includes people of all races is to subscribe to a colorblind or color evasive (Frankenberg, 1993) perspective that denies the reality of people of color.

As suggested in the question itself, white students asking about Blackness often ask so in response to a discussion around whiteness. As such, it is often a form of deflection or refusal to talk about whiteness directly because mere discussions of whiteness make white students feel uncomfortable because 1) they have never discussed it before and 2) it is engaged as a point of critique. These two stances embody Leonardo's definition of whiteness in their resistance to racializing whites (2002). Additionally, these stances challenge what Bonilla-Silva calls a *minimization of racism* (2014), where whites avoid even discussing race, and in so doing, dismiss the lived experiences of people of color.

White discomfort in discussing race, and particularly whiteness, is understandable given the unsavory connotations. Roediger (1991), for instance, poignantly and unforgivingly defines whiteness, stating, "It is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is *nothing but* oppressive and false" (p. 13). In

this way, the very essence of whiteness is oppression of people of color for the benefit of whites. Now, the struggle that many whites (new to critical race perspectives) are confronted by is how or whether they can separate their white skin from the insidious nature of whiteness. The answer for this conundrum is yes and no. The good news is that white skin is not the same as whiteness. The bad news is that everyone with white skin benefits from whiteness and white supremacy even if they want to cast off whiteness as race traitors (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). Thus white people, even the most well-meaning, will always be in cahoots with whiteness.

It's worth noting that although whiteness shares much of its definition and purpose with racism, given the basis of both on white supremacy, Blackness does not. We highlight this because oftentimes the person asking about Blackness, in a move to escape a focus on whiteness, is employing a "reverse-racism" or victimization claim (Cabrera, 2014). Along these lines, oftentimes whiteness questioners begin to understand whiteness as a form of racism. This early understanding of racism is as a preference or bias toward a particular race. Under this definition, they then understand Blackness, and its celebration of Black people and culture as racism as well. However, since racism in the US was created and perpetuated to manifest white supremacy and a socio-racial hierarchy to support it, people of color cannot be racist against whites.

Question 2: Now that we have a Black President, is race really a problem?

It's notable that these questions of whiteness set up the respondent to give a one-word response, almost as if the questioner is a defense lawyer looking to limit and control the response of the witness. This is likely not a coincidence, since the questions are often intended to imply as much as they are to ask. In this question, the questioner presumes that a Black president means first and foremost that we are in a post-racial American society and that race no longer matters. From the authors' experiences, the

questioners are usually suggesting their own answer to their question, which is, "No, race is not really a problem anymore." However, a critical race response would need to begin with a question instead of the sought after, one-word response. That question is – problem for whom? Plainly stated, the racial system was created and maintained to benefit whites and to oppress people of color (Feagin, 2006; Massey & Denton, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994), so in that way, race has never been a *problem* for whites. Rather, race has been a great asset to whites. For example, Oliver and Shapiro (2006) show that white wealth was accrued on the labor and denial of black wealth. Brodkin (2006) argues that whites have amassed their wealth during periods of great racial injustice. For instance, the GI Bill granted veterans reasonable home loans and access to higher education, but veterans of color were systematically denied such benefits because of the racist social climate and the governmental affiliations with all-white groups. Additionally, the institution of racial covenants restricted where people of color could buy homes, thus controlling the equity of communities of color. Therefore, although race was never a problem for white folks, it has always *forced* a problem on people of color.

Returning to the question, the questioner in addition to his/her assumptions about "the race problem," is suggesting that with the election of a Black President that we are now in a post-racial era. Haney Lopez (2010) defines this post-racial stance as "the seeming evaporation of race as a basis for social ordering in the United States" (p. 1024). The suggestion of a post-racial US society for those in the mainstream equals the demise of racism and racial-based privilege and oppression. This is based on the notion that when a Black man can ascend to the US's top leadership position (as Obama has), it has proven that race is no longer a barrier for people of color. Within the assertion of a post-racial society is the myth of meritocracy, such that people now are able to achieve the American Dream no matter their race.

Among critical race scholars, post-racialism has been refuted. Bell (1992) identifies and defines the permanence of racism as an underlying assumption of CRT. That is, within CRT, racism is acknowledged as a constant in the United States because it is so deeply embedded in the systems and the psyche that make up American society. As such, Bell's *permanence of racism* acknowledges that it cannot be ultimately eradicated. Although seemingly pessimistic, this position is one rooted in a national reality in which we have seen racism and white supremacism evolve under the historic opposition of the end of slavery (e.g., lynching and Jim Crow laws), the civil rights movement (e.g., white only spaces), affirmative action (e.g., racial assumptions that a college student of color or newly hired employee of color is accepted because of racial quotas), and most recently the election of our first Black president (e.g., the assumption that because one voted for a Black president they cannot possibly be racist). Bonilla-Silva conceptualized this as a "new racism" which addresses this recent peak in post racial hope upon the election of President Barack Obama (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Ray, 2008). Part and parcel with Bonilla-Silva's concept of new racism is his concept of color-blind racism (2013), an act of whiteness, which ignores the role of race – both racism and white privilege. Wise (2009) terms this phenomenon, racism 2.0, describing it as "enlightened exceptionalism, a form that allows for and even celebrates the achievements of individual persons of color, but only because those individuals generally are seen as different from a less appealing, even pathological black or brown rule" (p. 9). Finally, Winant (2006) terms it "a new racial hegemony that is reinventing white supremacy and even imperialism under the protective coloration of appeals to 'colorblindness' and 'cultural pluralism'" (p. xii). Although these concepts, which refute "post-racialism" vary slightly, they all allude to the malleable and pervasive nature of racism, which thus illuminates the permanence of racism through its evolution.

In the aftermath of any movement that furthers an anti-racist agenda, race theorists can expect strong retaliatory movements that support white supremacism. For example, on a large scale, the Black power movement and civil rights gains by people of color in the 1950's and 60's led to the criminalization of civil disobedience, the war on drugs, and the mass incarceration of people of color that has grown rampant till this day (Alexander, 2012). Again, the permanence of racism is not necessarily pessimistic, but unfortunately realistic. However, we do not suggest that antiracist scholars, race theorists, and race activists give up their missions on the seemingly nihilistic aspect of their work. Instead we advocate that such a phenomenon demonstrates "the work" is never done. Relatedly, it's as Morgan Freeman's character says at the conclusion of the movie *Seven*, "Ernest Hemingway once wrote, 'The world is a fine place and worth fighting for.' I agree with the second part" (Kopelson, Carlyle, & Fincher, 1995).

Given our definition of post-racial and the embedded myths of whiteness, described above, it's important to note that Barack Obama's election opened the flood gates in post-racial rhetoric and attitudes. The mainstream media began using the phrase "post-racial" in the midst of Obama's campaign and ultimate win (Gillespie, 2009; Love & Tosolt, 2010). Love and Tosolt (2010) offer a definition, saying post-racial "signifies a society in which racial differences are no longer significant" (p. 23). Yet, there are several flaws in this "post-racial" assumption. The first assumption lies in the election of Obama. While we celebrate the election of our first Black president as a source of "symbolic unity" between whites and people of color (Love & Tosolt, 2010, p. 30-32), the truth is that the majority of white Americans voted for McCain in the 2008 election (Giroux, 2009; Love & Tosolt, 2010). And again, in the 2012 election, the majority of white Americans voted for Mitt Romney (Gallup Poll, 2012). So, to suggest that the election and re-election of Obama is an indicator of white acceptance of a Black

President is a falsehood. When it came to both polls, the majority of white America wanted a white president.

To summarize, President Obama is often evoked as a symbolic marker that indicates we have indeed entered a post-racial era. Yet, truth be told, such an era does not exist. Rather, he and his politics are not exempt of the racial dynamics that make race a real problem in this seemingly post-racial society. Dissecting this false idolized marker demonstrates how our first Black president is *not* pushing us forward when it comes to antiracism. Sadly, his need to maneuver his own Black body around racial politics and supporting policies that further deepen racial disparities move American society even more firmly into what Bonilla-Silva describes as new racism in a post-civil rights era (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Ray, 2008).

Question 3: Isn't the real disparity in socioeconomic status?

We begin answering this question by suggesting that the person asking this question is often implying that racial disparity isn't "real." Going back to our initial discussion of what is race, we remind our questioner that although it is true that race is not real (it is a social and political construction), the consequences of racism are indeed real, as we have shown in our illustrations of socio-political consequences. For example, prejudicial attitudes about the inherent purity of whites is indeed a social construction of the white race, yet it produced real anti-miscegenation laws in almost all 50 states that made it illegal for whites to marry people of color. Therefore, one cannot be misled to believe that social constructions are merely *fantasmas*[2].

The questioner does not explicitly reveal her/his prejudicial bias against ever legitimizing race; but implicitly does by positing a commonly used diversionary tactic:

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[2] *Fantasma* is a Spanish word for an illusion or specter.

socioeconomic status (SES). That is, the questioner, one who resists talking about race, strategically opts to discuss SES or class, in general, claiming it has a *more* profound impact on the disenfranchised group than does race. This is strategic because, in all likelihood, an instructor who engages in critical race discussion does not say that race trumps class. Instead, critical instructors often press that it should be intersectionally included in the analysis of other topics. Despite this, the questioner may be too emotionally uncomfortable with the inclusion of race that she/he deflects by 1) assuming that the instructor is trying to hierarchize race above class and gender and 2) interestingly does so by hierarchizing class. Sadly, there are other cases where the questioner is resolute or steadfast in claiming that it is only SES that creates disparity and that race has no effect on anything. Allen (2008) illustrates similar semantic moves in his critical exegesis of the whiteness question: "What about poor white people?" (p. 209). As Allen illustrates, non-poor whites often ask this question, feigning concern for poor white people to strategically move the conversation off of race. Yet Allen also highlights the complexity of this question, because while the questioner may be trying to move away from the topic of race, the truth is that poor white people are also racialized and marginalized using race and class, but not to the degree that people of color are marginalized and oppressed by race.

The question and the discussion so far present a great irony in that the question is trying to separate two social systems when one precipitates the other. In this sense, SES is largely determined by race. It is not merely coincidence that Black and Brown people in the United States tend to largely represent the lowest SES group, and in this way, it is quite limited to discuss SES without also discussing race.

To illustrate the collusion of race and SES, we begin by looking at the historical structuring of this relationship. Harris (1993) showed how whites used whiteness as property in their laying claim to African bodies in the form of slaves as well as their

seizure of Native American land. Those who were not white could not have property, only be property. Similarly, Lipsitz (1998) presents a theory of the possessive investment in whiteness that offers a comprehensive account of the economic benefits that whites have historically accrued and continued to accrue because of their subscription and adoption of whiteness. The economic benefits of whites are, at the same time, amassed at the strategic and institutional economic disadvantaging of people of color, and particularly Black people. Lipsitz shows how institutions and policies such as slavery, Jim Crow, The New Deal, The War on Drugs, Sub-Prime lending, the Federal Housing Act, today's mass incarceration of Black and Brown people, and others have all worked to economically benefit white people at the expense of people of color.

As an example of how these systems worked, we look specifically at The New Deal. The New Deal was developed and offered under Franklin D. Roosevelt's liberal administration. It made owning one's home a possibility for mostly young white families. This contributed greatly to the racially segregated neighborhoods we see today, especially when compounded with the Federal Housing Agency's (FHA) allowance of discriminatory practices, via racial covenants and redlining. Private real estate agencies saw lucrative returns on white flight, as well as on affordable and government housing options for people of color, especially after the federal government allowed private lenders to avoid all risk in funding low-income housing in the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act. In practice, FHA administrators promoted further segregation to yield huge returns for those in the housing and financial industries through promoting the flight of poor whites from urban communities and through the sales of poor quality homes to people of color. The resulting foreclosures for people of color pushed the racial gap even wider (Lipsitz, 1998).

Roediger offers additional examples under the concept of "The Wages of Whiteness" (1991), which highlights the financial benefits received by whites through the

promotion and maintenance of whiteness. For instance, to separate and continue to keep Black people on the lowest rung of the economic ladder, Roediger describes how labor union leadership strategically recategorized groups such as the Italians and Slavs as white to allow them the benefits of the labor union and grow their power and political clout while non-whites were prevented from joining (2007). Through these works, we can envision a Stock Exchange-style ticker ringing up dollars and financial rewards for each policy, system, or structure described that has historically and currently denies access for people of color to get loans, buy a house, go to school, or even to maintain their freedom. The disproportional rate of Black and Brown criminalization described above further exacerbates the slim chances of people of color attaining assets.

Along with housing and labor discrimination, which granted white economic gains at the expense of people of color, undesirable facilities such as garbage dumps and toxic waste sites, including superfund sites, were much more likely to be placed in communities of color (Lipsitz, 1998). To contest that these disparities were more based on SES than on race, in 1995, Bullard reported that in studies on environmental disparities, there were more racial disparities than that for income, but in addition, where both were found, racial disparities were more significant 73% of the time.

When considering that owning homes and property has historically been how white Americans have been able to climb the SES ladder, one can understand how crippling the undergirding racism of the systems described above were and are for people of color. Turning to the present, compounding the historical discrimination and resulting economic disparity is the consistently low employment level for people of color in the United States. From a 2012 report on Labor Force Characteristics by Race/Ethnicity from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment for Blacks/African Americans has consistently been about double that of whites (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), and the unemployment rates of Hispanics/Latinos has stayed somewhere in

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between African American and white rates. The report also shows the earning disparities as well, saying "In 2012, the median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers were $568 for Hispanics, $621 for Blacks, $792 for whites, and $920 for Asians," (p. 7). This suggests that not only are Black and Brown people less likely to attain employment, but that they are vastly underpaid if and when they are employed.

To illustrate how these dire employment figures come to be, we can point to a number of practices and institutions. People of color, particularly Black people, still face individual discrimination in hiring practices. For instance, before even interviewing, a field study found that résumés with white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks for an interview compared to those exact same résumés with African American-sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). In fact, in a recent article circulating around social media a job applicant decidedly dropped one letter from his name from Jose to Joe and subsequently received more callbacks for job opportunities[3].

Another institution that contributes to low employment and pay for people of color is education. Higher education specifically, has been and still is an American's best chance at securing economic stability, regardless of race. Yet, when people of color, and particularly Black and Brown people do not have the opportunity to seek college degrees or even complete high school degrees, they again find themselves with closed doors in the "land of opportunity." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), in 2013, for those 25 and older, the median weekly income was $651 for those with a high school degree compared to $1,108 for those with a Bachelor's degree. For those without a high school degree, the weekly median was $472. These numbers show the economic advantage of education. However, racism embedded in education systems and policies prevent access to disproportionally high numbers of Black and Brown students. Steele

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[3] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/02/jose-joe-job-discrimination_n_5753880.html

and Aronson (1995) have shown that stereotype threat and testing have detrimental effects on the success of students of color and other disenfranchised groups. And such threats lessen the educational opportunities of students of color more than white students, leading them down a path of lessened graduation rates, which mentioned above, renders lower weekly income. Carnevale and Strohl (2013) show that although family income level is significant in whether a person will attend college or not, race and ethnicity add a duplicative factor that lessens that person's chances of attendance. On top of that, they point out that African American and Hispanic college students are much less likely to attend the most selective institutions of higher education (9% and 13%, respectively), while 82% of their white cohorts attend these upper echelon schools. Not surprisingly, these selective colleges and universities have much higher graduation and retention rates, as well as higher employment rates and average graduate salaries.

"Isn't the disparity in SES?" is oftentimes part of a larger semantic move employed by whites to move the conversation away from the uncomfortable topic of race, similar to Allen's analysis of the whiteness question: "What about poor white people?" Yet, these counter-narratives or counter-histories show that a serious discussion cannot be had about SES disparities without also identifying the racial disparities that not coincidentally are found in the same places.

Whiteness FAQ as a Tool

As our examples suggest, there are many more assumptions made by whiteness questioners than is verbalized. Although having the ammunition to answer these questions directly is important through mastering the history, research, theory, and language of CRT and CWS, only responding to these questions is not enough to lift the veil of whiteness, so to speak (DuBois, 1903). Instead, we as race scholars must ask

questions that reveal the whiteness and deconstruct it. To use whiteness FAQ, we offer the following strategies.

Flipping the Question

We have seen many critical race scholars jump to offer white students and faculty questioners full literature reviews, scholarly articles, and books that respond to their question, putting the respondent in a defensive space. While offering a response (using those points outlined above) is appropriate, offering scores of articles does not further the conversation since the questioner is not likely to read them. Instead, consider flipping the question in such a way that the questioner has to define and dig into their position (and they do have one). See the chart below for example responses for each question.

Whiteness Question	Critical Response
I keep hearing you talking about whiteness; is there such a thing as Blackness?	It sounds like you aren't familiar with "whiteness," what does that term mean to you?
Now that we have a Black President, is race really a problem?	It sounds like you don't think race is a problem. How do you think Obama's election has helped people of color?
Isn't the real disparity in socioeconomic status?	I think SES contributes to disparities, but if racial disparity isn't real, how do we account for it at all class levels? I mean, Michael Jordan himself said he can't get a cab in NYC because he's Black.

As you see in these examples, the respondent first calls out the assumptions that undergird the question and then they ask the questioner to back those up or share their own ideas. This strategy leads more quickly to dismantling the myths of whiteness and resists contributing to those myths by engaging only in a direct-response. However, if this does not work, we hope that the responses and justification we provide will be clear and to the point as to how these underlying assumptions are being used.

Echoing and Islanding

Critical race scholars are usually not the majority in the higher education classroom setting, but oftentimes there is more than one. To create solidarity amongst these race scholars and to aid in the building of their agency, Critical race scholar, Margaret Montoya suggests "echoing" in class discussions. When one race scholar finds themself responding to a question of whiteness, once they finish responding, a second race scholar can state, "I agree, and here's why…" A third can follow-up and so on (M. Montoya, Personal Communication, November 20, 2014). This not only adds dynamic perspectives to the discussion, and builds that critical race discussion, but it also signals to the larger class and perhaps the instructor that these voices and perspectives are shared and valid. As such, they deserve to be taken seriously.

Along with echoing, Montoya (2014) also recommends to students with counter-narratives on race to sit together as a cohort in class to offer a physical sense of solidarity to one another when they are confronted with whiteness in its variety of forms (M. Montoya, Personal Communication, November 20, 2014). When these strategies are used together they can help to build the agency of a critical yet often marginalized group and perhaps allow them access into difficult yet necessary conversations about race.

Mm-hmm: Call and Response

Call and response is a cultural practice traditionally found in African American churches (Hale-Benson, 1982), where parishioners demonstrate or vocalize their agreement with the preacher or speaker. Some literature has advocated for the inclusion of such traditions in the inclusive classroom as a way to move away from anglicized practices to those that are more comfortable to African Americans (Boutte & Hill, 2006). Call and response can be and is used as a source of encouragement for the speaker or performer. One of the authors was formerly in a gospel choir where they would offer

verbal encouragement and support of their lead singer with a "go ahead" or an "all right." We find that call and response can be used in the college classroom in this way too around race conversations. Since those with a critical race perspective tend to be the minority in the college classroom, they are familiar with the cold silence that often comes when they share their perspective. Others with a critical race perspective that share the idea can use call and response to offer verbal support to their colleague with a simple "mmhmm" or a "yes." This reminds the speaker that they are not alone, and sends a message of validation to both speaker and listeners.

Disrupting Whiteness Norms

A last way to use these questions to enter into a critical race discussion is the respondent can expose the very intention that they see. Oftentimes, we see white students bringing up other isms and phobias in a race discussion, such as in question three. While we would not negate the importance of other hegemonic and oppressive systems, and acknowledge their intersectionality with race (hooks, 1995; Crenshaw, 2009; Brah & Phoenix, 2009), we also realize that they can be a white attempt to move the discussion from one where they are the oppressor to one where they are the oppressed (Allen, 2004). In these instances, the respondent can refuse to answer the question directly and describe the tactic the questioner is attempting to use. For instance, saying, "I think these other systems of oppression are important to deconstruct, but it seems that bringing them up in a discussion about race is often used as a tactic to distract us from a critical race discussion. Can we table these other issues unless we're talking about how they intersect with race?"

These strategies work best when they are used together and draw on the research and theory discussed in this article. We offer critical race and critical whiteness scholars some justification in these responses and tools in the hopes that they may be

used to help arm them on the ideological battlefield that is the higher education classroom.

Take the Lead

One problem the authors see in the premise of this article and scholarly, critical race talk in general, is that so often those with a critical race perspective are *re-active* in the higher education classroom. We look at how to *re*-spond to the frequent questions of whiteness. We suggest that those with critical race perspectives "island" themselves, creating a small fortress to *re*-buff the white norms and semantic moves that are regularly promoted, especially in conversations about race (when they're allowed to happen).

This is not to suggest that this reactive stance is somehow cowardly or lackadaisical, but taking a solely reactive stance to whiteness in the college classroom can mean a missed opportunity in taking the lead with a critical race perspective at the start of a conversation. Margaret Montoya is quick to point out in her speaking engagements that usually the first person to speak in a class or in an audience is a white man. She often acknowledges this after the first question is asked or a white man is the only participant with his hand up during Q&A. The authors, as both instructors and students, have noticed the frequency of the first question or the first voice heard after a presentation is white and male. But, what is more disturbing is to watch how the tone is then set by that first voice. The rest of the class often takes their cue from that first voice, and this voice and the following voices that echo or question are then judged as valid or not, largely based on race, gender, sexual orientation, class, or other marginalized identities of the owner.

In light of this tendency, we suggest that critical race scholars in these classes strategize how to take the lead of these conversations about race, most especially.

Instead of waiting for someone to share a position of whiteness, critical race scholars can start the conversation with asking a critical race question about the reading or make a critical race comment or observation. Imagine if a college course began with an unsolicited counterstory that was then echoed and supported by others with a critical race perspective. There is power in starting the conversation, and so often this is seized by a perspective of whiteness.

Conclusion

To acknowledge our limitations, we note that our FAQ and discussion have largely looked at examples of Black and white U.S. Americans. Lest this piece position whiteness in a false binary between Black and white peoples, we call for continued scholarship that deconstructs whiteness from different perspectives. Particularly, we look to indigenous scholarship to show the necessity of these and other critical tools for indigenous students and instructors alike (see Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012).

Lastly, lest whites think that this article is not for them, we re-emphasize that whites and whiteness are not the same thing. There are critically-minded whites dedicated to social justice, particularly around race who are essential allies, just as there are students and instructors of color who perform whiteness very well. So, we offer this tool not only as a source of humanizing violence (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) *against* any who would emulate whiteness, but *for* any who will join us in this fight for humanity.

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