The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness: A Pedagogical Analysis

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In the emerging sub-discipline of whiteness studies scholars seem better equipped to explain white privilege than to define whiteness itself. Such a dilemma is understandable: the concept is slippery and elusive. Even though no one at this point really knows what whiteness is, most observers agree that it is intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between white and non-white people. Whiteness cannot be separated from hegemony and is profoundly influenced by demographic changes, political realignments, and economic cycles. Situationally specific, whiteness is always shifting, always reinscribing itself around changing meanings of race in the larger society. As with race in general whiteness holds material/economic implications—indeed, white supremacy has its financial rewards. The Federal Housing Administration, for example, has traditionally favored housing loans for white suburbs instead of "ethnic" inner cities. Banks have ensured that Blacks have severely limited access to property ownership and capital acquisition compared to Whites. Unions over the decades following World War Two ignored the struggle for full employment and universal medical care, opting for contracts that provided private medical coverage, pensions, and job security to predominantly white organized workers in

mass production industries. Undoubtedly, there continue to be unearned wages of whiteness. Indeed, critical multiculturalists understand that questions of whiteness permeate almost every major issue facing Westerners at the end of the twentieth century: affirmative action, intelligence testing, the deterioration of public space, and the growing disparity of wealth. In this context the study of whiteness becomes a central feature of any critical pedagogy or multicultural education for the twenty-first century. The effort to define and reinvent the amorphous concept becomes the "prime directive" of what is referred to here as a critical pedagogy of whiteness (Keating 1995; Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Fiske 1994; Gallagher 1994; Yudice 1995; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997).

In the multicultural context a critical pedagogy of whiteness theoretically grounds a form of teaching that engages students in an examination of the social, political, and psychological dimensions of membership in a racial group. The critical imperative demands that such an examination be considered in relation to power and the ideological dynamics of white supremacy. A critical pedagogy of whiteness is possible only if we understand in great specificity the multiple meanings of whiteness and their effects on the way white consciousness is historically structured and socially inscribed. Without such appreciations and the meta-consciousness they ground, awareness of the privilege and dominance of white Northern European vantagepoints are buried in the cemetery of power evasion. Neither our understanding that race is not biological but social or that racial classifications have inflicted pain and suffering on non-Whites should move us to reject the necessity of new forms of racial analysis.

The white privilege of universalizing its characteristics as the "proper ways to be" has continuously undermined the efforts of non-Whites in a variety of spheres. At times such universal norms have produced self-loathing among individual members of minority groups, as they internalize the shibboleths of the white tradition—"I wish my eyes were blue and my hair blond and silky." Invisible white norms in these cases alienate non-Whites to the point that they sometimes come to live "outside themselves." A pedagogy of whiteness reveals such power-related processes to Whites and non-Whites alike, exposing how members of both these groups are stripped of self-knowledge. As Whites, white students in particular, come to see themselves through the eyes of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and indigenous peoples, they begin to move away from the conservative constructions of the dominant culture. Such an encounter with minority perspectives moves many white individuals to rethink their tendency to dismiss the continued existence of racism and embrace the belief that racial inequality results from unequal abilities among racial groups. The effects of a critical pedagogy of whiteness can be powerfully emancipatory (Tatum 1994; Frankenberg 1993; Alcoff 1995; Sleeter 1995).

WHITE REASON: THE COLONIAL POWER OF WHITENESS

While no one knows exactly what constitutes whiteness, we can historicize the concept and offer some general statements about the dynamics it signifies. Even this process is difficult, as whiteness as a socio-historical construct is constantly shifting in light of new circumstances and changing interactions with various manifestations of power. With these qualifications in mind we believe that a dominant impulse of whiteness took shape around the European Enlightenment's notion of rationality with its privileged construction of a transcendental white, male, rational subject who operated at the recesses of power while concurrently giving every indication that he escaped the confines of time and space. In this context whiteness was naturalized as a universal entity that operated as more than a mere ethnic positionality emerging from a particular time, the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and a particular space, Western Europe. Reason in this historical configuration is whitened and human nature itself is grounded upon this reasoning capacity. Lost in the defining process is the socially constructed nature of reason itself, not to mention its emergence as a signifier of whiteness. Thus, in its rationalistic womb whiteness begins to establish itself as a norm that represents an authoritative, delimited, and hierarchical mode of thought. In the emerging colonial contexts in which Whites would increasingly find themselves in the decades and centuries following the Enlightenment, the encounter with non-Whiteness would be framed in rationalistic terms—whiteness representing orderliness, rationality, and self-control and non-whiteness as chaos, irrationality, violence, and the breakdown of self-regulation. Rationality emerged as the conceptual base around which civilization and savagery could be delineated (Giroux 1992; Alcoff 1995; Keating 1995).

This rationalistic modernist whiteness is shaped and confirmed by its close association with science. As a scientific construct whiteness privileges mind over body, intellectual over experiential ways of knowing, mental abstractions over passion, bodily sensations, and tactile understanding (Semali and Kincheloe 1999; Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Hinchey 1999). In the study of multicultural education such epistemological tendencies take on dramatic importance. In educators' efforts to understand the forces that drive the curriculum and the purposes of Western education, modernist whiteness is a central player. The insight it provides into the social construction of schooling, intelligence, and the disciplines of psychology and educational psychology in general opens a gateway into white consciousness and its reactions to the world around it. Objectivity and dominant articulations of masculinity as signs of stability and the highest expression of white achievement still work to construct everyday life and social relations at the end of the twentieth century. Because such dynamics have been naturalized and universalized, whiteness assumes an invisible power unlike previous forms of domination in human history. Such an invisible power can be deployed by those individuals and groups

who are able to identify themselves within the boundaries of reason and to project irrationality, sensuality, and spontaneity on to the other.

Thus, European ethnic groups such as the Irish in nineteenth-century industrializing America were able to differentiate themselves from passionate ethnic groups who were supposedly unable to regulate their own emotional predispositions and gain a rational and objective view of the world. Such peoples—who were being colonized, exploited, enslaved, and eliminated by Europeans during their Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras—were viewed as irrational and, thus, inferior in their status as human beings. As inferior beings, they had no claim to the same rights as Europeans—hence, white racism and colonialism were morally justified around the conflation of whiteness and reason. In order for whiteness to place itself in the privileged seat of rationality and superiority, it would have to construct pervasive portraits of non-Whites, Africans in particular, as irrational, disorderly, and prone to uncivilized behavior (Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Stowe 1996; Alcoff 1995; Haymes 1996). As rock of rationality in a sea of chaos and disorder, whiteness presented itself as a non-colored, non-blemished *pure* category. Even a mere drop of non-white blood was enough historically to relegate a person to the category of "colored." Being white, thus, meant possessing the privilege of being uncontaminated by any other bloodline. A mixed race child in this context has often been rejected by the white side of his or her heritage—the rhetorical construct of race purity demands that the mixed race individual be identified by allusion to the non-white group, for example, she's half Latina or half Chinese. Individuals are rarely half-white.

As Michel Foucault often argued, reason is a form of disciplinary power. Around Foucault's axiom, critical multiculturalists contend that reason can never be separated from power. Those without reason defined in the Western scientific way are excluded from power and are relegated to the position of unreasonable other. Whites in their racial purity understood the dictates of the "White Man's Burden" and became the beneficent teachers of the barbarians. To Western eyes the contrast between white and non-white culture was stark: reason as opposed to ignorance; scientific knowledge instead of indigenous knowledge; philosophies of mind versus folk psychologies; religious truth in lieu of primitive superstition; and professional history as opposed to oral mythologies. Thus, rationality was inscribed in a variety of hierarchical relations between European colonizers and their colonies early on, and between Western multinationals and their "underdeveloped" markets in later days. Such power relations were erased by the white claim of cultural neutrality around the transhistorical norm of reason—in this construction rationality was not assumed to be the intellectual commodity of any specific culture. Indeed, colonial hierarchies immersed in exploitation were justified around the interplay of pure whiteness, impure non-whiteness, and neutral reason.

Traditional colonialism was grounded on colonialized people's deviation from the norm of rationality, thus making colonization a rational response to inequality. In the twentieth century this white norm of rationality was extend-

ed to the economic sphere where the philosophy of the free market and exchange values were universalized into signifiers of civilization. Once all the nations on earth are drawn into the white reason of the market economy, then all land can be subdivided into real estate, all human beings' worth can be monetarily calculated, values of abstract individualism and financial success can be embraced by every community in every country, and education can be reformulated around the cultivation of human capital. When these dynamics come to pass, the white millennium will have commenced—white power will have been consolidated around land and money. The Western ability to regulate diverse peoples through their inclusion in data banks filled with information about their credit histories, institutional affiliations, psychological "health," academic credentials, work experiences, and family backgrounds will reach unprecedented levels. The accomplishment of this ultimate global colonial task will mark the end of white history in the familiar end-of-history parlance. This does not mean that white supremacy ends, but that it has produced a hegemony so seamless that the need for further structural or ideological change becomes unnecessary. The science, reason, and technology of white culture will have achieved their inevitable triumph (MacCannell 1992; Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Alcoff 1995; Giroux 1992).

Whatever the complexity of the concept, whiteness, at least one feature is discernible—whiteness cannot escape the materiality of its history, its effects on the everyday lives of those who fall outside its conceptual net as well as on white people themselves. Critical scholarship on whiteness should focus attention on the documentation of such effects. Whiteness study in a critical multiculturalist context should delineate the various ways such material effects shape cultural and institutional pedagogies and position individuals in relation to the power of white reason. Understanding these dynamics is central to the curriculums of black studies, Chicano studies, postcolonialism, indigenous studies, not to mention educational reform movements in elementary, secondary, and higher education. The history of the world's diverse peoples in general as well as minority groups in Western societies in particular has often been told from a white historiographical perspective. Such accounts erased the values, epistemologies, and belief systems that grounded the cultural practices of diverse peoples. Without such cultural grounding students have often been unable to appreciate the manifestations of brilliance displayed by non-white cultural groups. Caught in the white interpretive filter they were unable to make sense of diverse historical and contemporary cultural productions as anything other than proof of white historical success. The fact that one of the most important themes of the last half of the twentieth century—the revolt of the "irrationals" against white historical domination—has not been presented as a salient part of the white (or non-white) story is revealing, a testimony to the continuing power of whiteness and its concurrent fragility (Banfield 1991; Frankenberg 1993; Stowe 1996; Vattimo 1992).

WHAT'S WHITE?
WHITENESS AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

As with any racial category, whiteness is a social construction in that it can be invented, lived, analyzed, modified, and discarded. While Western reason is a crucial dynamic associated with whiteness over the last three centuries, there are many other social forces that sometimes work to construct its meaning. Whiteness, thus, is not an unchanging, fixed, biological category impervious to its cultural, economic, political, and psychological context. There are many ways to be white, as whiteness interacts with class, gender, and a range of other race-related and cultural dynamics. The ephemeral nature of whiteness as a social construction begins to reveal itself when we understand that the Irish, Italians, and Jews have all been viewed as non-white in particular places at specific moments in history. Indeed, Europeans prior to the late 1600s did not use the label, black, to refer to any race of people, Africans included. Only after the racialization of slavery by around 1680 did whiteness and blackness come to represent racial categories. Only at this historical juncture did the concept of a discrete white race begin to take shape. Slowly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the association with rationality and orderliness developed, and in this context whiteness came to signify an elite racial group. Viewed as a position of power, white identity was often sought by those who did not possess it. Immigrant workers in the new American industrial workplaces of the mid-nineteenth century from southern and eastern Europe aspired to and eventually procured whiteness, viewing its status as payment for the exploitation of their labor. Such shifts in the nature and boundaries of whiteness continued into the twentieth century. One of the reasons that whiteness has become an object of analysis in the 1990s revolves around the profound shifts in the construction of whiteness, blackness, and other racial identities that have taken place in the last years of the twentieth century.

How are students and other individuals to make sense of the assertion that whiteness is a social construction? How does such a concept inform the democratic goals of a critical pedagogy? Such questions form the conceptual basis of our discussion of whiteness, our attempt to construct a pedagogy of whiteness. In order to answer them in a manner that is helpful to Whites and other racial groups, it is important to focus on the nature of the social construction process. In this context John Fiske's (1993) notion of an ever-shifting and realigning power bloc is helpful. The discourses that shape whiteness are not unified and singular but diverse and contradictory. If one is looking for logical consistency from the social construction of whiteness, he or she is not going to find it. The discursive construction of whiteness like the work of any power bloc, aligns and dealigns itself around particular issues of race. For example, the discourse of white victimization that has emerged over the last two decades appears in response to particular historical moments such as the attempt to compensate for the oppression of non-Whites through preferential hiring and admissions policies. The future of such policies will help shape the

discourses that will realign to structure whiteness in the twenty-first century. These discourses, of course, hold profound material consequences for Western cultures, as they fashion and refashion power relations between differing social groups. Any pedagogy of critical multiculturalism or of whiteness itself involves engaging students in a rigorous tracking of this construction process. Such an operation when informed by critical notions of social justice, community, and democracy allows individuals insights into the inner workings of racialization, identity formation, and the etymology of racism—an empowering set of understandings. Armed with such concepts, they gain the ability to challenge and rethink whiteness around issues of racism and privilege. In this context questions about a white student's own identity begin to arise (Gallagher 1994; McMillen 1995; Keating 1995; Nakayama and Krizek 1995).

Such questioning and renegotiating induces us to consider whiteness in relation to other social forces—non-whiteness in particular. Stephen Haymes (1996) argues that to understand racial identity formation, we need to appreciate the way white is discursively represented as the polar opposite of black—a reflection of the Western tendency to privilege one concept in a binary opposition to another. The darkness-light, angel-devil discursive binarism—like other discursive constructions—has reproduced itself in the establishment of racial and ethnic categories. Through its relationship with blackness, whiteness configured itself as different, as not enslaved, as powerful, as aligned with destiny. In this bizarre manner blackness or Africanness empowered whiteness to gain self-consciousness, often via the racist depiction of the other. Such representations affirm the superiority and power of whiteness—again, its rationality, productivity, and orderliness *vis-à-vis* the chaos, laziness, and primitiveness of Africans and other non-Whites. Through its relation with Africanism, Whites gained knowledge of themselves as the racial barometer by which other groups were measured. Yet, in our understanding of the diversity within whiteness, this knowledge has meant more to some Whites than to others. Historically, poor whites have undoubtedly reaped the psychological wages of whiteness, but talk of white economic privilege in the late twentieth century leaves them with a feeling of puzzlement increasingly expressed as anger. Thus, to speak of white privilege unproblematically in a pedagogy of whiteness ignores the reality of diversity in whiteness (Fiske 1994; Morrison 1993; Keating 1995).

AVOIDING ESSENTIALISM: THE INSTABILITY OF WHITENESS

Diversity in whiteness demands our attention. Critical scholars must carefully attend to the subtle but crucial distinction between whiteness with its power to signify and white people. The diversity among white people makes sweeping generalizations about them dangerous and highly counterproductive to the goals of a critical pedagogy of whiteness. Indeed, it is not contradictory to argue that whiteness is a marker of privilege but that all white people are not able to take advantage of that privilege. It is difficult to convince a

working class white student of the ubiquity of white privilege when he or she is going to school, accumulating school debts, working at McDonalds for minimum wage, unable to get married because of financial stress, and holds little hope of upward socio-economic mobility. The lived experiences and anxieties of such individuals cannot be dismissed in a pedagogy of whiteness.

How, then, in the study and teaching of whiteness do we avoid essentializing white people as privileged, rationalistic, emotionally alienated people? Understanding the social/discursive construction of whiteness, students of whiteness refuse to search for its essential nature or its authentic core. Instead, critical analysts study the social, historical, rhetorical, and discursive context of whiteness, mapping the ways it makes itself visible and invisible, manifests its power, and shapes larger socio-political structures in relation to the micro-dynamics of everyday life. This, of course, is no easy task—indeed, it should keep us busy for a while. Its complexity and its recognition of ambiguity are central to the project's success. Since there is no fixed essence of whiteness, different white people can debate both the meaning of whiteness in general and its meaning in their own lives. Critical multiculturalists believe that such debates should take place in the context of racial history and analyses of power asymmetries in order to gain more than a superficial acquaintance with the issues. Nevertheless, diversity in whiteness is a fact of life, as various white people negotiate their relationship to whiteness in different ways. Yet, whiteness scholarship to this point has sometimes failed to recognize that its greatest problem is the lapse into essentialism.

In its most essential manifestations whiteness study has operated under the assumption that racial categories were permanent and fixed. In their attempt to deconstruct race in this context, essential whiteness scholars tend to reinscribe the fixity of racial difference. The pessimism emerging here is constructed by a form of racial determinism—white people will act in white ways because they are "just that way." A critical pedagogy of whiteness understands the contingency of the connection between rationalistic modernist whiteness and the actions of people with light-colored skin. The same, of course, is true with people with dark colored skin—they may not "act black." They may even "act white." Such anti-essential appreciations are central to whiteness study, as scholars historically contextualize their contemporary insights with references to the traditional confusion over racial delineations. Throughout U.S. history, for example, many federal and state agencies used only three racial categories—White, Negro, and Indian. Who fit where? How were Latino/as to be classified? What about Asians? Originally, the state of California classified Mexicans as white and Chinese as Indian. Later Chinese-Americans were grouped as Orientals, then Asians, then Pan Asians, and then Asian Pacific Americans. Analysis of such categorization indicates both the slipperiness of racial grouping and the American attempt to force heterogeneous racial configurations into a single category around similarities in skin tone, hair texture, and eye shape. Such biological criteria simply don't work in any logically consistent manner, thus frustrating the state's regulatory

efforts to impose a rationalistic racial order (Keating 1995; Rubin 1994; Gallagher 1994; Fiske 1994).

Thus, advocates of a critical pedagogy of whiteness refuse to use race as an essentialist grounding of identity since it is not a natural category. Not only is race an unnatural category, but its cultural boundaries are constantly negotiated and transgressed as individuals engage the forces and discourses that shape them. If we are not careful when using race as a social category, we can reify the perceived differences between black and white and lose sight of the cultural hybridity we all share. When teaching about whiteness we need to always view the concept in historical context, keeping in mind the situationally specific nature of the term. Our emphasis should continuously revolve around rewriting racial identity, as we point out the inaccuracies and inequities embedded in present racial configurations. Such an emphasis undermines fixed notions of racial identity that separate peoples from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Identity politics grounded on such fixed positions have often supported a form of authority garnered from membership in subordinated groups. This privilege derived from oppression assumes that particular forms of analysis can be spoken only by individuals who share a specific identity. In this essentialist cosmos it is inappropriate for a white man to ever criticize a black man, a Jew to ever disagree with a lesbian Latina. Such politics quickly destroy any solidarity among individuals from a variety of groups who want to pursue an egalitarian, democratic vision.

If we are unable to get beyond these fixed definitions of black and white identity, a pedagogy of whiteness in particular and multicultural education in general may construct impressions that racism is an inevitable feature of the human condition. Thus, the question emerges: can the multicultural analysis of racialized identities such as whiteness serve a democratic outcome? Critical multiculturalists take the question seriously, even though they strongly believe that such analysis is necessary in a multiracial, multicultural society. They take the question seriously because they have too often seen the divisive outcomes of essentialist forms of identity politics. The question induces us to scan carefully the cultural landscape for the negative consequences of multicultural analysis, learning in the process to recognize and anticipate the unexpected problems such activities may help create. Because the meaning of whiteness in late twentieth century societies is volatile, a pedagogy of whiteness must walk a Wallinda tightrope between racial essentialism on one side and a liberal color-blindness on the other. Proponents of a critical pedagogy of whiteness understand that the only antidote to racial essentialism is not a fatuous embrace of racial erasure. They embrace a middle ground position that first, explores the socially constructed, artificial, ephemeral nature of racial identities and second, they carefully trace the all-too-real effects of such identities (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, and Chennault 1998).

As such a pedagogy separates whiteness from white people, it understands the changing meaning of whiteness for young working class Whites. In this context it analyzes such individuals' view of themselves as racial victims

and their resulting efforts to build an emotional community around their whiteness. Here critical multiculturalists explore the sobering consequences such tendencies may hold for twenty-first century race relations. Ever aware of the ambiguities of whiteness, a critical pedagogy of whiteness appreciates the plight and pain of the young white working class while concurrently exposing the ways whiteness developed in such a context works to hide racial forms of socio-political and economic inequality. In the global culture of hyperreality with its increasingly dynamic forms of hybrid identities, the critical work of tracing these constructions of self *vis-à-vis* group becomes progressively more difficult. As hope of finding discrete, bounded notions of self-fade, so too do traditional sociological and educational methodologies of inquiry with their antiquated notions of identity. In the postmodern condition individuals must wear several identities as they travel in and out of multiple cultural locales. Gone is the memory of "genuine cultures" who pass along their mores and folkways unchanged to the next generation. In this configuration the Scots would still wear kilts and the Sioux their warbonnets. In this new, more complex world critical scholars understand the need to refigure racial analysis and identity formation after the crutch and safety of essentialism are removed (Luke 1994; Keating 1995; Thompson 1996; Gallagher 1994; Wellman 1996).

WHITE MUTATIONS IN THE 1990S: WHITENESS VISIBLE

Contradictory articulations of what it means to "feel white" at the end of the century when coupled with a panoply of socio-economic and political forces have undermined any stable notions of white identity. The identity politics of the last thirty years have generated a widespread angst about the meaning of whiteness and induced many Whites to confront for the first time their own ethnicity. Realizing they may not constitute a majority of the population for long, understanding that they have been racialized, recognizing challenges to white supremacy, watching themselves being labeled as oppressors in the eyes of the world, white people face an unprecedented crisis of whiteness. Any pedagogy of whiteness must understand the nuances and effects of this socio-cultural phenomenon if it is to speak to white people in the post-civil rights era. It must not simply dismiss the paradoxical concerns many white people express about pride in white culture in light of the fact that "everyone else" (meaning non-Whites) is talking about pride in theirs. Make no mistake; there is a new consciousness about race in contemporary Western societies (Gallagher 1994; Winant 1994; Rubin 1994).

This new consciousness induces Whites to ask "who are we?" Living in a racially charged environment where the traditionally marginalized have gained a good deal of media exposure, white students now know Whites occupy a racial category. When bell hooks argued in 1992 that Whites could assume their racial invisibility, she did not realize how quickly that invisibility would disappear. The crisis of whiteness has ended the notion of white racial

invisibility, substituting in its place questions about how Whites, young Whites in particular, will construct a new white identity in this new racial world. Critical multiculturalists appreciate the necessity of carefully monitoring the political and ideological dynamics that will be drawn upon in the (re)construction of whiteness. Ruth Frankenberg's assertion formulated in 1993 that the erasure of race and whiteness was the dominant form of racial thinking among Whites seems passé only a few years later. Her category of race cognizance among white people involves an awareness of racial inequity and an appreciation of subordinated cultures. In the racial awareness of the late 1990s does Frankenberg's sanguine delineation of white racial consciousness account for all the ways Whites might express such awareness? Though she certainly understood the complexity of the way whiteness might be positioned in a racial consciousness that understood inequality and valorized difference, Frankenberg was unprepared for the intensity of the struggle for white identity that would follow the publication of her book (hooks 1992; Frankenberg 1993).

BALL OF CONFUSION: THE WHITE IDENTITY CRISIS

This struggle has placed Whites in general and young Whites in particular in a terrifically confusing position. As Whites gain consciousness of the racialization of their identity some feel guilty about their association with a group complicit with racial oppression. Such shame can be immobilizing to the extent it interferes with the construction of a progressive white identity that is psychologically centered and capable of acting in opposition to racist activity. Often guilty Whites in the midst of the identity struggle will engage in a form of white self-denigration that expresses itself in a conceptualization of non-white cultures as superior to white culture—more authentic, natural, sacred. Other white individuals when confronted with the racialization of whiteness will react in a very different manner. Given the way conservatism has discursively shaped various cultural expressions in recent years, Whites in crisis often find greater cultural correspondence with right-wing racial codes and articulations of racial anxieties. When conservatives maintain that white people aren't allowed to be white any more, many young Whites believe that a conspiracy of anti-white minorities and multiculturalists is repressing their free expression of a white identity. This conviction fans the flames of white anger against non-Whites and ups the ante of racial hostility (Gallagher 1994; Winant 1994; Tatum 1994).

This reactionary form of the new white identity appropriates whiteness as the defiant signifier of the new self. After all the talk, argument, and litigation about race starting with the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, right-wing analysts discovered that they could engage in identity politics as well. As it latched on to the whiteness signifier, right-wing identity politics touted values such as the Eurocentric cultural canon, English language-only legislation, the symbol of family values, and the work ethic. Melding, of

course, such virtues with whiteness, right-wing leaders deployed their brand of ethnopolitics in a larger effort to as—Aaron Gresson (1995) labels it—recover white supremacy. Such an ideological construction expresses itself in increasingly bizarre and paranoid ways, as neo-White supremists begin to formulate racially deterministic single-bullet theories that blame non-Whites for all social ills and rally white patriots around opposition to practices such as interracial marriage. Since the white gene is recessive, the patriots fear white identity (purity) will be lost in "miscegenation."

The recovery construction comes from all quarters, education included. After *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ran an article describing the proliferation of whiteness studies, Russell Eisenman wrote a letter to the editor that touched on many themes of the recovery rhetoric. Arguing that "it is bad enough that whites are victims of a quota system called affirmative action which causes them (especially white males) to be discriminated against, to work (as I have in the past) for an incompetent supervisor," Eisenman felt the need to justify white virtue and competence. Touting white people's intellectual contributions, low crime rate, declining AIDS infection rate, Eisenman warned that because of immigration laws Whites will become a minority early in the next century. In the spirit of the recovery rhetoric Eisenman concludes that someone must defend white people because in the 1990s they are attacked from everywhere—whiteness studies scholarship and college courses in particular (Stowe 1996; Yudice 1995; Gresson 1995; Tanaka 1996; Eisenman 1995).

How do we deal with the anger of Eisenman and the millions of white males he represents? Indeed, we understand the simple-minded irony of his argument that someone needs to defend white males—the most powerful group by far in contemporary society. But the importance of Eisenman's argument does not rest on its rational basis; its social importance revolves around its emotionality, its perception of Whites under siege, its white anger. Eisenman is in crisis about his whiteness in a world, a hyperreality, where meaning is lost and depersonalization is the order of the day. Obviously, his whiteness is important to him as an identity and he is upset by its instability, its vilification by "others" who have uncovered whiteness's complicity in their own oppression. Identity politics take on new importance in a world as fragmented as ours, often emerging as a remedy for alienation and anonymity. Caught in the crisis of whiteness, Eisenman and countless white young people in various Western societies attempt to deal with the perception that they don't have an ethnicity or at least don't have one they feel is validated. Whiteness finds itself in an identity vacuum and needs help in the effort to construct a progressive, anti-racist white identity as an alternative to the white ethnic pride shaped by the right-wing and embraced by Whites such as Eisenman.

A cardinal aspect of the entire conversation about whiteness involves the fact that liberal and pluralist forms of multiculturalism and identity politics have not produced a compelling vision of a reconstructed white identity. A critical white identity that renounces its whiteness or is guilty about it or seeks

merely to court favor among non-Whites is ineffective in the struggle for justice, democracy, and self-efficacy. Here is a key moment in the larger effort to change impotent forms of multiculturalism: the necessity of creating a positive, proud, attractive, anti-racist white identity that is empowered to travel in and out of various racial/ethnic circles with confidence and empathy. Operating from such a position, Whites would not resent those Latino/a, Asian, and African immigrants who enter their new countries with a clear sense of their ethnic identities. Progressive Whites of the critical multicultural variety would value and learn from such immigrants, using such knowledge in a continuous effort to understand the social and cultural forces that shape the way they see themselves and the world. Such Whites would understand in these contexts of racial difference the social role of marginality—the localizing power marginality has been able to muster since the late 1960s to help oppressed peoples gain moral and political currency as compensation for their lowly position. This currency is exactly what Whites haven't possessed over the last couple of decades, and it has made them quite uncomfortable. Whites such as Pat Buchanan, Dan Quayle, and letter-writer Eisenman have felt that something was missing in their struggle with the white identity crisis, but they couldn't name it. The moral and political currency provided by marginality provides insight into their struggle.

The white identity crisis is real and cannot simply be dismissed as the angst of the privileged. While it is *in part* such an angst, it is also a manifestation of the complexity of identity as class and gender intersect with race/ethnicity, an expression of the emptiness of the postmodern condition, and an exhibition of the failure of modernist humanism to respond to the globalism engulfing it. In the attempt to claim the currency of marginality Whites referenced their immigrant grandparents' stories of struggle, assumed the status of European ethnic minorities, and revived ethnic practices long abandoned by second-generation descendants of immigrants. Such efforts could not solve the identity crisis, for the immigrant experience of marginalization with its linguistic and custom-related alienation was too far removed from the lived world of most contemporary Whites. Indeed, eating mousaka on holidays does not a marginalized Greek immigrant make. Students emerging from such identity struggles or families caught in them often find it easier to discern manifestations of African, indigenous, or Latino/a racialized meanings in literature, popular culture, and everyday life than white racialized meanings. How could they know what a white racialized meaning (an implicit or explicit reference to how being white affects one's or a group's life) entails when they were unaware of what it means to be white or even Polish, Italian, or Greek? Even when whiteness and white ethnicity are racialized, their specific meaning is still occluded.

There are presently few options for progressive, anti-racist young Whites who don't position themselves as "wannabe" Blacks or "wiggers" (a designation for white niggers). Too often they sense that there exists no good reason to be white (Yudice 1995; Gallagher 1994; Tanaka 1996; Winant 1994; Keating 1995). Henry Giroux (1995) points out that popular culture often provides

little hope for a critical whiteness, as evidenced in the violence of white youth films such as *Laws of Gravity* (1992), *Kalifornia* (1993), and *Natural Born Killers* (1994). And it doesn't take much racial insight to identify the white nihilism within a movie such as *Falling Down* (1993). In this film Michael Douglas is an average white guy victimized by women and minorities who blame him for all that is wrong and want compensation from him. He is tortured by Chicano gang members who want a toll for passing through their turf, by lying and scheming homeless people, by Blacks ready to cry "racism" at every juncture, and bosses who don't care about competence and qualifications (Clover 1993). When white audiences applaud and cheer Douglas's character D-Fens as he "opens fire" and leaves a trail of corpses behind him, they are embracing an aesthetic of white nihilism. Such hopelessness assumes there is no alternative for postmodern white people save taking people with them when they inevitably go down (fall down). A critical pedagogy of whiteness rejects such an alternative as it conceives new ways of being white (Kincheloe et al 1998).

REACTING TO THE IDENTITY CRISIS: WHITES POSITIONING THEMSELVES AS VICTIMS

A critical foundation of this pedagogy of whiteness involves monitoring the white reaction to the identity crisis; and a central feature of that reaction involves the attempts of Whites over the last couple of decades to position themselves as victims. Aaron Gresson (1995) is unambiguous about the white self-portrayal as victim, when he writes about the recovery of white domination by the portrayal of Blacks and other non-Whites as the new oppressors. In this context whiteness is constructed as a signifier of material deprivation and a litany of present-day grievances. Everybody but white males obtains advantages, the argument goes, as non-Whites undermine white progress by exploiting white guilt about a long-dead white racism. Such a rhetorical construction, Gresson contends, is a form of vampirism, as Whites positioning themselves as victims suck the blood of the moral indignation from Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans and use it to reposition themselves in the new racial order. "They" won't even let us have our own clubs and white organizations, white students protest, with the blood of moral indignation dripping from their mouths. A critical question asked by a pedagogy of whiteness concerns why many white students have such difficulty recognizing the long-term white domination of most existing school organizations. Why is this power dynamic consistently missed?

The same power illiteracy shapes white students' frequent concern with black history or black studies classes. Why can "they" have such classes, while we can't have white history or white studies classes? Such questions emanate from a belief in a colorblind society where everyone is equal. In this construct racially motivated organizations are racist because they are exclusive. Often formed as support organizations for non-white students that promote the development of social and professional networks, such black, Latino, Native

American, and Asian groups help such students negotiate the often-unfamiliar terrain of academia and the professional world. The need for such negotiation is often lost on Whites who do not perceive race neutrality as a way of maintaining an unjust status quo. Formal education rarely addresses the power illiteracy that plagues many white students. Often in my classes I am confronted by white students who equate all forms of prejudice—for example, black racism toward Whites is equal to white racism toward Blacks. White students are shocked to hear me make the argument that white racism holds more serious ramifications for Blacks than does black racism toward Whites because of the power inequities between Blacks and Whites. For example, I tell them, because Whites commonly control access to job hiring and job promotion—not to mention issues such as cultural capital—white racism holds a much greater chance of affecting black peoples' quality of life.

The color blind construct, the new discourse of white victimization and its rhetorical reversal works only if we assume that being white is no different than being any other race or ethnicity. White privilege must be denied even when it is obvious in its reality and its effects. Dangerous historical memories must be erased in a way that severs the connection between white people's contemporary privileged social location with historical patterns of injustice. When such a connection is destroyed, no one can interpret the relationship between white wealth and racial exploitation—the ethical, moral, and political dynamics of such a relationship never enter white consciousness. With such concepts "whited out" Whites can be represented as *the* victims of racism just as easily as the *National Enquirer* can claim that Bill Clinton made love to an alien. Such a socio-historical amnesia allows the Supreme Court to assure us that white racism at the end of the twentieth century is rare, found among a few white supremist organizations and a small number of racist black militants. This collective white denial of privilege inhibits questions and public reflection on how being white may provide benefits. Rare is the situation in this era of white recovery where public figures ask: do people ever get jobs and promotions because they're white (Gresson 1995; Gallagher 1994; Winant 1994; Rubin 1994; McIntosh 1995; Giroux 1992; Hacker 1992).

One of the great paradoxes of the end-of-the-century Western societies is their ability to deny what is most obvious: the privileged position of whiteness. Using their belief in a just world with equal opportunity, white students maintain the charade of white victimization. Critical multiculturalists intent on implementing a pedagogy of whiteness must understand the social context that constructs the denial, while at the same time appreciating the ways of seeing of white students who genuinely feel victimized. Critical teachers, thus, will not be surprised when they encounter white students who vehemently resent multicultural requirements as anti-white restrictions that subject them to charges of racism merely because they are white. Some white students see such curriculums as burdens and enter the classes with attitudes shaped accordingly. Multiculturalists teaching about whiteness and white privilege will not succeed if they are not ready to encounter such hostility.

This perception of victimization from every direction among many white students shapes the way they interpret the canon wars, the public conversation about political correctness, feminism, and affirmative action. The multicultural effort to construct an academic curriculum grounded on the values of inclusivity and social justice has been seen as not a battle between competing ideologies and pedagogical philosophies but as a simple punitive attack on white people. The economic decline of the last twenty years has been viewed similarly by many white people: because of liberal concern with racial injustice our (Whites) job possibilities are narrowing and our future looks dim. In such a context affirmative action can be portrayed as a monster, as the embodiment of an evil designed to punish white people. Thus, one hears (especially if one is white) a lot of white muttering in schools and workplaces about the climate of unfairness, of reverse racism. Such dominant group anger propels the engine of social regulation, as traditional victims of oppression become the causes of the society's and the dominant group's problems. White male anger intensifies in this ideological framing of the problem, as such men grow more and more threatened by privileged non-Whites and women (Sleeter 1993; Gallagher 1994; Willis 1995; Appiah 1995; Tanaka 1996).

Such white anger and resentment have opened a new racial order to mark the beginning of the twenty-first century. The new order is grounded on a new white consciousness emerging from the chaos of the white identity crisis. The emergence of such a consciousness is a serious social phenomenon and cannot be dismissed by proponents of a pedagogy of whiteness. Grounded around an admittedly näive concept of individual equality, the new white racial consciousness of the new racial order challenges the very foundations of a critical pedagogy grounded on a recognition of the interplay of power and social justice. Understanding this dynamic, proponents of a critical pedagogy of whiteness address both the ideological and interpersonal forces at work in this dangerous context. While we do not want to abandon the study of whiteness because it is dangerous and might anger some Whites, we also want to take seriously the complex reality of white anger and address it at a number of levels. One such level, for example, would involve the examination of the construction of the belief that non-Whites are dedicated to conflict with Whites. Where is the proof of such a belief and where did it come from? How does it shape the way many Whites see the world? When Whites act on the belief they tend to behave defensively and aggressively, thus fueling a dynamic of racial conflict—a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the new racial order built on this assumption of conflict, any advance in the socio-economic position of non-Whites is constructed as a gain made at white expense. Thus, the flames of white anger are fanned.

DECLINING WHITE POWER: THE DIALECTICS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

The white identity crisis and the anger that accompanies it are manifestations of the growing realization that white power is declining in light of dominant demographic trends. When power declines, its wielders guard their interests more zealously. Understanding that they will no longer constitute a majority of the U.S. population in the twenty-first century, Whites appreciate the challenges such a reality will present. Indeed, with the forces of history moving against it, whiteness's traditional fear of blackness is rearticulated in more panic-stricken terms. Indeed, whiteness in decline is represented as a loss of order and civility. The horror of Africa, so central to understanding the history of the U.S., reappears in a televised postmodern guise taunting Whites with its traditional desire for/fear of dichotomy. The taunting—expressed so overtly every NFL Sunday in the fall and winter by black linemen after the sack of white quarterbacks—is from "within" on the post-Civil Rights landscape at the end of the century. Its within *our* integrated neighborhood schools with their multicultural curriculums, *our* workplaces with their affirmative action, and *our* universities with their preferential admission policies. The fear within paralyzes many Whites, as they grow even more fearful watching non-Whites become more alienated. As white men cheer defensive linemen in pursuit of quarterbacks, they repress the haunting image of black retribution and the disadvantaged position that it portends for them. The rhetorical reversal of white victimization plays well at the subconscious level in this context.

The pain of the perception of a new psychological disprivilege within an old privilege gnaws at contemporary white people. While it must always be understood within the context of a material privilege, this psychological disprivilege of whiteness must be appreciated by those intent on teaching a pedagogy of whiteness. The new disprivilege emerges from the increasingly valued concept of difference and Whites' lack of it. White people can claim little "oppression capital" in a world where representations of one's or one's group's oppression seems—especially to white observers—to mean so much. Such an absence looms large in the minds of the white working class, who are the Whites who gain the least from white privilege and who perceive that they lose the most from the non-white exploitation of oppression capital. But is there really a disadvantage to being white in hyperreality? Is there a devaluation of whiteness that permeates the end-of-century social landscape? What are the implications of this new dialectic of whiteness, this yin-yang of whiteness for a pedagogy of such? How do we explore the damage of racism on those who have held it without diminishing the centrality of the ways such racism has harmed its victims? Answering such questions moves a pedagogy of whiteness to a dangerous terrain where its intentions can be challenged from a variety of directions. Questions such as "why do you want to demean white people" may be followed by inquiries including "why do you want to protect white people." Nothing will come easy in a pedagogy of whiteness