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The Black Educology Mixtape is an open access mixtape that moves beyond academic articles to feature various art forms and voices that are typically muted. Our scope and sequence focuses on the past, present, and future of Black education, which has been historically and systemically caught in the underbelly of western education. The main tenets of Black Educology's educational vision are rooted in critical race theory, with a focus on counter-storytelling, Black critical theory, Afro-pessimism, and Black educational epistemology. Our work is grounded in creating mixtapes that are both revolutionary and emancipatory in the name of love, study, struggle, and refusal.



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Metaphor For a Post-White Horizon

Dwayne K. Wright and Tyler Derreth

Abstract

This project is a counternarrative, in the tradition of Richard Delgado's *The Rodrigo Chronicles*, using critical race theory's storytelling methodology. We present a discussion between a Black scholar and white scholar sharing their experiences as they explore the relationship between Blackness/whiteness and anti-Blackness/white supremacy. The crux of this counternarrative lies in the intersection between the hopelessness one Black scholar feels toward racial progress in America and the desperation of a white scholar as they process the possibilities for a post-white ontological future within the Western academy in the wake of the January 6th Insurrection. The counter-story integrates Afropessimistic thought with the creativity of Afrofuturism to comment on the uses and abuses of Black labor under the white gaze. The conclusion of the counter-story argues for the need of a post-white futurism that imagines a possible future without whiteness and a future that is also not subsistent upon the foundational abuse and overuse of Black labor.

In its most metaphorical form, whiteness is a myth that constructs white people as heroes and non-white people as villains. Phrases such as "white knight" and "black sheep" are examples of the mythical binary of white as right and Black as wrong.

— Sabrina Michelle Hambel¹

This track² seeks to use metaphor and dialogic narrative to investigate the meaning of whiteness³ in terms of its relationship to anti-Blackness so that we might learn how to imagine

¹ Hambel, S. (2005). Alternative futures of whiteness. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 10(2), 75–84.

² The *Journal of Black Educology* (BE) is a collective, peer-tuned, open-access, digital journal that is dedicated to the sounds of theory, philosophy, research, and praxis central to the genealogy of Black struggle and liberation with education. BE declares (publishes) "tracks" (articles); "re-sounding commentary" (reviews of media, books, curricula, reports); "notes from the studio" (notes from the field); community-based commentary and artwork from the global sounds of Black education liberation.

³ Following Cabrera, Franklin & Watson (2017) we embrace a conception of Whiteness as a normative structure in society that marginalizes already minoritized individuals and privileges White people. While white people receive material benefits from this normative Whiteness and minoritized individuals lose. Although white people benefit

beyond it. Indeed, this is a project about ideologies not about any group of people. Following Stewart and Nicolazzo (2018), we see whiteness as distinct from white identity⁴ and white supremacy. Whiteness, they note, is a way of knowing and a set of knowledges that drive white supremacy. In other words, whiteness can be defined as the social and cultural methods that mediate systemic manifestations of white supremacy. Whiteness maintains its social power because it creates “invisible” social norms against which all other races are judged (Cabrera & Hill-Zuganelli, 2021).

Whiteness, though, is fundamentally a myth, a story we tell, that often uses the power of metaphor to explain itself, who we are in relation to its power, and the roles we willingly or unwillingly take up as oppressors and oppressed. Often this myth, this collection of “ways of knowing,” is dependent upon “ignore-ance” and the silencing of further definitions of itself (Williams, 2020). Therefore, to reveal the full danger and damage of the contours of whiteness and white supremacy, we have chosen not to focus on whiteness as a self-sustaining term. Whiteness is an illusion and as a concept often eludes clear definition. Rather than an isolated focus on whiteness, a focus on anti-Blackness highlights and illuminates the centrality of anti-Black racism to patterns of domination too often narrowly referred to only as white supremacy (Espinoza & Harris, 1997).

Scholars have argued that education curricula fail to engage in critical conversations about race, racism, and whiteness (Muñiz et. al, 2022). Indeed, it has been noted that traditional texts on education typically tend to ignore questions of anti-Black racism (Mustaffa, 2017). By anti-Black racism, we mean the type of racism directed against Black peoples, as well as anyone who is perceived as Black, specifically because they are Black or seen as Black (Kumsa et. al, 2014; Reece, 2019). Anti-Blackness has been described as intentional theorization on the specificity of anti-Black racism and the effect it has on the day-to-day lived experiences of Black people (Dumas, 2016). Ultimately, anti-Black ontologies perpetuate the idea that being Black is “the very antithesis of a Human subject” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 9).

By studying the concept of anti-Blackness, one begins to understand the argument that any theory of racial equity must first confront the ubiquitous nature of anti-Black racism in our society. Anti-Blackness, as a social construct, reflects social suffering and resistance as the primary embodied lived experience of Black people in the afterlife of slavery (Hartman, 1997).

Consequently, anti-Blackness has emerged as the central proposition within intellectual projects such as Afropessimism⁵, BlackCrit (Dumas, 2016), and Black whiteness studies (Matias, 2022). Scholarship on the concept of anti-Blackness is therefore necessarily motivated by the question of Black suffering and seeks to bring attention to the psychic and material assault on Black people. These works aim to force discussion on topics of anti-Blackness into the zeitgeist of social justice (Dumas, 2016; Gillborn, 2018). Because Black ontologies are too often “hidden by white institutions’ singular insistence on denying legitimacy to Black lives” (Gilmore, 2021, p. 120), we interrogate white supremacy through a lens focused on addressing the effects of anti-Blackness, not simply decentering whiteness.

from the discourse of racism, understanding Whiteness as a discourse means that it is possible for minoritized individuals to engage in the very discourse that serves to marginalize them as well.

⁴ We have chosen not to capitalize the letter “w” in ‘white’ to signify the difference or “slippage” between Whiteness and white people.

⁵ Afropessimism theorizes that Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity because such a relationship continues to benefit those in power (Dancy et. al, 2018).

In this experimental⁶ research project, we attempt to map the dissonances and resonances of the voices of two scholars engaged in a dialogic narrative on the meaning of post-whiteness and the sacrifices that must be made to get to such an auspicious destination. Other scholars have done the work of deconstructing whiteness (powell, 2005; Matias et. al, 2014) and illustrating how it operates in people’s day-to-day lives (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). This project seeks to employ metaphor and narrative, not to hide whiteness in its own myths, but to reveal the truth of its violence and the air it sucks up in the room as distinct from actual anti-racist initiatives and efforts to mitigate anti-Black racism.

This work is the product of hours of conversations and writings between the authors, spread between February 2021 until the initial submission of this manuscript in January 2022. We began with a single question: “*What does it take for a person to be capable of moving toward a post-white horizon?*” By post-white horizon, we mean to imagine a world, which lies perpetually beyond what we can now see, that is free from whiteness and the perpetuation of anti-Blackness. There is value in journeying toward a post-white horizon. While we might not “know” what is in store for us, the journey there can be as vital as the hoped-for destination.

The answer to our initial question is simple and well-documented yet impossible: live without the violence of white supremacy (Cebulko, 2021). No one in the United States has ever done this (Hannah-Jones, 2019). It is impossible to even imagine what this looks like—and yet this is our task.

We lack the ontological frames and epistemological tools to move beyond whiteness, so we cannot answer the question. But we can consider: *What do we need in order to move toward the answer?* To explore this question, we engage in a counter-story that examines the promises and pitfalls of cross-race discussions that move away from anti-Blackness and toward anti-racist action. We write this narrative as a metaphor for how Black educators do and can directly challenge whiteness. It is a method of framing how we all can orient toward the post-white horizon.

In our three-part counter-story, we reveal and interrogate the facade and danger of the “good white liberal” (King, Jr., 1992). The narrative also exemplifies the use and abuse of Black labor to enact such an interrogation (Love et al., 2021). The substance of the narrative dialogue covers whiteness as violence and definitionally opposed to racial justice, the limits and possibilities of Black critique, and the centrality of Black pain in the maintenance of whiteness and anti-Blackness as expressed in “good white liberal” personas and interactions. Because of this, we encourage readers to proceed with both a critical and self-caring eye. Even as we identify and explore how Black labor is central in such cross-race conversations, we also recognize that reading such a narrative is its own kind of labor and potential pain, and it should be treated as such.

Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve.

—Karl Popper

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks: A Nexus of Theories

⁶ By calling this project “experimental”, we do not claim that our findings show cause and effect. Rather the use of experimental in this instance is to indicate that what we are trying to accomplish with this project has typically not been attempted under the banner of what might be considered “traditional” scholarship.

With the metaphor of the post-white horizon, we mean to express explicitly that a society without whiteness is “unseeable” and without arrival. Implicitly, what we mean to say is that we are currently *incapable* of making such a post-white society—and such a life. This is because we are all committed to whiteness and/or impacted by the white gaze. Even when we work to abandon whiteness, we are often responding to it—not living without it. Further, as we attempt to move toward the post-white horizon, it becomes clear that this is a yet untraveled path; it must continually be charted.

In this track, we are attempting to work in the space between present analyses of race in the U.S. and the hoped-for future destruction of whiteness. We acknowledge our incapacity to imagine and create a post-white world, but we wonder what kind of development we need to imagine and create such a world. Put another way, this inquiry seeks to find out what tools would facilitate that development.

Because we see this as a developmental question, in relation to race and racism, we use sociocultural theory as the underlying rhythmic beat for this track (Vygotsky, 1987). Sociocultural theory has been used as a method of analysis to center race and cultural differences within the broader context of social justice (e.g., Cormier & Pandey, 2021), and in this project it serves to organize how to use, make, and extend critical theories of race for the purpose of one’s continued development to construct a post-white world.

We introduce a “nexus of critical theories on race” as our available tools that might facilitate our development and provide future scholars with the resonance necessary to place all the theoretical possibilities in tune with each other. Like other traditional forms of Black ontological expression (i.e., jazz, hip-hop, the blues) we envision this nexus as a response to the call for epistemological improvisation (Gilmore, 2021). Collaborative improvisation, expressed as the blending of critical theories like the harmony of instruments, might make a track that can answer questions that need to be answered but that our theories, our instruments, were not made to answer on their own (Newman & Holzman, 2013).

The counter-story that follows explores a three-part conversation that reveals the developmental incapacity of our society to carry out justice and bring about the destruction of whiteness because of seen and unseen commitments to anti-Blackness (Žižek, 2006). We present a nexus of critical theories on race to unmask and critique these commitments, show both the power and limitation of these theories, and suggest a way forward that can only be understood when these theories are placed in conversation with each other. To accomplish this, we discuss an array of revisionist, deconstructivist (Leonardo, 2013), realist, and imaginative theories. These include critical race theory (Bell, 1992b), Afropessimism (Wilderson, 2010), critical whiteness studies (Jupp, 2016), philosophical race readings such as concepts of non-performativity (Ahmed, 2006; Mills, 1997; Yancy, 2015), Afrofuturism (Womack, 2013), and racial melancholy (Cheng, 2001).

In our narrative, we read this collection of theories as expressions of the dialectical interface of individuals and social systems (Ratner, 2015). That is, we see these various theories on racial analysis to be artifacts, sociocultural–materialist expressions of how we understand the history, enactment, and results of white supremacy and anti-Blackness. While these theories are often structurally oriented, they are representations of the reaches of our collective developments—what we are capable of interpreting and knowing (Salis et. al, 2019). Therefore, we intertwine a nexus of theories into our narrative as a way of creating resonance between what is known and knowable. The nexus also serves as a complex social mediation so that we might

chart what we do not yet know and how we might learn to imagine and develop in the future (Vygotsky, 1987).

The relationship between anti-Blackness and whiteness influences many progressive race scholars to limit their “anti-racism” to non-performatives, which are speech acts in which articulation alone stands in for action (Ahmed, 2006). A theory of non-performative acts explores how institutions “commit” to anti-racism through words and statements without implementing actual anti-racist actions (Ahmed, 2007). Non-performativity explains why, despite the intentions and awareness that racism exists and should be obstructed, institutions never encounter or bring about the social conditions necessary for anti-racist change (Prescha, 2021).

This lack of action is not a failure of speech; rather, it is a revelation of its own meaning. Declarations of a desire for an anti-racist world are typically never meant to be realized, they are only meant as words—never actions (Kimura, 2014; Prescha, 2021). Conversely, the counter-story “speech acts” in this article, expressed in a dialogic narrative, are aimed directly at mediating further social and psychological development toward the dismantling of whiteness and anti-Blackness, which are systemic barriers to the realization of lived humanity.

This is our theoretical project—to take what capacity and artifacts we have and use them to collectively build the tools necessary for us to journey toward the metaphorical post-white horizon (Stetsenko, 2013). These “tools-and-results” work dialectically as contextually made/making process products that might extend our development toward what is not yet known (Newman & Holzman, 2013). Following these sociocultural principles of learning and development and using a nexus of critical theories on race as mediating artifacts for our development, we design a counter-story narrative as a tool-and-result toward an episteme of the post-white horizon.

Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darkneses of other people.

—Carl Jung

Research is a two-way process, search for
what you have gained and what you have to lose;
what you have lost and what you have to gain.

—P.S. Jagadeesh Kumar

Methodology

Critical race theory (CRT) is a legal, epistemological, and conceptual framework that was developed by BIPOC legal scholars who rejected law as color evasive (Ward, 2022). Following Cabrera (2018), we adopt the research position that CRT was not intended to be solely a theoretical framework, but rather a theorizing counter-space to challenge and transform racial oppression. CRT scholars have asserted that race is a significant factor affecting educational inequity in the United States (Tuitt, 2012). In fact, legal scholar Victor Romero (2002) pointed out that to be a critical race theorist is to reject the idea that racism is perpetuated today by extremist individuals and theorize instead that societal systems are to blame for the continuation of racism. Whiteness is one such societal system (Guess, 2006). Thus, this project adopts a CRT methodology to allow for the production of research that challenges and transforms the racial oppression brought about by the system of whiteness. Such critical research is central to the genealogy of Black struggle and liberation within education (Nicolazzo, 2021).

CRT entered the field of education as a decidedly Black theorization of race (Dumas & Ross, 2016) and is most appropriate to lift up the voices and narratives of Black educators. CRT in education advances the idea that counternarratives are important and central to understanding the nature of reality (Milner & Howard, 2013). Counter-storytelling is defined as a method that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority (Ellison & Solomon, 2019). It is a method of telling the stories of people whose experiences are erased from or dehumanized by dominant stories and modes of storytelling (Dutta et. al, 2021). The ideology of racism, and by analogy the ideologies of white supremacy, the white gaze, and anti-Blackness, creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a “master narrative” in storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

As a rhetorical method, the critical race counter-story is a theoretically grounded research approach. With the express purpose of challenging white privilege, the critical race counter-story draws on interdisciplinary methodologies to reject notions of “neutral” or “objective” research and exposes research that distorts or silences epistemologies of minoritized⁷ people (Martinez, 2018).

Thus, the choice of counter-story as the method for this experimental project is an intentional one. A counter-story functions as a method for marginalized people to intervene in research methods that would form majoritarian stories based on ignorance and assumptions about minoritized peoples (Martinez, 2018). As an interdisciplinary method, CRT counter-story recognizes that experiential and embodied knowledge is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices (Martinez, 2014). These stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings that form the background for the legal and political discourses that take place (Delgado, 1989).

When producing knowledge utilizing a CRT counter-story methodology, it is important that researchers acknowledge that CRT emerged from law as a response to critical legal studies and civil rights scholarship (Crenshaw, 2001; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2013). As such it should be noted that, at the genesis of CRT, there was no need to distinguish the CRT counter-story from the more general method of narrative inquiry, which emerged at around the same time (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). However, as CRT began to make its way into educational research (López, 2001), it has become necessary to discern the counter-story as a unified interdisciplinary narrative methodology that can result in transformative action for educational equity (Miller et. al, 2020).

Some scholars have categorized the counter-story as a type of narrative research (Berry & Cook, 2018). Others have identified genres of CRT counter-stories, such as personal stories, other people’s stories or narratives, and composite stories (Hunn et. al, 2006). For the purposes of this project, the kind of counter-story that we are engaging in has been described as narrative dialogue, similar to Richard Delgado’s (1995) *The Rodrigo Chronicles* yet distinct from the allegorical chronicles written by Derrick Bell (Martinez, 2018).

In the verses that follow, the CRT methodology of counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) is juxtaposed against non-performative anti-racism to examine the possibilities of a discussion on white supremacy and, more saliently, on anti-Blackness. A project examining anti-Blackness adopts the claim that there are segments of American society that exist

⁷ In this project, we use the verb “minoritized” as opposed to the noun “minority” because the verb better describes the process by which certain racial-ethnic groups are assigned minority status through the actions and non-actions of more dominating groups.

antithetical to manifestations of Black social life, yet paradoxically seem to feed off the commodification and consumption of Blackness for political, erotic, economic, ontological, and epistemological value (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019). Anti-Blackness is reproduced through the extraction of labor from the Black body as property and the mechanisms that societal institutions use to police, control, imprison, and kill Black people (Dancy et. al, 2018).

Using the 2021 United States Capitol attack that occurred on January 6th, this project presents a counternarrative consisting of an intellectual exchange between a white man and Black man within the academy. The characters are not avatars of the authors. Both are composite characters and neither is meant to represent any actual scholar or person. Any resemblance between the characters and any real person is purely coincidental.

In utilizing this method of analysis, we attempt to show how narrative performs an epistemological function as well as a rhetorical one. We see then that the counter-story as a kind of narrative. Narrative provides knowledge about the nature of discrimination from the perspective of those who experience it (Carbado & Gulati, 2002). Narrative also allows us to combat the forms of epistemic violence (Garrett-Walker, 2021) and injustice that some common stories may inflict on people of color, particularly Black people (Dutta et. al, 2021). It should go without question that the physical violence inflicted on Black people living in the afterlife of slavery is immense (Hartman, 1997). This project seeks to highlight that violence inflicted on a person in one's capacity as a consumer and producer of knowledge "violates an essential value and capacity of what it means to be human" (Dutta et. al, 2021, p. 2; Dotson, 2014; Dortch & Patel, 2017).

To counter this ontological imposition, which can be termed an ontology of white supremacy for the purposes of establishing permanent anti-Black epistemologies, we place two characters in narrative dialogue to both show the uses (and abuses) of Black labor and the possibilities for anti-racist education if more white people were committed to actions that remove, rather than entrench, the white gaze. The counter-story is a method in the destruction of white myths and the building of possible narratives beyond the white gaze.

Metaphors in Narrative Inquiry

While we intend for this counter-story to stand on its own, the experimental method allows for the use of meta-metaphor to tell several counternarratives within one (McLeish, 2020; Hendry, 2007). Sticking with our sociocultural conceptual framework, we adopt the view that metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. We use metaphor as a means of ontological mapping across the conceptual domains of our nexus of critical theories on race (Lakoff, 1993). It is a method of knowing.

Scholars have attested to the ability of metaphor to allow for the investigation of complex phenomena within the limited space provided to social science researchers (Schmitt, 2005). One such area in which metaphor has been particularly useful has been in inquiries around and on the topic of whiteness (Leonardo, 2016). Zeus Leonardo (2016) states that "the literary turn in whiteness studies highlights the role not just of language per se, but of rhetoric in setting the parameters or conditions of whiteness' own intelligibility" (p. 5).

When confronted with the ability of metaphor to deconstruct whiteness, we begin to further conceptualize whiteness as "an ideological and epistemological perspective that consolidates and promotes hegemony and normalization" (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018, p. 134-135). As critical researchers we must acknowledge and give voice to the fact that a major

part of metaphor is the “ability to make meaning stick” beyond our typical forms of knowledge production and transmission. Further, because whiteness uses language to make and distort its meanings, the use of metaphor becomes necessary to unveil and reveal its pervasiveness (Leonardo, 2016).

As human beings, we are all not conducting just one narrative but many narratives all at the same time.

—David Hare

The purpose of narrative is to present us with complexity and ambiguity.

—Scott Turow

Narrative⁸

PART I

Dr. James Garrison, a recent hire in the College of Education at Neoliberal University, comes by the office of his assigned faculty mentor Dr. Frederick Malcolm Powell a week after the January 6th Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol for a previously scheduled meeting.

Dr. Garrison is a cisgender white male and the college’s most recent tenure track hire. He is a practitioner of critical whiteness studies (CWS) and considers himself a race scholar. This was one of the reasons he was assigned to Dr. Powell as a mentee.

Dr. Powell is a cisgender Black male who was recently awarded tenure at Neoliberal University. As the tenure process was grueling, he had asked for a one-year exemption from having to guide a mentee. However, as no one else in the college was a race scholar, the exemption was denied. In addition, Dr. Powell had raised concerns about Dr. Garrison’s hire as he thought him too “inexperienced” for a tenure track line. Neither has corresponded since the events on January 6th, 2021.

When Dr. Garrison enters the office, Dr. Powell moves to turn off his television. On it was CNN News coverage of the aftermath of January 6th. The conversation proceeds as follows once Dr. Garrison enters Dr. Powell’s office and sits down. Dr. Frederick Malcolm Powell begins, his voice breaking through the static noise:

Dr. Frederick Malcolm Powell (**FP**): *So, Dr. Garrison, how are you? Any reaction to the craziness we saw on the 6th?*

Dr. James Garrison (**JG**): *Well, I must tell you Dr. Powell, my initial reaction bothered me. I’m stunned that this could happen. I feel a bit helpless and angry, and I’m not sure how to move on. If it were up to me, I’d wave a magic wand tomorrow and no longer be white. Yes... yes, I think that is my “best” answer... I think that is the right answer... I don’t want to be white.*

FP: *Helpless? That’s an interesting emotion...*

⁸ Within the confines of this counterstory, we shift our method of citation to footnotes as a way of honoring the tradition of critical race theorists like Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado. Further, we find that footnotes, rather than in-text citations, maintain a *narrative cohesion* that is important to the storytelling aspects of our argument.

JG: *I feel something eating me from the inside out. I've always thought that the greatest thing about our American democracy is that we are always moving forward.⁹ That, no matter what, progress will keep going, things will keep getting better, and nothing that is wrong with America can't be cured by what is "right with America." And, honestly, that people can change. That we could and would change from hatred to love. "Yes, we can" and all that. Today, I don't know if I believe that anymore. I'm ashamed of my country. And ashamed, frankly, of my whiteness. I don't know if we'll ever change. I'm ready to abandon it. I don't want to be white. I want out.*

FP: *Well James, that's a very... interesting response. I'm not sure what you mean by that. You no longer wish to "be" white?*

JG: *Yes. I'm reminded of the concept of "race traitors."¹⁰ We should abandon whiteness because it is irredeemable. I don't want to be white.*

FP: *Well. What would you be? Black?¹¹*

JG: *Well...*

FP: *I didn't think so...*

JG: *You don't think I shouldn't want to be white?*

FP: *I am not sure what I think is very important here.¹² But I'm also not sure that "being white" is your choice or under your control.¹³*

JG: *Well then what am I supposed to do, Fred?*

FP: *I do not know, James. But can't you see the arrogance of your whiteness? It has allowed you to come into my office and put the burden of telling you, a white cisgender straight college professor, an answer to a question you are responsible for on me. Saying you don't want to be white is still denying your whiteness. You're not rejecting it; you are just trying to hide it.*

Upon hearing this James is stunned. He immediately gets up, turns around, and begins to head to the door.

⁹ Contra Seamster, L., & Ray, V. (2018). Against teleology in the study of race: Toward the abolition of the progress paradigm. *Sociological Theory*, 36(4), 315–342.

¹⁰ Ignatiev, N., & Garvey, J. (2014). *Race traitor*. Routledge.

¹¹ Moon, D., & Flores, L. A. (2000). Antiracism and the abolition of whiteness: Rhetorical strategies of domination among "race traitors". *Communication Studies*, 51(2), 97–115.

¹² Oluo, I. (2018). White people: I want you to understand yourselves better. Medium. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from

<https://medium.com/the-establishment/white-people-i-dont-want-you-to-understand-me-better-i-want-you-to-understand-yourselves-a6fbdd42ddf>

¹³ Rockquemore, K. A., & Arend, P. (2002). Opting for white: Choice, fluidity and racial identity construction in post-civil-rights America. *Race and Society*, 5(1), 49–64; Song, M., & Hashem, F. (2010). What does "white" mean? Interpreting the choice of "race" by mixed race young people in Britain. *Sociological Perspectives*, 53(2), 287–292.

JG: *I didn't mean to make you so angry, Fred.*

FP: *James, you came to me today and decided to talk about your whiteness and my reaction as a Black man makes you walk away and label me "angry"? If you leave now, that might be the whitest thing you could do. Why don't you stay and do the hard work that's necessary?*

James sits back down.

JG: *What do you mean?*

FP: *What reaction did you expect me to have today? You, a white man, no longer want to be white in a nation dominated by anti-Blackness. Cute. Now what?*

JG: *I thought I was doing the right thing. I just want to fight against this white supremacy we see on display.*

FP: *Are you familiar with the concept of non-performativity?*

JG: *Vaguely. I have heard it used to describe the whitewashed statements universities send after racial incidents.¹⁴ But what does that have to do with me?*

FP: *Using Austin's conception of performative utterances,¹⁵ Sarah Ahmed¹⁶ contends that when well-intentioned white people admit to their privilege or their racism, they are not intending to make declarative claims; rather, they believe that their utterance does something at the moment of speaking.¹⁷ To put it another way, non-performativity shows us that when white people say things like, "I no longer want to be white" as an acknowledgment of the violence that whiteness has and is perpetrating on all of us, then they are trying to signal distance between themselves and that violence. The declaration, "I no longer want to be white" stands in for any real action toward defeating, rather than reforming, whiteness and mitigating anti-Blackness. Nothing has changed by the white person admitting they no longer want to be white, except that the white person gets to feel better. This seems like the real goal of most liberal attempts to mitigate white supremacy—making white people feel better about themselves.*

JG: *Fred, do you think I'm the problem¹⁸ here?*

FP: *So, when you say, "I don't want to be white anymore," all I see is you using another version of whiteness to further anti-Blackness. You don't seem to understand how that reaction just adds*

¹⁴ Kimura, M. (2014). Non-performativity of university and subjectification of students: The question of equality and diversity in UK universities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(4), 52–540.

¹⁵ Hall, K. (1999). Performativity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 9(1/2), 184–187.

¹⁶ Sarah Ahmed is a philosopher and feminist writer who produces scholarship work at the intersection of feminist, queer and race studies. Her research is primarily concerned with how bodies and worlds take shape; and how power is secured and challenged in everyday life worlds as well as institutional cultures.

¹⁷ Ahmed, S. (2004). Declarations of whiteness: The non-performativity of anti-racism. *borderlands*, 3(2).

¹⁸ Vaught, S. E., & Castagno, A. E. (2008). "I don't think I'm a racist": Critical Race Theory, teacher attitudes, and structural racism. *Race Ethnicity and education*, 11(2), 95–113.

a new version to all the other ways we can be racist. This is why I believe that racism is permanent.¹⁹ Even when people think they are rejecting it, they tend to end up reinforcing it.

JG: *Ok. I think I see the connection now, Fred. But I do still think it's possible to actually, not just in words, reject whiteness. After all, I am the one that just walked into your office and said I do not want to be white. I know I'm not perfect, but why level accusations at me when we have white guys committing the acts of insurrection? We need more collaborations to stop these overt racists. There are deep racial problems everywhere, but shouldn't we gather together to stop the most dangerous versions?*²⁰

FP: *Well as an Afropessimist²¹ I think the best answer I can give you is that every act of whiteness and white violence is overt to me. Some are less dramatic, but none are hidden, except by your own white ignorance.*

JG: *What do you mean? Are you saying my non-performativity is just as bad as a violent insurrection?*

FP: *They are all part of the same problem, James. America has been a society dominated by anti-Blackness since before you were born, and it still will be long after you've left this earth. The people attacking the capitol on January 6th actively reinforced that truth. But your statement today, and continued inaction, also ensure the structures of anti-Blackness remain intact.²² It's inaction like this that makes another insurrection possible. Without actions to tear down these structures, racism is just perpetuated; it's permanent.²³*

JG: *Well, that is certainly a "hot take." So, do you believe that I am a racist and there is nothing I can do about it?*

FP: *You keep coming back to YOU in this conversation, James. Do you think that if I "solved" YOU here, we would solve racism?*

JG: *No, of course not. I am a CWS²⁴ scholar, so of course I acknowledge systemic racism. But I also believe that there is a way out of such racism. We could transform our world and what it means to be white. It seems like you believe the opposite.*

¹⁹ Bell, D. (1993). The racism is permanent thesis: Courageous revelation or unconscious denial of racial genocide. *Capital University Law Review.*, 22, 571.

²⁰ Boyce, B. S. (2021). Racist compared to what? the myth of white wokeness. *Whiteness and Education*, 6(2), 115–129.

²¹ Sexton, J. (2016). The social life of social death: On Afro-pessimism and Black optimism. In *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations* (pp. 61–75). Routledge.

²² Dantzler, P. A. (2021). The urban process under racial capitalism: Race, anti-Blackness, and capital accumulation. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City*, 2(2), 113–134.

²³ Ramirez, S. A., & Williams, N. G. (2018). On the permanence of racial injustice and the possibility of deracialization. *Case Western Reserve Law Review*, 69, 299.

²⁴ For a good primer on what CWS is See Matias, C. E., & Mackey, J. (2016). Breakin' down whiteness in antiracist teaching: Introducing critical whiteness pedagogy. *The Urban Review*, 48(1), 32–50.

FP: *What you need to understand first is that I am a Black man. I live as a Black man. I conduct research as a Black man. And as a Black man, I have experienced the same things you have in America from a very different context and point of view: A point of view that is always shaped and informed by the truth of our history. We are a country built on and by chattel slavery that has never escaped the afterlife of it.²⁵ So when you say there's "a way out," I don't know how you could believe that, given all the evidence of what we have lived through as an anti-Black country. When we haven't even acknowledged the need to repair the damage of the of Atlantic Slave Trade and chattel slavery exploiting the Black body for free labor, and white pleasure, but the cost was Black suffering.²⁶ Where you seem to see progress, I only see reification.²⁷*

JG: *I'll be honest with you, Fred: I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. I thought I came here ready to accept responsibility for our history—to break the narrative. And you're telling me that I was simply declaring that readiness. But even as I try to prepare myself for what it would mean to actually take up that responsibility, your last statement made me realize that it's much heavier than I want to admit. I see that it's naive to believe I could just "fix" this, or even fix my role in this. I can't work my way out of historical, structural white supremacist violence. What are we supposed to do with that?*

FP: *Welcome to my world, Dr. Garrison. The despair that you are feeling right now is a shadow of what was felt by me and my people long before January 6th. It was felt in 1619 when the first Africans were kidnapped, raped, and brutalized for white profit and pleasure.²⁸ It was felt when our nation, the nation we built, failed to live up to its promise of "40 acres and a mule."²⁹ It was felt the night President Obama was inaugurated and so many of my colleagues acted like racism was "over."³⁰ And I felt it again today, when a white man full of privilege walked into my office and expected me to give him answers and absolution because he felt a moment of shame in his whiteness.*

JG: *I'll admit that I'm only—just now—beginning to see the violence I've committed against you today. And how that hurt is not new for you, and how that violence is not new for me. I am the other side of these truths. I'm complicit in ensuring the unbroken narrative of our country's white supremacy.*

FP: *And that point of view leads me to question if there is a "solution" to whiteness that can come from whiteness? You mentioned CWS; what has that intervention done to combat anti-Blackness, as opposed to... sanitizing whiteness?*

JG: *I've noticed any time I use white supremacy you substitute anti-Blackness. I'm starting to understand that's intentional on your part.*

²⁵ Sexton, J. (2010). People-of-color-blindness: Notes on the afterlife of slavery. *Social Text*, 28(2), 31–56.

²⁶ Davis, A. (2002). 'Don't Let Nobody Bother Yo' Principle': The Sexual Economy of American Slavery. *Sister circle: Black women and work*, 103, 108.

²⁷ Ray, V. E., Randolph, A., Underhill, M., & Luke, D. (2017). Critical race theory, Afro-pessimism, and racial progress narratives. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 3(2), 147–158.

²⁸ Bennett, L. (2018). *Before the Mayflower: A history of the Negro in America, 1619–1962*. Colchis Books.

²⁹ Darity Jr, W. (2008). Forty Acres and a Mule in the 21st Century. *Social Science Quarterly*, 89(3), 656–664.

³⁰ Delgado, R. (2015). Why Obama: An interest convergence explanation of the nation's first Black president. *Law & Inequality*, 33, 345.

FP: *Just like many forms of so-called anti-whiteness are just white supremacy up in drag as social justice, many forms of “working toward anti-racism” fail to fully conceptualize and comprehend anti-Blackness.³¹ I would argue that this failure is explicit, if not intentional, as many who claim that they want to destroy whiteness only seek to transform it into a more palatable form of anti-Black oppression.³²*

JG: *Can I ask how you continue to go on despite the realization that nothing will ever change? I’m feeling desperate. I have been carrying the violence of whiteness, and I don’t know how to put it down.*

FP: *James, that desperate feeling you have is all too familiar to me and many nonwhite people in the United States. In fact, I think we have lived with and by our desperation so much that it has now devolved into utter despair. This is the “social death”³³ that many Afropessimists reference in our work. However, hopelessness doesn’t necessarily mean nihilism.³⁴ Speaking truth to power about our current situation is its own form of freedom.*

JG: *You’re describing a form of freedom that only seems available to those that have been enslaved. Are you insinuating that for white people to be free, we must first place ourselves in cages?*

FP: *Don’t you see? You’re already in a cage of your own making.³⁵ You are bound up because we are ALL still bound. Whiteness necessitates a type of “spiritual death” for all who draw on it, which then facilitates and perpetuates Black social death. The violence that is inflicted on others by people committed to whiteness is a double-edged sword that cuts down those they oppress, even as it maims their own heart—how else could someone callously reject another person’s humanity?³⁶ Even if it is hopeless for us to arrive at spiritual and social resurrections from these dual deaths—it is never wasted time to live for humanity.³⁷ But first you have to know and be honest with yourself about where we are. Whiteness has us bound in shared cages of your making. Once you see that, then it should be clear: “We have nothing to lose but our chains.” Hopeless or not, it’s the necessary path.*

JG: *Well Fred, perhaps I’ve believed that my “cage” was never really locked—that I could choose to abandon whiteness. I realize that this is just an attempt to forget, to unsee, the bars*

³¹ Dancy, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Earl Davis, J. (2018). Historically white universities and plantation politics: Anti-Blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 176-195.

³² Hernández Adkins, S. D., & Mock Muñoz de Luna, L. I. (2021). In the wake of anti-Blackness and Being: A provocation for do-gooders inscribed in whiteness. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 51(1), 161–180.

³³ Patterson, O. (2018). *Slavery and social death: A comparative study, with a new preface*. Harvard University Press.

³⁴ Ureña, E. P. (2021). Between Hopelessness and Despair: Afropessimism and Black Nihilism in Ta-Nehisi Coates's Works. *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, 25.

³⁵ Sobre-Denton, M. S. (2012). Stories from the cage: Autoethnographic sensemaking of workplace bullying, gender discrimination, and white privilege. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 41(2), 220–250.

³⁶ Matias, C. E., & Allen, R. L. (2013). Loving whiteness to death: Sadomasochism, emotionality, and the possibility of humanizing love. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 4(2).

³⁷ hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope* (Vol. 36). Psychology Press.

that close me in. I do want to “lose these chains.” I know I need to see that the cage of whiteness closes me in; it closes in on all of us.

FP: *That is a good start...*

JG: *...But I have to say, now, I want to be careful not to extend my white arrogance here by making you responsible for curing my white ignorance. So, if I can ask: Are you interested in going on this journey with me?*

FP: *James, I have no interest in being your “supernegro.”³⁸ I’ve also never really seen an attempt to dismantle whiteness result in anything but other versions of anti-Blackness. However, I must admit that I am intrigued by the possibility of dismantling the cage of whiteness, even if I believe it to be impossible. I don’t have the expectation that I should find that out with you, but I’m interested in the questions it raises.*

JG: *I’m glad to hear you say that. But before we go further down this road, I feel like I need to do some more work on this on my own; I need to understand more of these structural elements and how I am implicated in them. I am starting to see how you described that relationship today, and I think I understand my role in our historical and present violence. Whether I’m active or passive, I still let the structures of whiteness stand. My question now is how can I work to destroy these structures and not just rely on my words to make things “right”? This means that I first need to look directly at how whiteness is a system of violence³⁹, how these structures work, and how it is a tool of broader anti-Blackness in America.*

FP: *Yes. Go do the work James. And when you are ready to continue the conversation, I will be here. But don’t be surprised if the work itself is not enough or not what you expect. After all, in the move toward an unknown horizon, work is a necessary element, but often not sufficient by itself.*

The two men depart on good terms and set an undetermined date to meet in the future to resume the conversation.

PART II

James and Fred plan to meet up a month after their initial conversation for another meeting on February 15th, 2021. The university is closed for the President’s Day holiday weekend. The conversation was intended to be a direct follow up to their previous discussion, focusing this time on a CWS manuscript James is drafting. However, upon entering James’s office, Fred notices his television, while on mute, is the announcement by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the commission to investigate January 6th.⁴⁰

³⁸ Baldrige, B. J. (2017). “It’s like this Myth of the Supernegro”: resisting narratives of damage and struggle in the neoliberal educational policy context. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(6), 781-795.

³⁹ Phipps, A. (2019). “Every Woman Knows a Weinstein”: Political Whiteness and White Woundedness in# MeToo and Public Feminisms around Sexual Violence. *Feminist Formations*, 31(2), 1–25.

⁴⁰ Sprunt, B. (2021). Nancy Pelosi announces plans for 9/11-Style Commission to study Capitol Attack. NPR. Retrieved February 26, 2022, from

<https://www.npr.org/sections/trump-impeachment-trial-live-updates/2021/02/15/968144630/nancy-pelosi-announces-plans-for-9-11-style-commission-to-study-capitol-attack>

The conversation follows from there:

FP: *Hello Dr. Garrison. What an auspicious day to continue this conversation, wouldn't you say?*

JG: *Indeed, it is. A month ago, I may have been more hopeful. But now, even with this news, I'm skeptical. We've seen these commissions come to nothing time and again. Just two days ago we saw the 45th President swiftly acquitted of inciting the insurrection. If anything, this commission is simply further data for my critical whiteness analysis we've come to talk about today.*

FP: *Interesting that you would be so skeptical of the January 6th commission yet so accepting of this field known as critical whiteness studies. Do you see no contradiction in those stances?*

JG: *I think I see your point Fred; perhaps CWS's earliest iterations might have found value in the commission. The first wave of CWS⁴¹ was aiming at an analysis of how we can understand and transform our whiteness on an individual level. In many ways, it was too simplistic and too hopeful. It was a project that some saw as achievable if only we found the right model.*

FP: *Umm... and you see the current wave of CWS as different in what way?*

JG: *This second wave of CWS gives "permission to be confused."⁴² It is a more complicated view of how whiteness functions and asks whether we can transform from it.⁴³ First, it better takes the structural elements of whiteness and how it perpetuates white supremacy into account. Then, it reads our individual engagement with whiteness through that lens, being critical of our definitions of self and how we might transform as individuals away from whiteness. Importantly, it critiques the essentializing of earlier works, acknowledging the fluid nature of how whiteness re-creates itself.*

FP: *It seems you've concluded that whiteness is "inescapable" for white people, no?*

JG: *In many ways, I think that's true. Our first conversation really made me confront this reality. I have abandoned the common idea of being a "good white person."⁴⁴ It is a false and unhelpful frame for trying to accomplish the work of dismantling white supremacy.*

FP: *Sounds good, James. But, if I may, it seems the "we" and "our" you are referring to are still mostly just white people. And the object of CWS is still this nebulous concept of "white*

⁴¹ Foste, Z., & Irwin, L. (2020). Applying Critical Whiteness Studies in college student development theory and research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 61(4), 439–455.

⁴² Tanner, S. J. (2017). Permission to be confused: Toward a second wave of critical Whiteness pedagogy. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 14(2), 164–179.

⁴³ Black, A. D. (2021). Starting with the Teacher in the Mirror: Critical Reflections on Whiteness from Past Classroom Experiences. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 94(3), 116–127.

⁴⁴ Hayes, C., & Juárez, B. G. (2009). You showed your Whiteness: you don't get a 'good' White people's medal. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(6), 729–744.

supremacy,” with no mention of anti-Blackness. Maybe we can start there. In your own words, can you tell me what exactly CWS is and what it intends to accomplish?

JG: It’s true that much of this work is focused on the actions and identities of white people. I think that is perhaps not the critique you might think, though. It’s important that white people take responsibility—and take action—for who they choose to be and what they choose to do. The world I have known and the identity I have made is rooted in whiteness. My definition of CWS evolves from earlier definitions, taking on the current approach of second wave theorists.⁴⁵ CWS is a complex analysis of the structural function of whiteness and how individuals develop because of those structures⁴⁶, and how they develop and act to maintain those structures. Further, CWS attempts to decenter whiteness as a way of transforming ourselves and our structures. I’m interested in your thoughts on this definition, but I also have to ask—how do you define anti-Blackness as different from white supremacy?

FP: Thank you for that. That was very well thought out. That definition sounds like a fancy way of white people saying that the problem and the solution to whiteness is, and will always be, white people.⁴⁷ Think about what you just outlined. Do I fit into that at all?⁴⁸ Now to your latter point, I would argue that no “proper” definition of whiteness can neglect the inclusion of the fact that it serves to create, perpetuate, and keep in place anti-Black racism. By anti-Blackness, I mean that one’s very existence as Black is constructed as a problem—for white people, for the public “good,” for the nation–state, and even as a problem for the celebration of racial difference.⁴⁹ By anti-Blackness, I mean to say that even the critiques of white supremacy seem to take place under, within, and by the authority of the “white gaze.”⁵⁰ You see this even in the current iteration of what you call CWS. Under the white gaze, CWS serves to reproduce anti-Blackness because it appears to be white people simply being introspective about their own whiteness with no real aim or need to mitigate the anti-Blackness in our society and the academy.⁵¹

JG: Ah, I see your point, I think. You make a good critique of fundamental views within CWS. But I should point out that this is already an ongoing struggle. Zeus Leonardo described two pathways of CWS.⁵² Its founding scholars incisively identified the specific ways that whiteness harms oppressed peoples. Recently, scholars have called for a return to these beginnings by

⁴⁵ Jupp, J. C., & Badenhorst, P. (2020). Second-Wave Critical White Studies. In *Encyclopedia of Critical Whiteness Studies in Education* (pp. 596–608). Brill Sense.

⁴⁶ Cabrera, N. L., Watson, J. S., & Franklin, J. D. (2016). Racial arrested development: A critical whiteness analysis of the campus ecology. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(2), 119–134.

⁴⁷ Matias, C. E., & Boucher, C. (2021). From critical whiteness studies to a critical study of whiteness: restoring criticality in critical whiteness studies. *Whiteness and Education*, 1–18.

⁴⁸ Aveling, N. (2004). Critical whiteness studies and the challenges of learning to be a “White Ally”. *Borderlands: E-journal*, 3(2).

⁴⁹ Dumas, M. J. (2016). Against the dark: Antiblackness in education policy and discourse. *Theory Into Practice*, 55(1), 11–19.

⁵⁰ Ignatiev, N. (1997). The point is not to interpret whiteness but to abolish it. *Race Traitor*.

⁵¹ Bassichis, M., & Spade, D. (2014). Queer politics and anti-blackness. In *Queer necropolitics* (pp. 191–210). Routledge.

⁵² Leonardo, Z. (2013). *Race frameworks: A multidimensional theory of racism and education*. Teachers College Press.

arguing for the destruction of whiteness.⁵³ The other side argues that whiteness can be reformed. To be sure, this perspective has taken over much of the field. Am I right in believing you are advocating for CWS that calls for the destruction of whiteness?

FP: Ah, Dr. Garrison, you simultaneously understand and misunderstand me. I'm familiar with the split within CWS. However, my critique extends to the destruction branch of CWS as well as the watered down reform branch. While you see differences, I see continuity. Both branches contend they are fighting white supremacy while doing very little to attack the beating heart of whiteness, which I contend is anti-Blackness.⁵⁴ What I see is a branch looking to "destroy" whiteness in rhetoric and name only because they have failed to articulate and illustrate how the destruction of whiteness will result in a world materially free from anti-Black racism. In other words, the "destruction of whiteness" branch of CWS appears to be rather non-performative⁵⁵ and not really about destroying anything at all but preserving whiteness in yet another form.

JG: I agree that we should aim for the destruction of whiteness. But, Fred, I don't think I agree that CWS's work in this vein is only non-performative. Is it not important to first identify, analyze, and describe the functions, contours, and damages of whiteness? How else are we supposed to know what we are living in, what we are a part of, to destroy it, and move beyond it?

FP: And how long must the "documentation" of whiteness go on while nonwhite people pay the cost of that with our blood, bodies, and minds? If, as you say, it is important to identify, analyze, and describe the violence that whiteness reaps upon all of us, at what point will it be the time to act and end that violence? Is that what your upcoming article attempts to do? Or is it just more academic "documentation"?

JG: So, you are calling for a charting of the full destruction of whiteness as we know it. Fred, I wish I could say my project was answering your call, but I don't think I am up to that task. You, yourself, have commented on the permanence of racism—and therefore the permanence of whiteness.⁵⁶ How could we move forward except in trying to persistently identify and deconstruct the latest versions of whiteness?⁵⁷

FP: You have to understand that permanence does not have to result in performative paralysis.⁵⁸ Just because the world we live in right now mandates certain outcomes does not mean that we must limit the academic imagination to those outcomes, particularly when we know such

⁵³ Matias, C. E. (2022). Towards a Black Whiteness studies: a response to the growing field. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1–11.

⁵⁴ Whitehead, M. A. (2021). Whiteness, Anti-Blackness, and Trauma: A Grounded Theory of White Racial Meaning Making. *Journal of College Student Development*, 62(3), 310–326.

⁵⁵ Squire, D., Nicolazzo, Z., & Perez, R. (2019). Institutional response as non-performative: What university communications (don't) say about movements toward justice. *Review of Higher Education*, 42, Supplement, 109–133; Howard, P. S. (2004). White privilege: for or against? A discussion of ostensibly antiracist discourses in critical whiteness studies. *Race, Gender & Class*, 63–79.

⁵⁶ Tran, H. (2016). Color blindness and the permanence of Whiteness. *School Integration Matters: Research-Based Strategies to Advance Equity*, 23.

⁵⁷ Giroux, H.A. (1997). Racial politics and the pedagogy of whiteness. In M Hill (ed). *Whiteness: A critical reader*, pp. 294–315. NYU Press.

⁵⁸ Riebe, L., Whitsed, C., & Girardi, A. (2021). Exploring the paradoxes and tensions encountered by business faculty teaching teamwork in a changing academic environment. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1–15.

outcomes are rooted in anti-Black violence. But I am not a critical whiteness scholar, James; you are. So let me ask you some questions. Why has there been so much effort to “identify and deconstruct whiteness,” but so little effort in the field toward action that would end the material benefits that come from white supremacy, the violence against Blacks, and the preservation of anti-Blackness?

JG: Fred, I think CWS is trying to make space for that possibility. I hope that my work reveals the damages of whiteness for people to try to take action. But I do wonder: Do we even know what that action could look like? Have we ever seen it before, in the way you are meaning?

FP: No, but that’s the point. This version of CWS seems perpetually stuck waiting for others to act while they continue to identify and document whiteness. This allows for a certain amount of liberal white comfort, working for an anti-racist cause in half-measure while still maintaining white privileges. Such half measures implicitly maintain the space for more complex and fancy forms of anti-Blackness.⁵⁹ Rather than constantly analyzing whiteness for what it is, maybe more CWS scholarship should purposefully aim to change the impact that anti-Blackness has on all of our day-to-day lives. If we continuously make ending white supremacy the focus of anti-racist efforts, rather than ending anti-Blackness, then we are only focused on reform under the white gaze.⁶⁰

JG: I’m a little confused, Fred; how do you see a focus on the destruction of white supremacy as different from a focus on reducing anti-Blackness?

FP: If the focus remains on anti-Blackness,⁶¹ then we may be able to see that white supremacy is a tool for the continual destruction of Black people and not simply efforts to privilege white people.⁶² If we ignore that anti-Blackness shapes the definition and function of white supremacy, then it is easy to “soften” the violence of white supremacy.⁶³ We must remember that the project of racism is dependent on the destruction of Black bodies.⁶⁴ To truly contest anti-Blackness, as opposed to “fighting” white supremacy in a non-performative way, the work must seek to contest the devaluation of Black life and not just the garish elimination of white privilege.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Winnubst, S. (2020). The many lives of fungibility: anti-blackness in neoliberal times. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(1), 102–112; Warren, C. A., & Coles, J. A. (2020). Trading spaces: Antiblackness and reflections on Black education futures. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53(3), 382–398.

⁶⁰ Goitom, M. (2019). ‘Legitimate Knowledge’: An Auto-Ethnographical Account of an African Writing Past the White Gaze in Academia. *Social Epistemology*, 33(3), 193–204; Nielsen, C. R. (2011). Resistance through re-narration: Fanon on de-constructing racialized subjectivities. *African Identities*, 9(4), 363–385.

⁶¹ Pasque, P. A., Patton, L. D., Gayles, J. G., Gooden, M. A., Henfield, M. S., Milner IV, H. R., Peters, A. & Stewart, D. L. (2022). Unapologetic Educational Research: Addressing Anti-Blackness, Racism, and White Supremacy. *Cultural Studies↔ Critical Methodologies*, 22(1), 3–17.

⁶² Dancy, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Earl Davis, J. (2018). Historically white universities and plantation politics: Anti-Blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 176–195.

⁶³ Howell, A., & Richter-Montpetit, M. (2019). Racism in Foucauldian security studies: Biopolitics, liberal war, and the whitewashing of colonial and racial violence. *International Political Sociology*, 13(1), 2–19.

⁶⁴ Bassichis, M., & Spade, D. (2014). Queer politics and anti-blackness. In *Queer necropolitics* (pp. 191–210). Routledge.

⁶⁵ McIntosh, P. (1995). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible backpack. Women: images and realities: A multicultural anthology, 264–267.

JG: *I appreciate these critiques of CWS, and I'll take them to heart as I think about how to revise my article to address anti-Blackness more directly. But I have to say that our conversation today feels at odds with our first conversation in some ways. Today you've argued for the transformation of CWS to compel white people to act in the ending of anti-Black violence. Yet, I left our first conversation feeling the weight of the almost nihilistic permanence of racism that you've described as Afropessimism. This seems like an intractable contradiction, Don't you think?*

FP: *As racism and its progeny are illogical,⁶⁶ James, many of the thoughts around it are situated in contradiction.⁶⁷ I think we both have some work to do in our fields as we continue these conversations. Let me give your response some thought and let's plan on meeting again to talk about the paper, as it seems we've exhausted our time for today.*

The two men depart on good terms and set an undetermined date to meet in the future to resume the conversation.

PART III

On April 11th, 2021, an officer was involved in the “accidental” shooting of an unarmed Black man, Daunte Wright, in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. The shooting took place approximately twelve miles away from the location of and eleven months following the murder of George Floyd. On April 20th, former police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted by a jury of his “peers” for that crime. That same day, Ma'Khia Bryant, a 16-year-old Black girl, was fatally shot by police officer Nicholas Reardon in southeast Columbus, Ohio. The juxtaposition of the killings of Wright and Bryant with the conviction of the murderer of George Floyd causes James and Fred to come together and discuss the contradictions within their fields against the backdrop of these latest injustices.

The two meet via Zoom on April 21st, 2021, for a discussion on these topics:

JG: *Fred, I want to ask how you feel about the George Floyd verdict. If you don't want to talk about it, I understand. I just want to make space for you to express anything you think you need to here, considering everything that is occurring around us.*

FP: *There are things I want to but can't say. There are things I don't think I should say that maybe you need to hear. But if I had to sum up my emotions, I think the single word I would use is grief.⁶⁸ Intellectually, if I had to sum up my thoughts, the single word I would use is used.⁶⁹ I honestly don't expect you to understand either...*

⁶⁶ Litwack, L. F. (1998). The White man's fear of the educated Negro: How the Negro was fitted for his natural and logical calling. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (20), 100–108.

⁶⁷ Delgado, R. (1988). Critical legal studies and the realities of race—Does the fundamental contradiction have a corollary. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 23, 407.

⁶⁸ Grinage, J. (2019). Endless mourning: Racial melancholia, black grief, and the transformative possibilities for racial justice in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 89(2), 227–250.

⁶⁹ Lensmire, T. (2014). White men's racial others. *Teachers College Record*, 116(3); Blake, J. (2020). How 'good white people' derail racial progress. CNN. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/01/us/white-liberals-hypocrisy-race-blake/index.html>

JG: *Thank you for sharing what you have, Fred. I too feel the grief of the moment, but I realize our griefs are different, and much cannot be shared. If you'll allow me, I do have a question about what you've just said. I don't understand your choice of "used" as an intellectual response.*

FP: *First, please know that if we are going to go down this road, there will be a point at which we get stuck⁷⁰ because I do not expect you to fully understand my responses.⁷¹ This is not to attack your intellect but just to say that whiteness can sometimes blunt understanding.⁷² I am fine with sharing my ideas in this conversation, but I must be careful with whom I share my pain.⁷³*

The two men sit in silence on the Zoom call for about 90 seconds. A capella. Staring at each other staring at each other through a computer screen.

JG: *...Sorry for such a long pause. Thank you for sharing that. I'm being confronted by the realizations that anything I could say right now would only focus on my own experience and whiteness.⁷⁴*

FP: *True enough, James. I have a question for you: What do you think would have happened had the person that lynched George Floyd been found not guilty?*

JG: *I think we've already seen what would have happened. We have seen the race riots and protests that came at the tail end of the 1960s civil rights era; we have seen the community responses to the deaths of Michael Brown⁷⁵, Sandra Bland⁷⁶, and Freddie Gray.⁷⁷ There would have been justified protests. And in response to that, the people in power would minimize Black pain to maintain systems of white comfort.⁷⁸ There might be a few non-performative statements⁷⁹*

⁷⁰ Flynn Jr, J. E. (2015). White fatigue: Naming the challenge in moving from an individual to a systemic understanding of racism. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 17(3), 115–124.

⁷¹ Eddo-Lodge, R. (2020). *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

⁷² Calvente, L. B., Calafell, B. M., & Chávez, K. R. (2020). Here is something you can't understand: the suffocating whiteness of communication studies. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 17(2), 202–209.

⁷³ Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). Education for everyday people: Obstacles and opportunities facing the Obama administration. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 345–359.

⁷⁴ Walton, J. (2017). Beyond 'getting along': Understanding embodied whiteness in educational spaces. In *The relationality of race in education research* (pp. 59–71). Routledge.

⁷⁵ Dancy, L., & Masand, J. (2019). Race and representation on Twitter: members of congress' responses to the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 7(2), 267–286.

⁷⁶ Dowler, L., & Christian, J. (2019). Landscapes of impunity and the deaths of Americans LaVena Johnson and Sandra Bland. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26(6), 813–829.

⁷⁷ White, C., Weisburd, D., & Wire, S. (2018). Examining the impact of the Freddie Gray unrest on perceptions of the police. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 17(4), 829–858.

⁷⁸ Leonardo, Z., & Porter, R. (2010). Pedagogy of fear: Toward a Fanonian theory of 'safety' in race dialogue. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13(2), 139–157.

⁷⁹ Prescha, L. (2021). Myth of neutrality and non-performativity of antiracism. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 36(2), 109–124.

before calls to use “the master’s tools”⁸⁰ to institute reform to the white supremacist system instead of working to destroy it.⁸¹ And the cycle would start over again.

FP: Justified protest...?⁸² Who gets to decide whether the protest of the oppressed is justified or not, James?⁸³ The oppressors?⁸⁴

JG: No, you’re right. I’ve again tried to place myself as a “good white” person⁸⁵ compared to those who might claim protest as an overreaction.

FP: Understood. We must acknowledge that the minimization of Black pain and Black suffering is a real thing⁸⁶, particularly in the academy.⁸⁷ You asked why I used the word “used” when describing my reaction to the Derrick Chauvin verdict...

JG: Yes, I was interested in that word specifically...

FP: I used the word “used” rather intentionally here because I feel that Black bodies and Black pain are oftentimes used to placate white people into accepting unjust systems.⁸⁸ Yes, I feel better today than I would have had the verdict come out the other way. But I’m sure I will feel bad tomorrow when yet another unarmed Black child is killed but America’s temporary infatuation with Black loss has moved on.⁸⁹ Did you not hear, James, that at almost the same time that yesterday’s verdict was being announced, Ma’Khia Bryant was shot in Ohio?⁹⁰

⁸⁰ Lorde, A. (2003). The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader*, 25, 27.

⁸¹ Mills, C. (2015). Global white ignorance. In *Routledge international handbook of ignorance studies* (pp. 217–227). Routledge.

⁸² Milligan, T. (2013). *Civil disobedience: Protest, justification and the law*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

⁸³ Badaan, V., Jost, J. T., Osborne, D., Sibley, C. G., Ungaretti, J., Etchezahar, E., & Hennes, E. P. (2018). Social protest and its discontents: A system justification perspective. *Contention*, 6(1), 1–22.

⁸⁴ Campbell, S., Chidester, P., Bell, J., & Royer, J. (2004). Remote control: How mass media delegitimize rioting as social protest. *Race, Gender & Class*, 158–176.

⁸⁵ Boyce, B. S. (2021). Racist compared to what? the myth of white wokeness. *Whiteness and Education*, 6(2), 115–129.

⁸⁶ Kinkel-Ram, S. S., Kunstman, J., Hunger, J. M., & Smith, A. (2021). Examining the relation between discrimination and suicide among Black Americans: The role of social pain minimization and decreased bodily trust. *Stigma and Health*.

⁸⁷ Fordham, S. (1993). “Those loud Black girls”: (Black) women, silence, and gender “passing” in the academy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24(1), 3–32.

⁸⁸ Cann, C. & McCloskey, E. (2017). The poverty pimpin’ project: How whiteness profits from black and brown bodies in community service programs. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(1), 72–86; Razack, S. H. (2000). Gendered racial violence and spatialized justice: the murder Pamela George. *Canadian Journal of Law & Society/La Revue Canadienne Droit et Société*, 15(2), 91–130.

⁸⁹ Crusto, M. (2022). How to Get Away with Murder: When a White Male Police Officer Kills a Young Black Person, 79 *Washington and Lee Law Review Online* 1.

⁹⁰ Hall, A. R. (2021). Towards love as life praxis: A Black queer and feminist pedagogical orientation. *Communication Teacher*, 1–14; Miah, M. (2021). George Floyd: One battle won, the war for justice continues. *Green Left Weekly*, (1306), 12.

JG: *I did hear, Fred. This week seems particularly full of tragedies. I understand your point on placation and how we can use Black pain to relieve our guilt.⁹¹ And out of that, we let systemic racism continue, unchallenged. I can't help but wonder if maybe after seeing the serial, systemic violence—multiple cases of police killings in a single week—it might be enough to reveal to white people the systemic nature of white supremacy and anti-Blackness.*

FP: *I think the best response to that is “LOL,” as the kids say. What evidence do you have to believe that such a “revelation” is even possible, much less probable?*

JG: *I'm not sure I have the evidence. But it seems as though the Black pain that has always been a part of America is more visible to white Americans now.⁹²*

FP: *James, your response reminds me of why I disagree with the so-called Afrofuturists.*

JG: *Curious thought, Fred: Why does my response remind you of Afrofuturists?⁹³*

FP: *Well, James, the term “Afrofuturism” was coined in 1993 by a white man, Mark Dery, and can be said to refer to any and all “speculative” fiction that treats African American or Black themes and seemingly addresses Black concerns in the context of twentieth-century techno culture.⁹⁴*

JG: *That's a little ambiguous. Do you mean like the movie Black Panther?*

FP: *Well, maybe.⁹⁵ I would say that, more to the point, Afrofuturism can be understood as an incredibly wide-ranging social, political, and artistic movement that seeks to imagine a world where African-descended peoples and their cultures can play a central role in the creation of that world.⁹⁶ You mentioned a movie, but I would more associate Afrofuturism with the works of*

⁹¹ Caouette, J., & Taylor, D. M. (2015). “Don't Blame Me for What my Ancestors Did”: Understanding the Impact of Collective White Guilt. In *Revisiting The Great White North?* (pp. 89–104). Brill Sense.

⁹² Santia, M., Fuller, P. B., Kalmoe, N. P., & Saha, P. (2020). “Them Cuffs Keep Them Quiet”: Facebook Users' Reactions to Live Arrests During Racial Justice Protests. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 21.

⁹³ Sions, H. K., & Wolfgang, C. N. (2021). Looking back, looking forward: Resisting the white gaze in historical narratives and future possibilities of art education. *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 41(1), 7.

⁹⁴ Elia, A. (2014). The languages of Afrofuturism. *Lingue e linguaggi*, 12, 83–96.

⁹⁵ Burger, B., & Engels, L. (2019). A nation under our feet: Black Panther, Afrofuturism and the potential of thinking through political structures. *Image & Text*, (33), 1–30.

⁹⁶ Bruce, D. (2020). Afrofuturism: From the past to the living present. UCLA. Retrieved January 26, 2022, from <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/magazine/afrofuturism>

novelists Octavia Butler⁹⁷ and N.K. Jemison⁹⁸, the art of Jean-Michel Basquiat,⁹⁹ the music videos of Janelle Monáe,¹⁰⁰ or even the later music of A Tribe Called Quest.¹⁰¹

JG: So why do you disagree with Afrofuturist works? Are they too hopeful in your view?

FP: Well, first let me say I respect and enjoy the work produced under the banner of the genre. I view Afrofuturism and Afropessimism as two sides of the same project¹⁰² within the Black radical imagination.¹⁰³ However, I think the larger Afrofuturism movement tends to rely on, and perhaps overuse, existing linguistics and semantics to make a claim that we're out of the realm of absolute abjection and despair that I think we are still in.¹⁰⁴ To me, that's just religious thinking. Faith without the evidence of things seen. I would argue that anyone making such a claim, Afrofuturists or otherwise, moves from analysis to idealism without "showing the move."¹⁰⁵ As an Afropessimist, I find it hard to fathom how one can even imagine "another world" inside of the anti-Black episteme in which we live.¹⁰⁶

JG: Are you saying that people can't imagine "wildly" enough? It seems you tie these narratives back to what already exists.

FP: What I am trying to convey, James, is that our imaginations are captured in the afterlife of slavery as much as anything else is and.... I believe everything is. You must get past that before you imagine a world free from the ontology and epistemology of anti-Blackness, not after.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the "possibility of being" operates as an abstraction, but the "absence of the possibility of being" is what is truly material.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁷ Morris, S. M. (2012). Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's "Fledgling". *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40(3/4), 146–166.

⁹⁸ Morris, S. M. (2019). Dreaming of Afrofuturism, Epic Fantasy, and Utopia in NK Jemisin's Dreamblood Duology. In *Race and Utopian Desire in American Literature and Society* (pp. 283–300). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

⁹⁹ Boyd Acuff, J. (2020). Afrofuturism: Reimagining art curricula for Black existence. *Art Education*, 73(3), 13–21.

¹⁰⁰ Gipson, G. D. (2016). Afrofuturism's Musical Princess Janelle Monáe. *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*, 91–107.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, C. Z. (2019). *Race in the Galactic Age: Sankofa, Afrofuturism, Whiteness and Whitley Strieber*. State University of New York at Albany.

¹⁰² Hart, W. D. (2021). Afterlives of Slavery: Afrofuturism and Afropessimism as Parallax Views. *Black Theology*, 19(3), 196–206.

¹⁰³ Garibay, J. C., Mathis, C. L., & West, C. P. (2022). Black student views on higher education reparations at a university with an enslavement history. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 1–22; Kelley, R. D. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Beacon Press.

¹⁰⁴ Robertson, A. (2021, March 9). The year Afropessimism hit the streets?: A conversation at the edge of the world. Literary Hub. Retrieved January 26, 2022, from <https://lithub.com/the-year-afropessimism-hit-the-streets-a-conversation-at-the-edge-of-the-world/>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Sexton, J. (2012). Ante-anti-blackness: Afterthoughts. *Lateral*, 1(1), 1–14.

¹⁰⁸ Robertson, A. (2021, March 9). The year Afropessimism hit the streets?: A conversation at the edge of the world. Literary Hub. Retrieved January 26, 2022, from <https://lithub.com/the-year-afropessimism-hit-the-streets-a-conversation-at-the-edge-of-the-world/>

JG: *We can't live outside of the world we are a part of. We may have found some common ground here, Fred. This reminds me of sociocultural theories of development¹⁰⁹ and what we are capable of doing or thinking.¹¹⁰ We are made by our world, even as we make our world.¹¹¹ But, to return to the original question—how is my comment on white Americans seeing Black pain reminiscent of Afrofuturism? Are you saying this kind of white double consciousness is not possible to even imagine in our world?¹¹²*

FP: *We may have found common grounds James, but just to be clear, I am not just saying that a form of white double consciousness is just not possible; it's nonsensical. For one to think otherwise, one must willfully embrace ignorance to obscure the truth.¹¹³ The work of Black Afrofuturists seems to be trying to reach beyond a world bound by the absence of the possibility of white double consciousness. But this, in my view, means that the work is often still reactionary rather than truly revolutionary—it tends to be so caught up in reacting to a world captured by white gaze¹¹⁴, that the work no longer has much of a gaze of its own.¹¹⁵*

JG: *That criticism seems awfully pessimistic, Fred. I've read some of the creative works you mentioned, and I find many of them prescient and inspired. I think there must be room for creativity that aims at destroying, or at least decentering, whiteness that could cast a vision we can dream toward.*

FP: *What you call pessimism, I suspect I would refer to as simple racial realism.¹¹⁶ But I thought we were having a conversation about Afrofuturism, James? Why does everything always have to come back to whiteness?*

JG: *I see what I just did there. Let me try and rephrase. Have you seen Afrofuturism that allows for the possibility of a white double consciousness that would aid in the destruction of whiteness? Essentially, I'm asking where can we, as white people, fit in? Should we abandon futurism and come alongside with our own white pessimism?*

FP: *White pessimism? That is rather amusing. I think the first thing you, or any white person, can do is resist the need to "fit" into all places at all times. Second, I want to point out, now, a consistent tact you've taken in our latest conversation. I'll note that in the last few minutes, you've brought up the scholarship of Du Bois with double consciousness, you've appropriated Afrofuturism to make "better" white people, and you're now attempting to appropriate*

¹⁰⁹ Bang, M. (2016). Towards an ethic of decolonial trans-ontologies in sociocultural theories of learning and development. *Power and privilege in the learning sciences: Critical and sociocultural theories of learning*, 115–138.

¹¹⁰ Leonardo, Z., & Manning, L. (2017). White historical activity theory: Toward a critical understanding of white zones of proximal development. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(1), 15–29.

¹¹¹ Lantolf, J. P. & Poehner M. E. (2014) *Sociocultural theory and the pedagogical imperative in L2 education: Vygotskian praxis and the research/practice divide*. New York: Routledge.

¹¹² Yancy, G. (2015). Tarrying together. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(1), 26–35.

¹¹³ Mills, C. (2007). White ignorance. *Race and epistemologies of ignorance*, 247, 26–31.

¹¹⁴ Rabelo, V. C., Robotham, K. J., & McCluney, C. L. (2021). "Against a sharp white background": How Black women experience the white gaze at work. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(5), 1840–1858.

¹¹⁵ Pailey, R. N. (2020). De-centring the 'white gaze' of development. *Development and Change*, 51(3), 729–745.

¹¹⁶ Bell, D. (1992). Racial realism. *Connecticut Law Review*, 24, 363; Stokes, S. (2021). A sense of belonging within the imaginative constraints of racial realism: a critical race analysis of Latinx students' racialized experiences during the Trump presidency. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1–16.

*Afropessimism in some attempt to—what? Retrofit our work to answer the question of how to destroy whiteness as a white person for white people? Why should it be up to the minoritized and the marginalized to construct a world free of whiteness from only our imagination? Why can't you and other CWS scholars do the work of imagining a world that exists after the destruction of whiteness and not just analyze the world that is currently dying from whiteness?*¹¹⁷

JG: *I think we've run up against this limitation before. And I'll call upon sociocultural work again to describe it further. I don't think there is capacity for that kind of white imagination. We need a "more knowing other" to guide our zone of proximal development.¹¹⁸ We have learned, so fundamentally, how to be white¹¹⁹ that to be anything else would be to lose too much of who we are and what we know now.*

FP: *James, it seems you are saying that being white in this country is "so hard" that you are unable to even imagine bearing the cost that some Black people have had to pay for generations to be rid of whiteness.¹²⁰ If that is truly the case, I am not sure what to tell you. What I am sure of is that I can't be yours, or any white person's, magical negro on the road to racial redemption.¹²¹ That is neither my job nor my calling.¹²² The work is going to be up to you, even if we don't yet know what that work is. What is called for is the courage to run toward the horizon, without knowing what is beyond it but knowing that anything short of it is just continued despair. That is where I think Black people who are living in the afterlife of slavery are. The sooner white people allow themselves to experience the despair of their inhumanity, the sooner we can begin doing the work to correct this.*

JG: *What lies beyond the horizon. That's a project I can take up. It's the project I wish I could have named many months ago when I naively demanded not to be white. The path here, it seems, has been laid and paved many times over. I'm reminded, even, of Du Bois, who you seem to echo, who said, "The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression, even though that cost be blood."¹²³ Perhaps a project of creating "what lies beyond the horizon," of imagining a post-white futurism, might be its own exploration of learning how to pay, finally, the cost of liberty.*

FP: *You know, I never thought about that in that way to be honest, James. But now that you say it, that might be a worthwhile exploration for a critical whiteness scholar. A space for white imagination and development that does not try to impose that white gaze on Black projects, but*

¹¹⁷ Metz, J. M. (2019). *Dying of whiteness: how the politics of racial resentment is killing America's heartland*. Hachette UK.

¹¹⁸ Leonardo, Z., & Manning, L. (2017). White historical activity theory: Toward a critical understanding of white zones of proximal development. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(1), 15–29.

¹¹⁹ Thandeka. (1999). *Learning to be white: Money, race, and God in America*. New York: Continuum

¹²⁰ Applebaum, B. (2010). *Being white, being good: White complicity, white moral responsibility, and social justice pedagogy*. Lexington Books.

¹²¹ Hughey, M. (2012). Racializing redemption, reproducing racism: The odyssey of magical negroes and white saviors. *Sociology Compass*, 6(9), 751–767.

¹²² Hughey, M. (2009). Cinematic racism: White redemption and black stereotypes in "magical Negro" films. *Social Problems*, 56(3), 543–577.

¹²³ Du Bois, W. (1909). Chapter 13: The Legacy of John Brown. In *John Brown* (pp. 362–393). Philadelphia, PA: G.W. Jacobs and Company. Retrieved from Black Thought and Culture database.

whose purpose is the intentional thinking of a world free of anti-Black racism. Now, I still think that world would be a fantastic one and might as well be produced by Disney.¹²⁴ But that is just me. I do think that is a more positive direction to move the white attention, rather than just constantly analyzing whiteness.

JG: *I don't know how much more can be said, Fred. I feel compelled to close our conversation and start my own work based on where we've arrived.*

FP: *You've finally arrived where I wish we had started James. I am encouraged, but I'm exhausted. I'm glad you got something out of this, truly I am. But just consider for a moment, before we depart, the work that has gone into these discussions. I was already tired from repeatedly seeing the killings of Black youth on our collective screens. And it has now taken three conversations to get to a point where you are almost ready to begin to contribute to "anti-racism" without imposing the white gaze. I just want you to understand the Black labor it takes sometimes to get even the "best," most woke white people to this point.*

Given the emotional weight of this conversation the two men decide to give it some time before they reconvene again. They log out of Zoom, turn off their screens, and close their laptops.

#FadetoBlack

The American idea of racial progress is measured by how fast I become white.

—James Baldwin

Outro

Wow.... That was A Lot Of Work For Fred

Black labor is often taken for granted. The work needed to prepare, secure, and maintain Black intellectual spaces often goes unrecognized (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019). In this counter-story, Fred leads us to an inevitable conclusion: There is a need for Black spaces that are not surveilled by white faces (Jenkins et. al, 2021; Fiske, 1998). It is clear that both men put in work in this conversation, but what is evident is that the labor was not equally distributed.

We hope that one of the main takeaways from this track is a recognition of the unseen and uncompensated labor that many Black educators, whether race scholars or not, are forced to endure in the academy (Tuitt et al., 2009). While the object of this counter-story may appear to be an explanation of the space that whiteness takes up, the explicit purpose of the counter-story is to illuminate the use and abuse of Black labor to reveal through metaphor the complexities of anti-Blackness, particularly in the academy (Rodríguez, 2012). More broadly, we concentrate on the exploitation of Black labor here to describe two truths; the Black mind is a genesis of racial progress in the U.S. and Black labor is abused and co-opted to recenter whiteness rather than attack anti-Blackness. Thus, Black labor (intellectual, emotional, spiritual, etc.) gets captured

¹²⁴ Gregory, S. M. (2010). Disney's second line: New Orleans, racial masquerade, and the reproduction of whiteness in *The Princess and the Frog*. *Journal of African American Studies*, 14(4), 432–449; Kiyomi, K. (2000). Disney's Pocahontas: Reproduction of gender, orientalism, and the strategic construction of racial harmony in the Disney empire. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 6(4), 39–65.

into a perpetual cycle (Thompson Dorsey & Venzant Chambers, 2014) of use and abuse as creative progress is made and re-made from anti-whiteness into anti-Blackness.

At the start, we endeavored to explore the question: *What does it take for a person to be capable of moving toward a post-white horizon?* The answer that we found is as painful as it is evident: Black labor is what is always called up, frequently sacrificed, and too easily overused and abused to bring about racial progress. This finding is not new, but rather sits in conversation with such foundational pieces in the canon of race scholars as Derrick Bell's (1980) interest convergence theory and the late Charles Mills's (1997) racial contract, and W. E. B. Du Bois's (2015) seminal *The Souls of Black Folk*.

What we hope to add to this ongoing conversation is a demonstration that this abuse of Black labor appears in a symbiotic relationship with white complacency and often results in white people distancing themselves from the responsibility of changemaking that all who benefit from whiteness have. Thus, even some so-called progressive scholarship operates under the "afterlife" of slavery and subsumes some of the practices that the master used to subdue the slave.

Through the method of dialogic counternarrative, we hope to speak to an alternative path that points us toward a post-white horizon, rather than the white sanitized lies of racial progress that preserve the privileges of whiteness while changing nothing but its rhetoric (Ray et. al, 2017). Through this narrative, we raise the possibility of unpacking the potential power of Black labor once it has been freed from the white gaze and allowed to grow on its own terms. To be clear, Black scholars contribute rich knowledge and have for years. Yet the question remains: What else might be constructed, designed, imagined, and formulated free from the white gaze?

We hope this project illuminates the idea that it is not more Black labor that is required to compel the white imagination into post-whiteness. What is necessary today is for the white imagination to get over its need to control the possibilities of progress, to make space for what might become. Whiteness wants to have its cake and eat it too. The white liberal imagination craves the credit for affirming Black knowledge, but only if that knowledge leads to whitewashed racial progress. It does this while simultaneously seeking to avoid responsibility for the exploitative means used to achieve its hegemonic ends.

Therefore the myth of the "good white person," particularly but not exclusively in American academia, is often extraordinarily destructive and can lead to the creation and preservation of many anti-Black epistemologies. The mythological "good white person" judges the Black mind not on its own merits but by how quickly that Black mind can become understandable, palatable, and usable for "progressive" whiteness.

So, What About This Post-White Futurism

This project seeks to offer the "possibility of possibility," even within ontologies that see racial progress as impossible (Bell, 1992a). This is not because we believe that "we shall always overcome" (Seamster & Ray, 2018); on the contrary, it stems from the compulsion of a desperation brought on by the inhumanity of racism. This compulsion means that hopefulness is not an inert state. Hopefulness, instead, is found directly in the action of "working toward what could be otherwise" (Anders & Lester, 2019, p. 932).

To be clear, the focus of this track was not on advancing the racial understanding of our white character, Dr. James Garrison. As previously mentioned, it was to reveal the position and labor of Dr. Frederick Malcolm Powell. But Dr. Garrison is not simply a passive foil for Dr.

Powell. Rather, what we hope we have shown with Dr. Garrison's character is what might happen when those who say they are committed to stopping anti-Blackness work to remove, rather than re-impose, the white gaze from the social justice activities of Black people.

We do think that there is a future for study in post-white futurism for the purposes of redirecting the white gaze. By post-white futurism, we mean to offer a challenge to white racial scholars to produce scholarship, art, music, and media that imagines what our world can look like when it is free from anti-Blackness and the role whiteness takes up in that world. Post-white futurism will imagine present impossibilities and demand that post-white futurists decenter whiteness in their efforts to decenter whiteness. Ultimately, the creation of a post-white futurism might redirect the white gaze toward its own means of self-destruction, in which a post-white futurist, from their current position, imagines the worlds that we need to eliminate the power of the white gaze and whiteness.

In this work, white scholars might explore the contours of responsibility they owe to the project of eradicating whiteness while not falling into the pitfalls of internalized white study for mythical white progress. In a post-white futurism, the project is not to map how whiteness works within us, but to imagine beyond, and despite, ourselves for how we might live without whiteness. More to the point, projects that fall under the banner we call post-white futurism will intentionally seek to mitigate the impact that anti-Blackness has on all our lives.

The idea of white race scholars doing the work of imagining what a world that does not subscribe to anti-Blackness would look like seems as compelling as it is necessary. However, what this project has hopefully illustrated is that the cost to produce such a future, should not—cannot—come on the backs of more Black bodies (Cann & McCloskey, 2017) or at the expense of the exhaustion of more Black minds. That is not a future free of white supremacy but one embedded in yet another version of anti-Blackness.

Neither should a post-white futurism project exist as a thinly veiled attempt by white scholars to colonize Afrofuturism or Africanfuturism (Hanchey, 2021). Such an imperialist reclamation (Nishi, 2020) of an anticolonial effort is the norm for much progressive scholarship but would be the antithesis of anything worthy of the label post-white futurism. Rather, what a post-white futurism would be is a space of detox for those who have been so long addicted to the intoxicating drug known as whiteness. It would be a kind of rehabilitation for those whose social and cultural identity development was interrupted by whiteness (Thandeka, 1999). Post-white futurism, then, would be the hard work of people creating worlds and lives out of the destruction of whiteness and developing social and cultural identities of shared humanity. What might this look like in practice? We anticipate that is precisely the question that scholars who engage in the work of post-white futurism would attempt to answer.

With this in mind, we cannot fall into the danger of imagining that whiteness can be “undone” or “unlearned,” that there is a “return” to make before whiteness. There is no social, cultural past in the U.S. that does not include whiteness. What questions, rather than immediate answers, can we pose so that we can begin enacting the process of making a world beyond whiteness?

Thus far, CWS has failed to recognize or address a pattern of historical platitudes which have shored up whiteness at times when it might otherwise have been upended (Boyce, 2022). Whiteness takes up space wherever it goes, even when we work to de-center and limit it. In any scholarship or education, whiteness will extract labor, perpetuate suffering, and limit possibility. Imagining a place beyond whiteness and free of anti-Blackness affords us the ability to ask questions geared toward fostering a shared humanity. Importantly, this turn toward post-white

futurism might afford space to traditions of scholarship away from the white gaze and begin the foundation for work that is not dependent on the unrecognized expectation of Black labor. In a phrase, it is the possibility of unexplored possibilities.

We hope you read this outro not as the end of our project, but rather as a beginning. This is fundamentally a project that aims to orient ourselves toward a post-white horizon. We do this not to placate whiteness but to open up the space for truly anti-racist ventures that decenter whiteness even in the efforts to destroy it. This is the post-white horizon that is currently limited to metaphor. We acknowledge that arrival at this point is impossible. But, before we even embark on such a journey, we know that there is work to do that points us in the right direction. We hope to work through how to face toward the horizon and begin this journey. Future work will explore the journey itself. We, therefore, conclude with a beginning, an invitation to freely imagine and freely create.

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