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## Critical Race Theory, Neoliberalism, and the Illiberal University

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## CRITICAL RACE THEORY, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE ILLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

by Rodney D. Coates

Within the U.S., the far right is now targeting Critical Race Theory (CRT). A total of 3,362 books were banned in the 2022-23 school year. In the majority of the cases the books banned were written by women, people of color and/or LGBTQ+ authors (Meehan, 2023). Across 24 state legislatures, a total of 54 different bills have been introduced to restrict education and training in K-12, higher education, and state agencies and institutions. Most of these bills target CRT and gender studies. They explicitly want to dictate what, how, and when American history is taught. Clearly these series of bans are aimed at dictating academic and educational discussions, and imposing state rules on how teaching is done (Friedman, et al, 2023). But this targeting is not for what CRT is doing, but what it might do if it continues to provide anti-racist critiques of our institutions and society. It could be argued that white conservative attacks against Critical Race Theory are a call for "Uncritical Race Theory." These challenges lay bare the existential fears that threaten the very core of the racial state. In this article, I will outline how CRT might offer us some hope moving forward.

Let me begin with a story, because I love stories. Wars and other crises have historically been the impetus for technological innovation. World War I provided the platform by which aviation advanced to become the dominant instrument of destruction. But as radar and global positioning satellites had not been invented, pilots had to navigate by the stars. One of the things that alerted the pilots that they were over the target was they would begin to get heavy flack. This leads to the conclusion that the hue, cry, and all the flack now targeting CRT indicate it is over the target. Why else would the racist be so upset? If CRT were indeed inconsequential or such a wasteful or misguided approach, why so much anger, angst, and frustration to the point where conservative legislators in virtually every Republican-dominated state are trying to ban its teaching or even its discussion? Every aspect of education, from K-12 through higher education, has been targeted to ensure that presumed CRT is not present. The charge: CRT is indoctrinating our youth by fostering racial divisions, hatred, and anti-democratic values. The strange thing is that within these concerted attempts to ban CRT, there is limited, at best, understanding of what CRT is. Why are they so afraid of CRT? Perhaps it targets the core problem with our racist American history.

CRT, deriving from both legal and feminist scholarship, starts from a set of assumptions. These assumptions are that systems of oppression, such as race, gender, sex, and class, are all interrelated and intersectional. So, while one might discuss them separately, only by understanding this intersectionality and interrelatedness can one truly begin to grapple with this monster. Intersectionality is interwoven throughout our social institutions and our history (Coates, Ferber, and Brunsma, 2021). While we might prefer analyses of race, gender, sexuality, or class as we

discuss one facet versus another, all of these are intertwined. Hence, as William J. Wilson (2011) explains, race dictates the outcomes of many within our society. Although women of all races and ethnicities face the highest rate of poverty, it is among American Indians, Blacks, and Latinas that we see the highest rates. While Latinas are only 18.1 percent of all women in the U.S. population, they comprise over a quarter of women in poverty.

Similarly, while Black women are only 12.8 percent of all women in the U.S., they make up 22.3 of those in poverty. And nearly 1 in four American Indian or Alaska Native women are impoverished (Bleiweis, Boesch, and Gaines, 2020). The life chances have gotten worse for minoritized individuals, particularly Black males from poor urban backgrounds, radically different from those from more affluent backgrounds. This means that dealing with one facet without understanding the interconnectedness and intersectionality tells only part of the story. Racism, as it was used in the 1960s, was a term that applied to individuals who were biased and used these biases to discriminate against individuals or groups. As we entered into the modern era, racism has been applied more and more at the institutional and societal level. Thus, many confuse the two terms. Therefore, I and others have begun using intersectionality and systemic racism to address these societal and institutional levels of racism. Even more, while those occupying liberal/moderate/centrist positions may have no problem with these terms, they nevertheless adhere to policies and politics that reproduce racial stratification (and as they intersect with gender, class, sexuality). Consequently, we have many who explore the terms or concepts, but whose analysis and policy recommendations do little to address the problems associated with the matrix of race, class, and gender. Even hard-core Marxists are now beginning to discuss racial capitalism. For this reason, with the emergence of CRT in Critical Legal Studies by such scholars as as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill-Collins, we explore new dimensions and possibilities with regards to not only analyzing race and racial structures, but the possibility of finally identifying meaningful solutions and not temporary band-aids.

Central to CRT are the voices of marginalized people. Many who look at this process concentrate on the objectification, victimization, and marginalization of the Indigenous, the colonized, and the enslaved. What is essential is to understand that they are active agents. This means that Indigenous, colonized, and enslaved peoples were more than blank templates on which were written the epithets of racism and racialism. They were already contemplative, whole peoples who came from societies that had already spent hundreds of years writing their own stories. One of the principal lies and myths of both liberal and conservative historians is that the history of these peoples began at the junction where they entered history as victims and rarely as thinking, sentient peoples. Failure to see this lie means that we fail to understand how counter-narratives and alternative narratives existed and persisted even as the racial transformations deliberately attempted to wipe their existence from the face of history. Critical Race Theory advocates the essential use of storytelling (Cooper 1994), counter stories (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Villenas et al., 1999), and counter-narratives (Lather, 1998) as not only correctives but necessary transformative processes

in producing equitable and systemic anti-racism policies, practices, and policies (Miller, Liu, and Ball, 2020).

What is Critical Race Theory? Essentially, it's a **theory** of oppression. The basic idea is that instead of being an invisible force or a force of nature, systems of oppression are socially constructed. These systems are further complicated by the intersections of race, gender, sex, and class as they work together to warp groups' life chances and create identities. The more integrated these systems are embedded into our institutions, the more normal they appear. The more normal they seem, the less likely we will see them as arbitrary constructs. Time and space do not allow for examining all racialized social institutions. One example is higher education, which has been viewed over the decades as an important pathway towards a higher quality of life. Nonetheless, higher education has seen the racial gap in both access and graduation get worse over time, past all the attempts to level this playing field. Black enrollment in colleges and universities has dropped 22% between 2010 and 2020. This means that more than 650,000 fewer Black students are now enrolled than a decade ago (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). As states across the nation challenge diversity programs at public universities and as the Supreme Court has ruled against affirmative action in college admissions, we must ask whether higher education provides a level playing field, especially between Black and white Americans. A CRT analysis of higher education follows. This analysis will demonstrate how and why ideologies deriving from both liberalism and neoliberalism continually work to preserve racialized systems of oppression.

#### LIBERALISM, NEO-LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Throughout history, great ideas have been formulated to deal with humanity's most pressing problems, regardless of culture or era. Even in ancient times, however, great ideas have been subverted by those in power to produce creative interpretations that provided ideological justification for the cruel and often inhumane treatment of whole groups of people. The ancient Egyptian Pharaohs, trained in the Plahhotep concept of the concept of *ma'at*, or justice with great pains, subverted these ideas to subjugate and dehumanize the Israelites (Medan 2017). So, it is not strange that in our current era, great ideas have been formulated that become the tools of oppression. Our modern ideas, from liberalism to post-modernism to neo-liberalism, all have supported imperialism, reifying racism. While all major institutions in the Western world have been instrumental in these processes, the role played by higher education is often ignored. European liberalism in universities provides sanctuary to the ideas of European imperialism, the Protestant Ethic, and the so-called spirit of capitalism. Within these ideas, we find the ideological justification and the lynchpin by which racism, genocide, and Western expansion found expression. And as colonialism came into question and was ultimately challenged, new means of subjugation were espoused. Thus, as we have witnessed civil rights and postcolonial struggles take shape, the response has been a new ideological set of policies. These new policies and practices, euphemistically labeled neoliberalism, attempt to redefine our institutions to wrest control from

the postcolonial. While all Western institutions feel the strain of these struggles, none has been more central than the academy.

## POST-MODERNITY AND DREAMS

Born at the end of World War II, a baby boomer, I am the product of what some might consider a failed experiment of post-modernism. This experiment centered on critical thinking, existentialism, and protests aimed to disrupt and transform the world. The experiment began in our schools as we learned to be skeptical of the grand narratives and ideologies associated with modernity. My generation took to the streets, took over campuses, and shouted from the belfries that the “revolution would not be televised.” We challenged all, and in the process, we learned much. And we believed we could change the world created by liberalism, a child of the Enlightenment. Let us begin by examining the Enlightenment and how my generation learned to be critical of it / its legacies.

George Fredrickson (2002), in a classic piece, explains how the Enlightenment created specific ideologies to maintain political and economic power at the expense of racialized, gendered, and sexualized groups. The actual concept of race, a product of the Enlightenment, in displacing religious and metaphysical-based arguments, provided the racial taxonomies and the “color-coded, white-over-black” ideological justifications that became embedded into our systems of knowledge, logic, and realities (Hannaford 1995). We learned that truth claims, and the value systems they supported, were socially constructed to preserve specific political, historical, and cultural hierarchies. The reality, as we know it, was similarly a social construction. And what could be constructed could not only be deconstructed (Culler 2008) but reconstructed (Jinks 1997) to suit the marginalized’s political, cultural, and social goals. We believed in our truths and created our own epistemological and revolutionary philosophies to transform the world as we knew it. Our journey began by exploring the racial birth of the U.S. nation.

As the United States was being formed, the German intellectual Johann Blumenbach in 1776 provided ideological justification for the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans that would follow. In his formulation, the five basic divisions of humanity were destined to produce obvious racial hierarchies, with Caucasians at the top. For it was only natural that they, having the greatest capacity to reason, would—no must—enslave the Africans or savages in the Americas. Against this subservience, expulsion or genocide was the only way to control the spread of these lesser humans. Immanuel Kant would add the final 18<sup>th</sup>-century anointing of these ideas by cloaking them in the illusion of science. He argued that the “hot, temperate zones of certain countries served to retard the intellectual growth of certain groups such as the yellow Indians and Negros who both had the lower intellectual development” (Kant /Leipzig 1777). The ideological justification was that these peoples were biologically inferior, and reason dictated order and their subservience. Thus it was argued that whites, coming from more temperate zones, were the perfect

blend of effects and passions. Their dispositions provided for the perfect balance of culture and civilization. For this reason, they were, among all other racial groups “the best leaders” and all others should follow. They were the “only ones advanced to perfection” (Eze 1997).

Ideas rooted in the Enlightenment soon morphed into what would become liberalism. Liberalism, a political and moral philosophy, is presented as the basis of liberty, democratic government, and equality before the law. Aiming to replace the previous structures based upon hereditary privilege, state religions, and absolute monarchy, liberalism provided a new justification for privilege. And upon this new justification, a new governmental form emerged called representative democracy and the rule of law.

John Locke is typically viewed as the architect of liberalism and posited that each man enters a social contract with others by which our natural rights of life and liberty would be protected (Tuckness 2020). Different national traditions developed from these thoughts, such that in England, liberalism meant expanding democracy; in the U.S., liberalism was explained to mean representative democracy; while in France liberalism was linked to nation-building and rejection of authoritarianism. Ultimately, these various forms of liberalism resulted in specific attempts to overthrow the monarchy, such as the English Revolution of 1688, the American Revolution of 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789. However, each of these revolutions ultimately replaced one hereditary rule with another, from one based on family to one based on race.

In the U.S., while many presumed that the Civil War was fought to free the slaves, in reality it presented a moral and political dilemma for Abraham Lincoln. Specifically, as Lincoln advocated freedom, he nevertheless held on to racial hierarchies. The enslaved were just another set of pawns in this political gambit, as our nation's leaders, North and South, battled to see whose version of America would prevail—one controlled by a Northern industrial elite or another owned by Southern plantation elite. There was no concern about whether the enslaved would be free, as acknowledged by Lincoln himself:

*My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, -- to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me, that whatever of high hope, (as I think there is) there may be in this, in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible. If they were all landed there in a day, they would all perish in the next ten days; and there are not surplus shipping and surplus money enough in the world to carry them there in many times ten days. What then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this betters their condition? I think I would not hold one in slavery, at any rate; yet the point is not clear enough for me to denounce people upon. What next? Free them, and make them politically and socially, our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not. (Lincoln 1854/1953)*

Ultimately, Lincoln did what was expedient to force the rebellious slaveholding states back into the Union; he freed those enslaved people only in the states in rebellion. That is, he released those enslaved people he had no control over. No enslaved people were freed from those states loyal to the Union and not in rebellion. And so, the Emancipation Proclamation held out the promise of the promise of freedom. A promise that never came to pass as the “great mass of white people” refused to allow it to come into being. The premise—that all men (humans) are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. The least of these rights being “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” which constituted the premise that the Emancipation Proclamation promised would go unfulfilled, a check written and returned marked insufficient funds. And it is this check that constitutes the paradox of American justice that yet goes unfilled.

The Civil War ended on April 9, 1865, as Robert E. Lee surrendered his Confederate troops to General Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. Thus ended the costliest domestic war America has ever fought as an estimated 1.56 million Union and 800,000 Confederates forces battled for supremacy. At the close of the war, some 4 million Blacks (constituting 88% of all Blacks) were now free, but another 250,000 in Texas languished in slavery. Neither Lincoln nor the federal government had any real impact on Texas, primarily because there were not enough Union troops to enforce the order. Such force was not available until after the surrender of General Robert E. Lee in April of 1865, and General Gordon Granger's regiment only arrived in Texas two months later. Listen as Granger declares their freedom in his General Order Number 3:

*The people of Texas were informed that all enslaved people were free following a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former enslavers and enslaved people, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired laborer.*

*The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes, and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts, and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere. (Granger, 1865)*

I cannot help but wonder if any whites were advised to “remain quietly at their present homes, and work for wages...and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.” As we will see later, these were the seeds through which the infamous Jim Crow codes and laws would ensue. But for now, let us consider the response of the formerly enslaved person.

The responses of the formerly enslaved people ranged from shock to exaltation, from acts of retribution to praise, and from prayers and celebration to cries of despair and loss. Some left not only the plantation but the South, seeking to reestablish connections with family and communities broken and shattered as a consequence of slavery. Others stayed to attempt to take on freedom

where they were enslaved. Regardless, these enslaved people challenged America to recognize their equality as they sought to establish themselves as free people within America.

One of the first things these free people sought to do was to embrace education. It should be recalled that under slavery, it was illegal in many states to teach any Blacks—either free or enslaved—reading and writing. But, even under slavery, Blacks facing severe punishment still found ways to support and encourage education. Therefore it is not strange that after the war and emancipation, the now freed gathered to learn in homes, cellars, sheds, meetinghouses, and even under the shade tree in the fields where they worked the crops. They learned from each other, teachers, clergy, or older family members. They not only learned to read and write, but they retained their history as a people. Imagine the scene recorded from South Carolina, as a six-year-old girl sits beside her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother (over 75 years old), all embracing learning and reading for the first time. From the beginning, many of the freedmen distrusted the scalawags and carpetbaggers and former masters, demanded to learn to read for themselves, to learn math, and to read the Bible firsthand. They established their schools, freedom schools, to accomplish this. These freedom schools were sometimes funded by white aid and benevolent societies from the North, such as the American Missionary Association and the National Freedmen's Relief Association, Sabbath schools, and night schools. But most of the monies to fund these schools came from the newly freed Americans, who privately sponsored their schools.

These newly freed Americans sought to become economically independent and exercise their full civil and political rights along with the right to education. One of these efforts' most significant outcomes was the establishment of all-Black towns across America. These Freedmen's Towns, or All-Black towns, were established by or for a predominantly African-American population. Many were founded by formerly enslaved people and existed in many of the former Southern states. For example, before the end of segregation, Oklahoma boasted dozens of these communities, while in Texas, some 357 freedom colonies have been verified and located.

For a brief period, the promise of Freedom flourished as Congress passed, then slowly the states ratified the so-called Reconstruction Amendments. These three amendments, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup>, abolished slavery and attempted to guarantee equal protection of the laws and the right to vote. Thus, briefly, the enslaved enjoyed a taste of freedom. For the first time the U.S. Constitution through the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment prohibited involuntary servitude and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified the principle of citizenship for all born or naturalized and granted the right to vote and decide who could hold office. These rights protected citizenship for all, regardless of previous conditions of servitude, race, or color. Of interest is that all debts of those associated with either the insurrection or rebellion against the United States and even the claim for the loss or emancipation of enslaved people were considered unenforceable, and resultant claims were to be held illegal and void. Problems were apparent, as the Constitution denied women the right to vote for the first time.



Unfortunately, these amendments did not provide any enforcement provisions nor preclude the former states or its members from seeking to nullify, negate, or circumvent the laws.

No sooner than the ratification of these amendments and after the assassination of Lincoln, state laws and federal court decisions began to erode and nullify much of these throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many states passed what would be known as the Jim Crow laws that limited the rights of African-Americans. These were in tandem with decisions made by the Supreme Court, such as the Slaughter-House Cases in 1873, which undermined and prevented several federally guaranteed rights from being enforceable because they could not supersede state law, and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896, which established “separate but equal” and gave federal approval to all the Jim Crow laws. These rights did not become available until the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The responses of Southern whites to the newly freed persons were not limited to legislative or court actions. As American Blacks celebrated their new freedom, many whites in the South mourned the passage of what they believed was “their greatness.” For many Southern whites, this was personal and represented a communal defeat, marking the demise of the White Man and a time of dismay. They mourned the loss of traditions, customs, families, property, and a whole way of life built with Blacks’ blood, sacrifices, and lives. Many considered leaving, while others began to retreat into nostalgia and fictitious memories of the Old South and mourning the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The first Confederate memorial associations started appearing in 1865 and 1866 as they built cemeteries and monuments throughout the region. Others created groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, which resorted to violence, murder, and terror to oppose this new Freedom. The story of destruction of Tulsa in 1921, Black Wall Street, and hundreds of other Black towns illustrates the terror ensuing as the formerly enslaved sought to create their Freedom.

No sooner were the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments enacted—which provided legal and civil protections to formerly enslaved people—members of the Ku Klux Klan began systematic terrorist attacks against Black citizens for exercising their right to vote, running for office, and serving on juries. Congress quickly responded by passing a series of Enforcement acts of 1870 and 1871 which attempted to end such violence and empower the president to use military force to protect African Americans. The Enforcement Act of 1870, for example, even prohibited groups of people from banding together “or to go in disguise upon the public highways, or the premises of another” to violate another’s constitutional rights. Legislative intent aside, these acts did nothing to diminish the harassment of Black voters across the South. Seeing the lack of enforcement, the Senate passed two more Force acts, one known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, designated to enforce the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1866. A second Force Act passed in 1871 aimed to place national elections under the federal government’s control and empower federal judges and U.S. marshals to supervise local elections. Then the Third Force Act of April 1871 gave the president the power to use the armed forces to combat those who conspired to deny equal

protection of the laws and to suspend habeas corpus, when necessary, to enforce the act. These acts temporarily assisted in ending the violence and intimidation, but the formal end of Reconstruction in 1877 opened the floodgates for the disfranchisement and violence targeting African Americans. Absent these protections and amid the rise of Jim Crow Laws throughout the South—it was essentially open season for Blacks.

Lynching became the most frequent weapon to terrorize Blacks and force them into submission. By 1877, lynchings became normalized and flagrantly committed as public displays. People dressed up, invited friends and neighbors and advertised in local newspapers. Large crowds, whole families, would show up to watch Blacks get their “justice.” Lynchings targeted prominent and successful Blacks. It was a means of keeping Blacks in their place. Typically, allegations of Black males being sexual predators motivated mob actions by whites. All too often, the real insult was the perception that these Blacks were political and economic threats. Lynching and white riots were used to teach them a lesson, put them in their place, and serve as a warning to any other Black arrogant enough to challenge white supremacy. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, close to 5,000 Blacks were lynched. In Mississippi alone, some 500 Blacks were lynched from 1800 to 1955. Lynching was not restricted to the South, as over 35 people died in Ohio from lynching from 1872 to 1932. The full range of whites who attended—from journalists to legislators, from police to judges, from labor leaders to clergy—were anything but innocent bystanders.

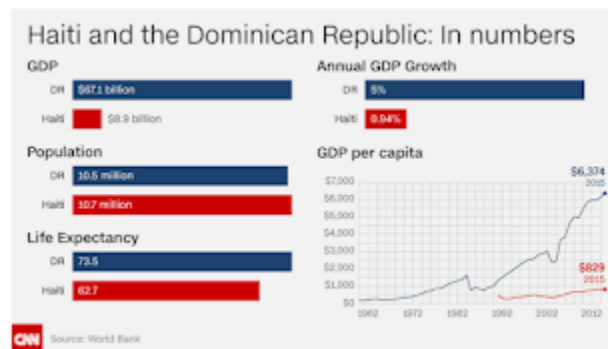
But Blacks were not content to sit by and be lynched: Blacks voted with their feet and initiated the largest domestic migration movement in modern history as millions of Black relocated from the most violent Southern regions to what was presumed to be a more tolerant North.

America has become absorbed and shocked by the massacres in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921. But we should point out that Tulsa was just one of at least 50 separate events where African Americans were violently expelled from their homes, towns, cities, and counties within the United States, most of these occurring from just after the Civil War until 1954. To date, few have been brought to trial, even though photos by the tens of thousands still can be found throughout the internet. Reminiscent of the genocide perpetuated against the Indigenous peoples in the U.S., never had domestic terrorism, public murders, and riots been so celebrated.

Of course, even as lynching and wholesale black massacres began to wane, the Black church continued to be a central target of White America's racial angst. Herein lies an irony: prior to this the Black church was not viewed as a threat. Then, in 1822, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina was burned down. Over the next few decades and into the 20th century, an average of 6 churches were burned each decade. Then we hit the end of the 20th century, where over 30 Black churches were burned in just 18 months between 1995 and 1996. Congress finally passed the 1996 Church Arson Prevention Act. Bill Clinton established a

Presidential Commission to document the burning of Black churches, and they reported as many as 827 churches might have been burned. But the spate of church burnings had not ended; from then to 2018, another 16 Black churches were burned. Last year 7 Black churches were targeted. These attacks were attacks aimed at the spiritual core of the African American community. They sought to kill that spirit, but what they did was fire up the community. Churches thus joined individuals and ultimately whole towns that were destroyed by white mobs.

Things were not that different in Africa. Walter Rodney's 1972 seminal text, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, explores how European colonial powers' deliberate policies, strategies, and practices undermined, exploited, and underdeveloped Africa. The poverty in the African states that resulted was intentional and served to justify and condemn Africans for conditions created by their adversaries. Oddly enough, while many have criticized the book and its author, his articulated needs were part of the duplicitous ways the imperial state penalized racialized others for being different and then shifted the blame unto the victims. Let us consider how these policies, strategies, and practices served to under-develop Haiti while simultaneously developing the Dominican Republic.



Source: [Two countries, one island, life-and-death differences | CNN](#)

Saint Domingue, as the French colony was known prior to its current name of Haiti, was once considered the jewel of the Caribbean. Before 1960, the Dominican Republic and Haiti had almost equal GDP and capital incomes. Today, the Dominican Republic is nearly 800% higher. Haiti is now the pariah, as France, the U.S., and other world powers orchestrated the demise of this Black-led nation. As a result, Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere. Moreover, the same policies, practices, and intentional strategies that created such a nation would be duplicated, refined, and reinvented as our nation discovered Jim Crow, redlining, the cradle-to-prison pipeline, and the resulting ghettos. Oddly, it was liberalism which provided the basis for these processes.

## LIBERALISM, EUROPE AND RACIAL IMPERIALISM

Consequently, liberalism provided the sanctuary for the ideas of European imperialism and the ideological justifications and lynchpins by which racism, genocide, and Western expansion found expression. It would take some time for the almost wholesale elimination of many Indigenous peoples and cultures from the Americas to the Pacific Islands, from the Horn of Africa to the Pacific Rim, and from the Middle East to Asia. Oddly enough, World War II would be the catalyst for change.

World War II challenged us to rethink who, why, and what we were as humans. It forced us to look at ourselves in a new light as we contemplated the horrors released upon the world. We questioned how and why such a thing as the Jewish Holocaust could have happened, much less with the apparent tacit complicity of the so-called modern world, including England, France, and the United States. And while research such as Stanley Milgram's famous studies on compliance emerged, we were still left with the reality that all of us could fall into the same mindset as Hitler and Nazi Germany. Post-modernity offered hope, and we students of the '60s embraced civil rights and social change zealously.

Post-modernity was a direct rejection of the horrors of a war that many believed was a direct result of the ideology-driving modernists (Felluga 2016). As such, post-modernity envisioned a bold future made possible by various inventions, including T.V., film, popular music, and the computer. And it was this world that I was born into.

The United States and much of the so-called free world embraced post-modernity passionately in the decades after the war. We invested in it and charged our schools to teach our kids to challenge authority, think critically, and interrogate truth claims. We grew up with the idea that we could indeed transform the world and reshape it into a place where all, regardless of accidents of birth, could not only be free but live that freedom while enjoying the blessings of democracy—life, liberty, and, above all else, pursuit of happiness. As I look back on those times of change, I see that our dreams and passions for a different world, though possible, yet remain a dream. The next revolution must transform institutions of higher education. This is why today's ultraconservatives are so intent on controlling education and eliminating CRT. Yet, as the next section explains, education, particularly the academy, has long been one of the chief tools for maintaining the racial state.

## INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION ARE BROKEN BOTH WITHIN THE U.S. AND EUROPE

Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities, as some of the principal institutions serving persons of color, Indigenous people, racialized people, or former colonial subjects, are disproportionately less likely to be funded at the same rate as their predominantly white counterparts. Within the U.S., we spend \$5 billion less on

the education of black students than white students (Garcia 2018). According to a 2019 European University Association (EUA) study, the greatest barrier to diversity in higher education was a lack of funding and other resources (EUA 2019). A 2020 Fulbright Virtual Conference demonstrated that both sides of the Atlantic face racial equity challenges in higher education institutions (Fulbright 2020).

Racism in higher education in the U.K. might go unreported as over 79% of the students do not know to whom and how to report racism. Hence, the 2019 EUA report documents 559 complaints of racial harassment in U.K. universities over a three-and-a-half-year period. Only one-third of these students reported these incidents to their universities (Akel 2019). Black and particularly Black female faculty routinely face bias and discrimination in the U.K. (Rollock 2019) and the U.S. (Walkington 2017). Educational institutions, on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly in higher education, have failed consistently to embrace, educate, and promote racialized, gendered, and sexualized individuals. Historically this failure hides behind such ideas as assimilable/unassimilable, the culture of poverty, biological racism, imposter syndrome, implicit bias, and so on. The same institutions have begged the question, blamed the victim, and embraced all remedies, the latest associated with so-called “neoliberal” policies. These remedies essentially reflect what has been termed a deficit model, where Black, brown, and other students of color have various deficiencies which result in their failure. The results of all the knee-jerking, all the self-studies, and all the remedial and other programs have been the repeated recognition that the problem must be with the specified marginalized groups and not the institutions. And so, we are again working to help the oppressed adjust to, fit in, and succeed in the same system that oppresses them. While the system remains intact, the structures continue to do as they were programmed to from their onset -to reify, justify, and perpetuate white space, identity, and realities.

However, research documents that rather than the students, it's the structures we must look at. (Akel 2019). But while countries such as Britain and the U.S. point out their increasing demographic diversity, they consistently fail to see such diversity reflected in their curriculums. As repeatedly pointed out, the role of higher education curricula helps reaffirm racial inequality (See, for example, Atkinson, Bardgett, Budd, et al., 2018). We must stop trying to help marginalized people to adjust to the institution. Instead, we must adapt the institution to the marginalized. And herein lies the dilemma. Or is it the irony? Only through these changes, and what I call the decolonizing of the institution, can we hope to change the institutions.

Interestingly, some believe that putting a person of color over diversity initiatives and programs automatically produces change. Tokenism does not lead to systemic change; it's not an image problem but a structural one that must be solved. Diversity and compromise are important, but sometimes you need a clear strategic vision for the future and change. Such a vision must change the structure, system, and processes that deny access and success. No, it's not about changing the face of leadership or even the names of buildings. These give the illusion of change and are a kind

of performance activism that only maintains the illiberal institution. Change—real change—is not about looking good or even sounding good; it is about making good decisions that change the dynamics of the structure. It is not about what you say but what you do. Transforming the Illiberal Academy will not be easy, but it will be necessary.

### WHY SCHOOLS, NOT STUDENTS, FAIL

We have all read or heard of the children's story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, by Hans Christian Andersen (1837/2005). Interestingly, shortly after writing this story, which was decidedly political satire, Andersen received a ruby ring from the prince. And that was the last political satire he would write about royalty. Similarly, we often give lip service to celebrating diversity, but what happens when someone points out the flaws in our various institutions? Dealing with #whiteprivilege is treacherous, particularly for persons of color. What happens when one challenges power and privilege in real life, not in children's stories?

When marginalized individuals within the academy or other major institutions challenge the racial order, they are compromised or disciplined. Many would rather become less critical than face scorn, increased isolation, lowered evaluations, and the related risk of promotions and raises. Student evaluations and performance reviews frequently punish those who dare reveal and challenge racial norms and structures. The reality is that faculty of color often teach the same courses that aim to challenge racial norms and structures, so-called identity courses, which are the very ones that suffer the most. Often when we notice lower class sizes and student evaluations, we point to the professor of color as the problem, not the structure.

The current trend across many conservative-leaning states is to enact laws and policies to systematically reduce, redact, and obscure the history and reality of marginalized groups. Again, we find ourselves with ideological and political rigidity, which presents a static educational curriculum that aims to preserve the racial state. As this process is unchecked, we find that racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and homophobia have not receded but have been submerged in a new variant of political correctness. We bury the work of feminists over the past 40-50 years, especially by women of color, like Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2000), who has ushered in lots of exciting sociological work that centers the voices of people of color. We must rediscover the counter-narratives—stories of resistance, rebellion, and transformation—as they help inform us of how social movements, civil rights, and change actually comes about. CRT examines these stories and illustrates gaps and demonstrate “how we got over.” These tales of the truly determined help us to understand how agency is realized, experienced, and articulated in the everyday lives of those we so conveniently objectify through social constructions of marginality. We are left with the objectification of others rather than the subjective understanding of us. This is why CRT is being attacked even as it plans to uproot structural racism, starting with legal discourse then moving into the academy.

## DECOLONIZING, DECONSTRUCTING, AND DELEGITIMIZING THE UNIVERSITY

Long-standing calls to uproot structural racism worldwide have targeted the laws and police. In the wake of dozens of killings of Black people in the United States, including the murders of Breanna Taylor and George Floyd, many have pointed out how these structures reinforce and reproduce racialized hierarchies. Consequently, voices coming from the Black Lives Matter movement call for judicial, police, and prison reform and ultimately the end of racially motivated violence. But the problems are systemic and related to the cradle-to-prison pipeline, the racial gap in college access and completion, the racial disparities in curriculum, faculty hiring and promotions, and the various glass ceilings these produce in professional, corporate settings across multiple institutions. The answers all point to reforms in our colleges and universities. These answers start with calls to decolonize institutions. Universities, as one of the main sites of European dominance, are central to any decolonizing efforts. But what does it mean to decolonize the university? And how can professors, faculty, students, and academics work to create this change?

As Europe colonized much of the world, it installed its major institutions—politics, family, economic systems, religion, and education (see, for example, Stein 2018). These institutions, found in the United States and the broader Americas, and throughout India, Africa, and the Caribbean, aimed to guarantee that Western ideas, knowledge systems, racial hierarchies, and identities would prevail (see, for example, Masta 2019). As former colonies have struggled to remove the imperial colors, their efforts have been stifled by the institutions central to their existence in many ways. The academy is no different. The ideas associated with white privilege, space, and identity have been preserved and continually reified within the university, as with all other European-imported institutions.

Consequently, dominant historiography of the Americas starts with colonization, and much of what we know and teach concerning the various colonized peoples begins at this point in history. Most Indigenous cultural systems, knowledge systems, and world views were denigrated and ridiculed as backward, unsophisticated, and disregarded. Colonized and enslaved people were treated as people without history, substance, or essence. They had no agency and only existed in juxtaposition and as a reaction to Western imperialism.

Students across colleges and universities challenged the white and Western exclusivity of history in academia. As early as the 1900, W.E.B. Du Bois was heard calling for the teaching of Black history. Later, Freedom schools evolved out of the 1960s civil rights movement to offer alternative schools that provided intensive consideration of Black history and culture and centered on the lives of Black students. Almost instantly, the call was heard across college campuses by students of color challenging the Eurocentric dominance within the classroom and textbooks, and argued for the creation of Ethnic Studies (Anderson 2016). Thus, it was not until the modern civil rights movement that Ethnic Studies came into being.

Even when forced to consider these various groups, Western imperialism reluctantly created identity-based programs such as American Indian Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, and Latino Studies. This left much of the foundations of European history, white identity, and privilege intact, as these programs continue to be marginalized. At the same time, areas such as Global and American Studies, primarily concentrating on Western experiences, are again the dominant voices among identity programs. Decolonizing the university means centering the various representatives of peoples of color, taking them from the margins to the core of what the academy is about (Stein 2018). Along with decolonizing, we must also deconstruct and delegitimize those elements within the academy that have failed in its primary mission.

Decolonizing, deconstructing, and delegitimizing the university are processes within the university that call for significant changes in the curriculum, pedagogies, and methodologies that delink, deconstruct, and unhinge Eurocentric stereotypes while simultaneously challenging the canon and dominant ideologies of Western-based systems of knowledge, theories, and information. These have become contested sites for decolonial activists, scholars, theorists, researchers, and artists. It is an ongoing process directly related to the anti-, post- and decolonial struggles developed in Asia, Africa, and the Americas that challenge the Eurocentric control of governance, knowledge, theory, and praxis. Indigenous writers and activists are producing counter-narratives that challenge the centrality of European knowledge systems while simultaneously recognizing that counter-narratives will be generated by canon proponents that challenge both the legitimacy and authority of these Indigenous counter-narratives. It also means that we must consider land theft and the return of this land as a basic principle of decolonization. Otherwise, as pointed out by Tuck and Yang, decolonization becomes a mere metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012). If the canon proponents are successful, they will deflect criticism and perpetuate the colonial-based orientation that marginalizes formerly colonized and subjugated peoples.

#### WHY DEI TRAINING FAILS IN THE ACADEMY

We hear a lot these days about diversity training. There are podcasts, online modules, in-person group sessions, webinars, etc. The costs also appear to have no end in sight, and at the end of the day, many respond that the only results they encountered were when they paid the fee. It is estimated that the annual expenditure for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts will be \$9.4 Billion and is projected to be an estimated \$24.4 Billion by 2030 (Global Industry Analysts 2023). Across the European Union, add another annual expenditure of an estimated \$20 billion. Yet, while the attitudes of some marginalized groups might feel better because of DEI training, there is very little evidence that such activities affect the behavior of white employees or management (Chang et al., 2019). I would argue that much of the DEI efforts aim to change the individual, concentrate on interpersonal relationships, and use such measures as implicit bias, in-group bias, self-serving bias, availability bias, cognitive biases, etc. Specifically, DEI training might empower targeted groups to seek mentors and become more knowledgeable about corporate



culture and how to maximize their opportunities. But it has done little to increase or enhance the access and success of targeted groups in the first place. Perhaps the problem is being misdiagnosed; we are using the wrong tools.

Many argue that corporations, educational institutions, and non-profits, when challenged about their lack of diversity, immediately hire someone to come in and do corporate training on diversity and sensitivity in the hopes that this will lead to less need for systemic/structural change. Because of misdiagnosing the problem or treating the symptom, a very lucrative industry has blossomed, producing very little change in the workplace. Research conducted by Dobbin, Kalev, and Kelley (2007) demonstrated that diversity training provided no positive outcomes for the average workplace. Researching antibias training since the 1930s reveals that antibias training does little to reduce bias, change behavior or the workplace (Dobbin and Kalev 2018). So, while everyone in the workplace has had more diversity and sensitivity training, the lack of diversity remains despite the legally protected classes and the veneer of progressive action. Alternatively, if campuses or corporations become more diverse, at all levels, as their curricula, programs, approaches, and ways of knowing change, so do the structures. This means that our very realities will change as we incorporate these formerly marginalized into the core of our institutions and campuses. We shift the center of knowledge systems, the histories, and how we view the world. The continual conclusion that diversity is a failed project leads many to become frustrated with the subject. Then we hear from the ultra-conservative right that diversity training is primarily about making white people feel guilty, shaming and naming them as the cause of all the grief faced by Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and women in general.

There are many reasons why diversity training fails. Here are just a few:

1. The lack of diversity is about systemic problems, not the behavior or attitudes of individuals. And while it is great to work on individual biases, such work takes years or even a lifetime to have positive effects. A little standardized DEI training cannot impact it. In some cases, the training can serve to increase biases.
2. If diversity training is about big brother creating the perfect workplace, employees often reject the training outright. Over 80% of corporations in the U.S. who have had such training have found that their employees react negatively (Dover, Major, and Kaiser 2016).
3. White males might feel that their careers are directly threatened by diversity training and efforts. As a result, they might work to undermine diversity efforts (Dublin and Kalev 2018).
4. Many institutions, corporations, and non-profits believe that the answer is to hire a diversity expert and place them in a highly visible position. Such an individual is typically a person of color, often a female. Hence you get two for one. Rarely does this individual have any real funding or staff, yet they are charged with articulating, implementing, and overseeing all diversity efforts and objectives within the organization. And they often fail.

5. Lastly, we often fail to create a strategic diversity plan, rarely define our diverse objectives, and have no clear method of measure or accountability. Without a long-term strategic diversity plan, a lack of a clear roadmap of initiatives, and a lack of transparency and accountability, stakeholders and employers have no clue what to expect, what their role is, and when “victory” has been achieved.

#### THE FAILURE OF PIPELINES: THE CASE OF STEM FACULTY IN THE U.S.

Diversity among STEM faculty remains elusive, as only 10.1 % of STEM faculty in the U.S. are underrepresented minorities (Bennett, Reed, and York, 2020). Faculty diversity is also linked to the access and success of diverse students (Stout, Archie, Cross, and Carman, 2018). The United States is becoming more diverse; this means that the very future of STEM is tied to increasing this diversity of faculty and students. The failure to attract and retain STEM faculty from underrepresented groups will directly impact the future of this nation's competitiveness in an increasingly technologically dependent world. The number of diverse faculty has been declining in recent years. Students from historically marginalized groups only earn 21 percent of STEM BA degrees at 4-year institutions (Bennett, Reed, and York, 2020).

The lack of Black and other underrepresented groups in faculty positions leads to many problems. The lack of diversity leads to increased bias and the use of stereotypes toward underrepresented groups, greater harassment, and the increased likelihood that diverse professionals will leave STEM (Dutt 2018). More diversity, both within the classroom and in the workplace, leads to more productivity, as different experiences and perspectives are available to approach problems, ask different questions, and develop more innovative responses (Hong and Page 2004). Resolution of these problems means increasing the number of minoritized faculty. So, while there may be more interactions between Black students and white faculty, this interaction is more likely to be negative. Minoritized students feel increasingly alienated by such interactions. Consequently, Black students are more likely to report experiencing racial/ethnic discrimination. Black and Latinx female students are more apt to leave STEM by the fourth year of college than their male, white, and Asian American peers. These perceptions increase retention problems of underrepresented students in STEM baccalaureate programs (Park, Kim, Salazar, and Hayes, 2020). Over a third of Black, Native American, and Latino college students are interested in STEM, but only 16% obtain bachelor's degrees (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics 2017).

Providing STEM faculty with pedagogical training stressing inclusive classrooms that raise awareness of student and instructor perceptions of identities and barriers to learning, including implicit bias, microaggressions, stereotype threat, and fixed mindset, has increased student learning. Such efforts, focusing on improving the structure rather than fixing the student, have benefited student learning and retention of students of color (O’Leary, Shapiro, Toma, et al., 2020). We must also examine institutional culture and climate, which can lead to students' success. This

means that we must address the whole student throughout their career as students to help them develop their competencies as scientists. This means early exposure to research and mentored experiences is critical if we want to see any significant increase in STEM success among underrepresented students (Chang, et al., 2014).

#### BLAMING THE VICTIM: ACADEMIC RATE BUSTERS OF COLOR

The scene is familiar across the academy: the young, eager scholar of color comes to the institution determined to be successful, productive, or “a star.” As they embrace the multiple roles—teaching, research, and service—they outperform their white colleagues, many of whom have been at the institution for many years, and have long since stopped producing at high levels, often are minimally engaged in service, and conduct their classes almost as an afterthought. This young scholar of color has become what is typically called a “rate buster” in the industry.

It is not strange that these young academics of color find antipathy from their other colleagues. After all, merit increases, course reductions, and the like are all tied to production levels. Consequently, as young academics of color increase their output, they become increasingly alienated from their colleagues. These faculty of color become more intense and productive and learn to celebrate their accomplishments. While sometimes their white and other colleagues attempt to treat the faculty of color with compassion, faculty of color remain isolated and feel that they are in a kind of solitary confinement created exclusively for the young scholars of color. Other young scholars, both those of color and white, see this and adjust their output accordingly. Thus, a bar is established, further isolating the young academic superstar.

Often a senior mentor (usually one of color) is encouraged to help the young superstar “adjust” and learn to get on with their peers. Strangely, the problem is vested in this young scholar, not the system. Then, the young academic superstar gets tenure or is lured to another university, where this cycle begins anew.

#### WHY IS THE PIPELINE BUSTED?

Universities have become the site of contested spaces in this country and other Western countries as symbols of our colonial, confederate, and imperial past have been challenged and, in many cases, removed. While it is great that the symbols of our racist past—such as Confederate flags, statues of Edward Colston (1636-1721, a slave owner, slave trader, member of parliament, and director of the Royal African Company that dominated the African slave trade) or King Leopold (Belgian ruler from 1865-1909, sole owner of the Congo, and responsible for as many as 10 million Africans forced into slavery) and other monuments—are being retired, we must do way more. We must dismantle the colonial, imperialist, and racist structures that continue to deny identity and agency, history, and cultural realities of those who have been subjugated, whose liberties were

denied, and who even now call for justice. We must commit to more than symbolic gestures and dedicate our efforts to making substantive changes to move forward. We can start with a basic set of definitions using a general formula:  $\text{Discrimination} = \text{bias} + \text{power}$ .

Bias is the propensity to assume stereotypes (either positive or negative) regarding a particular individual or set(s) of individuals based on group identities. These biases, varying by region, community, and institution, appear intractable because they have remained unchanged over decades of observations. Part of the problem is that we fail to understand that as the base of bias shifts, as the historical context and group dynamics change, so do the various components of bias. This suggests that bias for any group will be different in different contexts, situations, or structures. For example, gendered bias within academic institutions will look different depending upon positionality within and external to the institution. Consider, if you will, the role of women as faculty, versus staff, versus students. In each of these contexts, the type of gendered bias will be different and differently experienced. Further, these gendered biases will also vary if we consider various intersections. For example, gendered bias within units that are either masculinized or feminized, based upon historical antecedents, such as in, say, Education or English, which has more females as both students and faculty, compared to Chemistry or Physics, which has more males. The gender dynamics in each area will be distinct based on these historical antecedents that created the various gendered environments.

Now consider another aspect of intersectionality, say race or ethnicity. Even gendered spaces favoring females might have different biases based on race/ethnicity and gender. For example, where white women professors dominate, bias might select white instead of Black or Latina female students. How significant these biases are might be determined by looking at the access and success rates for specific intersectional identities. It is abundantly clear that different intersectional group identities are associated with different geographical and historical contexts. For this, consider that the trajectories for Blacks (males or females) in the South have been quite different than for those in the Midwest or the Northern portion of the U.S. While the former has a long history of overt forms of discrimination, a more nuanced covert set of discriminatory practices have been identified in the North and Midwest. Or consider the differences between the states of discrimination Afro-Latino(a) have experienced compared to their White Latino(a) counterparts. To treat them all as similarly impacted by bias is to ignore the history and geography of bias concerning Hispanics. Failure to consider the various ways intersectionality impacts upon bias and how these differences vary across different types of institutions, communities, or regions means that we will continually fail at our attempts to effectively deal with and solve our problems associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Even by understanding bias, we can identify a whole range of problems when we attempt to solve the issues associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion. When trying to solve these problems, we often concentrate on bias. Consequently, we have for centuries (at least since Reconstruction)

assumed that we could deal with the race problem if we could get whites to be sympathetic to the plight of Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, or Asians and if we could get people from these racialized groups to assimilate, adjust, and just overcome their color. We see this in such statements as “Kill the Indian, save the Man,” “the White Man’s Burden,” and “pulling oneself up by their bootstraps.” We see it in contemporary programs highlighting implicit bias and several DEI initiatives/programs/events. All of this assumes that if we can have enough events, we can impact on, if not eradicate, bias. And therein lies the problem. While we are trying to change the hearts and minds of individuals, the structures, practices, and policies that foster discrimination remain untouched. We must return to our basic definition to understand why this is so.

Discrimination = bias + power.

If we do not deal with the second aspect of the formula, we have only done half the work.

I would argue that we are all biased and that our biases are an ongoing part of our identities. Discrimination, however, is not solely biased. Discrimination is having biases and the power to act to realize these biases in institutional settings. Once these biases are embedded within institutional settings, they tend to have a life of their own. Failure to address these institutionalized structures, practices, and policies will mean that we will continually deal with outcomes that favor some at the expense of others. What is even worse is that in the current climate, the various diversity efforts I and others have termed Diversity Olympics effectively pit one set of marginalized identities against another. And in a cruel twist, it is the identities of color that once again lose out.

One example, if you will, demonstrates this. Let us look at affirmative action. Affirmative action became a direct call to action by Black civil rights activists. Affirmative action policies, coming into being more than 60 years ago, aimed at reversing centuries of discrimination faced by Blacks, Hispanics and other marginalized groups in hiring, promotions, and college admissions. Strangely, although more than 5 million marginalized individuals have benefited from affirmative action since the 1960s, the biggest winner in affirmative action has been white women. Further, these white women have been of the middle class. No significant number of poor have been impacted, and only marginal successes have been obtained by middle-class persons of color (Guynn 2023). The irony is not lost here as white women are also most likely to object to affirmative action. Neither is it not coincidental that all of the challenges to affirmative action have been on the basis of race and not gender. Hence, the power dynamic must be considered if we will not continue to do the same thing and expect a different result. This means being willing to have some difficult conversations and put our resources where our values are.

Difficult conversations about privilege and racial discrimination require that first, we be honest. We must provide spaces where all, particularly the marginalized, can be heard. So often, we want to bring in outsiders to tell us what is wrong. I find this strange when the real experts are there in

the room. Bringing in an outsider who controls the discussion sends a clear message to an insider person of color that their experiences are not valuable. Outsiders can indeed facilitate but should not dictate the conversation. Legitimizing the voices of people of color, who insiders are, sends a clear message that ownership of the conversation and the solutions are internally driven. When privilege dictates whose voices will be heard but how these voices will be evaluated only reaffirms privilege. In this strange game, conflict arises between the various peoples of color as each strives to be validated. Decolonizing the institution and anti-racism movements are not exclusive zero-sum operations but inclusive, additive processes. Decolonizing is not affirmative action but equitable action. It is not an equal opportunity but an equitable opportunity. It repairs the damage and reclaims land and resources denied or stolen over time. Only by repairing the damage can we truly transform the system.

Recently published data reveal that at our elite public institutions in higher education, the number of Blacks and Hispanics has not changed in 20 years. The reality is that these institutions, like much of our school systems, remain as segregated as they were at the height of the civil rights movements. Equitable action would acknowledge these historical processes that have denied access to far too many of our citizens. At the very least, it would insist that public institutions reflect their respective states' demographic realities. Equitable opportunities within higher education would recognize that historical racism has resulted in significant education and racial wealth gaps. It would respond by establishing scholarships and pathways to progress. The pipeline is broken. Perhaps we need to create pathways, and identity programs might provide insight.

#### THE FUTURE OF IDENTITY PROGRAMS

For much of the academy's history, the stories of Blacks and other marginalized people of color have been othered and not central to the conversation. Black Studies and other Ethnic Studies programs came into being as activists both within and outside of universities connected and pushed for inclusive access and change. Unfortunately, as the universities felt forced to discover, hire, and give space to Black voices, they reluctantly created such things as Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, and other studies. What was lost in this was the creative and progressive synergy that originally existed between those faculty of color and external communities of color. This was indeed an advancement for the university, but soon everyone became experts on the Black condition. Books, symposia, and a cottage industry came into being, celebrating "authentic" Black, Latino(x), Indigenous, and Asian voices. Now the university is replete with those who speak for Black and other people of color, who have used the "voices of lions" to become experts on these voices. In the process, the Lion's voice has become tame, marginalized, and muffled. This is particularly true at Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs), where you typically have more non-people of color who have become experts. While we welcome these allies in our struggle, they should not be given priority over the "authentic" voices of the Lions.

Specifically, many can teach using the works of critical thinkers from W.E.B. Du Bois, Karl Marx, and Max Weber to Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill-Collins, Richard Delgado, Sofia Villenas, and others. These thinkers' ability to link the academy with the community sets them apart. They understand that only those who have walked in these paths can use their own experiences in the cauldron of race, struggling to remove the stench of forced marches; cringing from being forced into reservations, internment camps, and ghettos; segregated, lynched, raped, and incarcerated. The contemporary movements captured in the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #AsianLivesMatter, #IndigenousPeoplesLivesMatter, and #ChicanoLivesMatter provide radically nuanced meanings when articulated by Lions' voices. The system, particularly at HWCUs, penalizes authenticity with more critical evaluations, lower-class enrollments, and more tenuous appointments. So, the average HWCU student avoids these difficult conversations and classes by avoiding those taught by Lions. And when forced to take such courses, these same predominantly white students are more likely to punish the Lion who dared to challenge them, the hunter.

We have long understood that faculty of color's courses, particularly in critical race and ethnic studies, are more likely to be negatively evaluated by students, their research and scholarly work marginalized within their disciplines, and their voices thereby muffled. Strangely, given the centrality of race in America's history, economy, politics, and realities, they become marginalized within the academy, disciplines, and our realities. When we talk about theory, critical inquiry, history, and America in general, we can still do this without reference to race, class, or gender. Only by giving centrality and protections to these voices can they continue in clarity and authenticity. We can ill afford to allow the hunters to dictate when, where, and how the Lion speaks. Decolonizing the institution means giving Lions a voice while understanding that the hunters will be troubled.

#### CHALLENGING WHITE SPACES, FRAGILITY, AND IDENTITIES

The Black Power movement deliberately attempted to challenge and critique white institutions within the U.S. and Britain. Institutional racism, as used by Stokeley Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, refers to the attitudes, practices, and systems that produce racist outcomes. Further, these racist outcomes assumed normal, were neither questioned nor interrogated by major societal actors and thus became embedded within institutions, including the academy.

However, defining white privilege, for example, should be quite easy. White privilege, a product of racial hierarchies, is embedded within racial institutions/structures. White privilege is the product of power embedded in institutional structures that create racial hierarchies. We describe the processes as structural racism. When these privileges and hierarchies extend across several social institutions, we label this systemic racism. Systems of racism, where several key racial institutions/structures overlap, socialize each new generation and accept the racial methods, hierarchies, and privileges as normal. Any patterns of racial inequities are typically assigned to individual incapacities, neglect, or inabilities. While white privilege is identifiable, it should be

clear that not all whites share this privilege. White privilege represents a continuum where some whites have virtually no privilege, whereas others have much. For this reason, as I use the term, it refers to the privilege associated with white elites. Saying that all whites have privilege is like saying all Blacks are victims. Any term that suggests everything reflects our bias. White privilege derives from which white elites benefit as individuals and as a group.

Similarly, some people of color within these systems suffer due to internalized colonialism, whereby their statuses, political voices, and life chances are significantly circumscribed by race. Embedded within internalized colonialism are also gendered, sexual, and other forms of oppression and social control. W. E. B. DuBois's work, while never using the term internalized colonialism, nevertheless presaged this area with both theories and research. As early as 1906, DuBois demonstrated that the life chances of blacks were a result of social, economic, and political isolation. He argued that improved life chances (regarding mortality and upward mobility) would come about by improving education, offering enhanced economic opportunities, and removing other institutional structures that maintain internalized colonialism (Du Bois 1906).

Hence, higher incarceration and conviction rates, expulsions and failure, graduation, wealth, and health gaps are defined as individual or group failures, not system failures. The irony of white privilege is that it allows the recipient the veneer of innocence and plausible deniability. As a result, even in the face of decades of scientifically verified and objective data and the constant complaint of people of color, the white privileged can operate cluelessly while the storm rages.

#### FROM THE ILLIBERAL TO THE LIBERAL ACADEMY

In some nostalgic, mythical place, the academy existed on a hill, the Ivory Tower, where all not only saw but were attracted to its light. The academy prided itself in its exclusivity, difficulty, and failure rates. However nostalgic one may be, such an institution could never exist; its very existence was to preserve the elite. The exact meaning of the university, derived from its Latin roots, refers to a community of scholars and learners. The reality is that functional universities are tied to their capacity to serve the community. That core mission remains. If anything, it is even more important. But the mission is expanding. The university's future lies in its capacity to develop community partnerships. These partnerships are most robust when they encourage pathways linking diverse constituencies to successful and thriving lives as responsible, liberally educated citizens. If the university cannot accomplish this, it will cease to exist in today's competitive environment.

On the front end, this means working with local schools to help articulate and model what pre-college skills and experiences are most appropriate for college success. On the back end, we must maximize the diverse students who graduate with the skills and experiences to enter society ready to be fully engaged. The pathways that lead through the university must be demographically diverse and reflect the wider community, state, and nation composition. The paths that lead from



our higher education institutions must be equally diverse across the university's full spectrum of opportunities. Chief among the skills needed of our graduates are interacting with an increasingly diverse world positively, thinking critically, logically, and analytically to solve complex problems, and being an accomplished scholar. Barriers to access and success must be identified and eliminated to maximize the university's core mission.

America's educational institutions, particularly in higher education, have failed consistently to embrace, educate, and promote racialized, gendered, and sexualized individuals. From their onset, the structures continue to do as they were programmed: to reify, justify, and perpetuate white space, identity, and realities. If we are to move forward, we must change the structures, policies, and systems, or we will continue to make the same mistakes and commit the same crimes, and the results will be the same—the murder (both spiritually and physically) of persons of color. Transforming the various institutions will transform the outcomes for marginalized people of color.

#### THE FUTURE AND THE PROMISE OF THE NEW ACADEMY

Maybe, as noted by the first black female publisher and lawyer, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, “we should do more and talk less.” We should challenge racial/imperialist legacies and work to empower Black, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, and other females and males that have been marginalized, minimalized, and excluded. As she noted over a century ago, we might note that we “[h]ave been holding conventions for years—we have been assembling and whining over our difficulties and afflictions, passing resolutions on resolutions to any extent. But it seems we have made little progress considering our resolves” (Specia 2018)

Perhaps we will rediscover Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who, over three decades ago, asserted that the most privileged members of our society target and obstruct the marginalized and intensify the racial burdens they bear while obscuring their claims. We might wonder why, even today, Blacks are least represented, accounting for less than 2 percent, among the many professions, including law, medicine, business, and within the academy. We would recognize that Blacks, particularly Black women, comprise just 5.6 percent of top leadership positions at law firms and are still excluded from partnerships and corporate law teams. We would recognize that the issue is more than race and gender but intersectional, interdimensional, and inter-institutional. We would understand that the perpetuation of racial structures requires our educational, legal, political, and other institutional structures to work collectively to form systems. Embedded into these systems are the intersectional processes of oppression along axes of race, gender, and sexuality. We might conclude that we do not need bias training but anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic policies. We might recognize that systemic racism requires systemic changes. Such changes start from the reality that centuries of legally sanctioned discrimination negatively decreed that Blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced (in)to slavery for his benefit” (*Dred Scott V. Sandford*). Decolonizing,

decentering, and delegitimizing educational institutions and policy might connect with diverse communities and purposefully work as partners to alleviate their problems. And rather than fostering a cradle-to-prison pipeline, we might establish cradle-to-opportunity pipelines.

A decolonized academic and policy structure might link poverty and inadequate educational funding that lead to an increased likelihood of being expelled from schools, an increased likelihood of being unprepared for the job market, and a high chance of being racially profiled by police. A decolonized legal system might decide that shouting Black Lives Matter is not enough, and we must actively be engaged in transforming the police and courts, public policy and criminal sanctioning, and work toward repairing the damage. A decolonized legal system might shift from retributive to restorative justice. It would start by understanding that Africa, China, Japan, India, and Indigenous People within the Americas had rich histories, cultures, and knowledge systems long before Europe discovered them. It might add these histories to our knowledge system. It would then explore the many important contributions these people have added to our own. We might discover that many major philosophers, artists, musicians, and scientists associated with technological, intellectual, religious, and civilizations predate European intervention. We need to enable restorative justice to restore confidence in the justice system.

Much like Father Desmond Tutu attempted in South Africa with European colonialism and apartheid there, we might look in the U.S. at the long sojourn starting with the theft of land, Indigenous genocide, enslavement, and reservations. It would look at papal decrees and racial theoretical and scientific pronouncements that made these systems not only possible but justifiable. We would walk the Trail of Tears, Jim Crow, the Black Codes, *Plessy*, lynching, segregation, subjugation, war on crime, and wars on bodies. We would look at the cradle-to-prison pipeline, immigration restrictions and reforms, racial profiling, and exclusion. We might restore human dignity, pride, and efficacy in the process. We might also discover, echoing Isabel Wilkerson, that racial caste in the U.S., much like its cousin in India, serves to deny opportunities while hiding under the veneer of colorblind policies. If we do this, we might rediscover critical pedagogies are central to creating a critical academy. Critical pedagogical practices that are anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti-sexist recognize that the only way to dismantle systemic forms of oppression is to fight negative discrimination with positive discrimination. And no, equality is not the answer, but equity is. Put differently? Anti-discriminatory processes aim to discriminate positively. This means they recognize that negative discrimination's chief purpose/result is to foster unjust, vastly unequal structures, results, and systems. The only way to resolve these is to use similar, positive discrimination to right the wrongs, restore the people, and produce equitable solutions. Having done this, we will reap the benefits of a decolonized academic system.

#### CRT AND THE ACADEMY: FIXING THE SYSTEM, NOT THE PEOPLE

Today, across America, we celebrate a hard-fought yet bittersweet victory as the people's demand for justice. But this is just a continuation of a struggle that started over 500 years ago. It

is a struggle to recognize the basic humanity and right to exist of Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. The effort to uplift the tired, to redeem the ridiculed, and to restore the oppressed. It is a struggle to acknowledge the right of people to love who they choose regardless of gender or sexuality, the effort to freely exist and not adapt to another's definition of what and who you should be, and the struggle to dream one's dreams unhampered by the stereotypical assumptions, or the limitations of another's pathologies, or the fragility of another's anxieties threatened by my and our very existence. If justice is to be realized, if freedom is to be experienced, then we must interrogate and decolonize all of our institutions, not just the government, police, and courts. Transformative social justice will not erase the past, or erase the crimes, but it just might restore the dignity, humanity, and realities experienced by the racialized and marginalized within our society.

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