

Racial Identity Formation and the Revival of the Neo-Confederate Ideology

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Abstract

The construct of race is so pervasive in the United States that most people cannot remember a time when people were not raced. This is far from the truth. Not only is race a fairly recent construct in terms of the history of humanity, but also the construct of race is perpetuated as a method of power (Dyer, 1997). Race has been used to execute power through the establishment of geographical, architectural, institutional, ideological, and religious structures and designs (Foucault, 1984). It has also caused those who would have formerly been considered outsiders from an ethnic, cultural, or religious standpoint (e.g. the Irish and Italian early 20th Century immigrants) to be raced white in order to form larger hegemonic coalitions. This two-year ongoing poststructural research project uses interviews with educators, college students, and community members; participant observations of Civil War Reenactments; and collection of archival data to examine how racial identity formation influences students and others in the community who participate in the Neo-confederate subculture. Secondly, it reveals how racing has enacted emotional and physical violence against individuals whose subject identity is not within the mainstream. The goal is to determine the level of understanding of racial formation, the ideologies it produces, and how these constructs translate into racialized and violent actions. With these findings, the researcher will develop praxis that engage students from different cultures, races, and backgrounds in collaborative inquiries that lead to new findings regarding the relationship between racial formation history and its effect on their culture

Racial Identity Formation and the Revival of the Neo-Confederate Ideology

The construct of race is so pervasive in the United States that most people cannot remember a time or assume that there never was a time when people were identified according to any other construct. This is far from the truth. Not only is race a fairly recent construct in terms of the history of humanity, but also the formation of race has served as a method of power (Dyer, 1997). Race has been used to execute power through the establishment of geographical, architectural, institutional, ideological, and religious structures and designs (Foucault, 1984). It has also caused those who would have formerly been considered outsiders from an ethnic, cultural, or religious

standpoint—groups like the Irish and Italian immigrants during the turn of the 19th Century—to be raced white in order to form larger hegemonic coalitions.

This two-year ongoing poststructural research project uses interviews with educators, college students, and community members; participant observations of Civil War Reenactments; and collection of archival data to examine how racial identity formation influences students who participate in the Neo-confederate subculture as well as others in the community. It also addresses the desire of educators to reach these students in spite of their ideological differences. The goal is to determine the level of understanding of racial formation, the ideologies it produces, and how they translate into violent acts within the community. With these findings, the researcher will develop praxis that engage students from different cultures, races, and backgrounds in collaborative inquiries that lead to new findings regarding the relationship between racial formation history and its effect on their culture. The research question is: What is the role of racial identity formation in forming ideology and how do individuals perceive its affects on school culture.

This project assumes that race was invented as a major construct and conduit of European hegemony and that these efforts maintained the locus of power with the European colonizers. With these assumptions it also seeks knowledge of how race has served as a method of power and been used to institute geographical, architectural, institutional, religious, and governmental designs that propagate the goals of European supremacy (Dyer, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Another focus of this study is how hate groups, sectarians, fundamentalists, and other racist institutions need to maintain the idea of racial differences in order to further their agenda—how they ignore the cry of scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians who repeatedly remind them that the concept of race is not scientific. It focuses on the work of Dyers and others who explain that the mountain of scientific research firmly establishes it as pseudo-science (Spears, 1999). It is a socio-cultural concept, created and sustained in the minds of humans living in or aware of racialized societies. Finally, this study uses Foucault's (1977) effective history to examine the effects of power as used in the aforementioned apparatuses (Agnello, 2002; Arac, 1988; Chambers, 2001; Foucault, 1984; Rella, 1994)

This effective history examines how the idea of race has affected the types of icons, heroes, and symbols that proliferate in American culture including the Confederate flag (McGee, 1998; Moe, 1981; Omi & Winant, 1994; Outlaw, 1996). Regarding racialized discourse, Bakhtin (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981) critiques the need of the traditional scholars to shape a unitary and focused ideological language that places closure on any attempts from non-western non-European forces to reconstruct or recreate language in their own images. If these forces are successful, there will only be one meaning—only one interpretation of emotive words and symbols like the confederate flag—that meaning that is given to the people from those who are privileged to create language meaning. These meanings are then engendered by young American men and women (Beach & Myers, 2001) and even internalized by those who are being “othered” by this type of discourse (Freire, 2000; Gossett, 1997; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Keita, 2000; Makolkin, 1992).

McLaren (Giroux & McLaren, 1994) emphasizes the need for poststructuralists to continually deconstruct traditional discourses and especially the ideas of whiteness. McLaren suggests that educators must encourage students to inquire into the historical constructs that formulate the prevailing ideologies of today, “the heroic cult of modernism which has naturalized the power and privilege of ‘dead white men’ and accorded the pathology of domination the status of cultural reason has all but enshrined a history of decay, defeat, and moral panic.”

Violence and “the Gaze:” on Black Youth

Violence. The Bible says, “the Earth suffereth with violence; and the violent taketh by force.” What is violence? Does one have to use a weapon against another or touch another in order to exact violence against that other? Those in power—those with “agency,” those who are “us,” not “them”—get to define violence. Those in power might define violence as a physical act that prevents someone (of “us”) from exercising free will, causes harm to another (one of “us”), or denies (one of “us”) the basic human rights to which every (one of “us”) is entitled.

We went to Brownsboro, South Carolina, one weekend, my quiz bowl team and me. We rode on the yellow school bus, our team comprised eight high school students all at the tops of their

respective classes in the almost all-black high school where I taught. Another team traveled with us. This team was composed of all white students from a neighboring high school.

There were five boys on our team. The oldest, was a sixteen-year-old junior, who was smart as a whip. His grandmother and his aunt doted on him. His grandmother, ailing and aged with diabetes, would come immediately from her dialysis to make sure she was there with her daughter to see Matthew off on this tournament. It was a special day when her grandson, the only child of her long-deceased older daughter, was selected to represent his school at a prestigious university in another state.

Then there was darkly beautiful Janene, who, because she was the baby of the family with two older brothers, could whip any boy in the school. Her mother was a chemistry teacher in a neighboring system—but that apple did not fall far from the tree. In spite of Janene’s many state championship trophies in track and field; she was still better at Calculus than she was at throwing the shot putt. That night she wore her letter jacket proudly. Always a little insecure, she tried to project leadership and confidence even when she did not feel it. Even when her natural coconut skin and jet hair belied what the world told her, that she was too black, too big, too. . . too. . .too . . .

Larry, Mr. Preacher man, moved up one year in school years ago when they did such things. Always trying to impress others with his wit(ness), his unrecognized giftedness, Larry was a non-card carrying member of the moral majority (except they didn’t know it and probably would only allow him ex-officio status if they knew). No matter how much this preacher’s son tried to act like he belonged to “us,” “we” always had the inside that he was not truly one of “us”. The act against him that rainy November night would prove this eternally true.

With Larry there were two other young men, and the three of them had carried their team to many city championships in quiz bowl ever since they were in the fourth grade. These three unlikely paisanos were always together, and planned to repeat their successes in elementary and middle school while in high school. Larry was the oldest and as a sophomore, one grade ahead of the other two. Scott was the most ambitious, and Gabriel was the quiet, strong, athletic, and extraordinarily gifted of the three. Gabriel’s talent was evident when, during the weekly interteam competition he earned the honor of eo-captaining his team as a freshman. Two years after the shooting, Gabriel

would move in with my husband and me because he was having trouble at home. In spite of his troubles, Gabriel would deliver a powerful Valedictory address at the schools graduation—an address in which he focused on the problem with young black men and guns. In spite of these extraordinary achievements, to outsiders these young men looked just like any other three black hoods, out of place, out of mind.

The two other girls, Mona and Raynette were both magnet students to our Health Sciences program. Raynette was quiet, soft-spoken, and tried with all her effort to fit in—to be just like the other kids at this all-black high school. Raynette would have succeeded, had not she taken this trip to South Carolina—a trip that forced her to face horrors she never thought of and fear that gripped her to her very bones. Raynette had succeeded in blending in until someone in Brownsboro reminded her that being young and black was a curse, and she had to struggle with whether she wanted to be young or black any longer.

Mona, an instant leader in her class, on the team, and in the community was betrayed by her innocuous sheltered upbringing as an army brat. So far, Mona had learned how to stay just on the edge without being totally co-opted by any group's identity. That was what made her a leader. She was just far enough inside to know the secrets, but just far enough outside not to have to participate in the in-group's childish high school games. Mona was tall and brown-brown pretty. Mona worried too much about her weight, and never could grow her hair because she kept trying to do things to it to make herself more whitely beautiful. To this very day, Mona sticks to me like glue. Even after receiving a scholarship to a prestigious black university, Mona still calls or e-mails me once or twice every week. I believe Mona and Janene were more directly victimized and humiliated by the events in Carolina than any of the others.

Finally, there was Michael. Michael, like his angelic namesake, was quiet, spiritual, and thoughtful. What I remember most about Michael usually pertains to his mother. His mother was a beautiful woman, who raised Michael and his older sister mostly by herself. The first time I met Michael's mother, she was walking about a block from the school. It was the middle of a hot day and I had been away from school on an errand. I found it strange that Michael's mother would be walking to the school in the middle of the day. I stopped and offered her a ride. When I asked her why she was walking, she said that she did not own a car, but that she had a special meeting to attend at the

school. No, neither Michael nor his sister was in trouble; she just felt that she should be involved in school activities and had volunteered to work on a PTSO committee. Michael's mother worked downtown; so when she had to come to the school in the middle of the day she would walk the three miles to make sure she supported her children and was involved in making our school a success. What an admirable woman—and what an admirable son she had born. Since Michael was also a magnet student, the three younger boys adopted him into their group. Michael did not know it, but a few girls also wished to adopt him. He was so unassuming. He never stopped to think of such things.

We arrive at the hotel at about three in the afternoon. It is a nice place in a reputable neighborhood in North Brownsboro. Our other chaperone, Mrs. S, is Gabriel's mother. She has taken the day off from her job in management at a corporate investment office to accompany our group. I am glad. I like Mrs. S's company. Mrs. S is self-taught. She is the ultimate expression of self-accomplishment. She came from the wrong side of the tracks and after ending one oppressive marriage, found herself and someone who loved her as she deserved to be loved. She is also a reader, like me, so we have lots to talk about. The first time I really ever talked to Mrs. S, was a Saturday, when a group of black women activists were holding a march called the "Mourning Mother's March" against black-on-black youth violence. We marched from one of the city's largest black neighborhoods to City Hall in order to demonstrate our solidarity to this cause. Mrs. S and I marched next to our mayor, a white former-college professor who later became a United States congressman. The mayor impressed me with his very presence at this event. Mrs. S and I talked all the way past the shotgun houses, across the river, and through downtown. By the time we reached our destination, we were instant friends. Now we have withstood what neither of us can adequately describe to others, so we will always be dear friends. Our friendship was borne of the tragedy that happened that Friday night in Brownsboro.

After everyone received their keys and unpacked in their rooms, we reunited in the room that Mrs. S. and I shared. A couple of the girls asked if I would call the desk and request an iron for them to use. Two young white men, one dressed in the uniform of a security guard and another dressed in the shirt and tie uniform of hotel

representative delivered the iron. We had small talk with these two young men and they left.

We then set up our buzzer systems, divided into teams, and practiced for a couple of hours with the team dividing into two opposing groups while I read practice questions to the group. After practice, we walked across the street to the mall. It was a little misty, with a light shower falling just enough to let you know the clouds were looming, but not enough to stop you from thinking things were all right. Most of these kids did not have much money, but there is always some invisible magnet that draws them to the nearest mall. While the kids surveyed the mall, Mrs. S and I sat in the food court and talked about families, husbands, children, people we both knew from high school, worries, politics, and anything else we could cram into two hours.

The kids finally returned from the expedition in the mall and we all walked across a divided four-lane highway to the hotel. By then, it was dark outside and the rain had increased slightly. The droplets tapped me on the shoulder, but I tried my best to ignore them so the kids would not complain about getting wet. When we returned to the hotel we practiced another hour after which I gave the usual safety rules: no leaving the hotel property; lights out at 11:00; and most importantly, no visiting in rooms of the opposite sex. (Just think, if I had let them go into each other's rooms, this tragedy might never have occurred.)

Mrs. S and I are startled by a call from the front desk. They need me to come to the hotel lobby immediately. I leave and go down to the lobby. As I exit the elevator, I see teary-eyed Janene and Mona sitting on a bench directly across from the check-in counter. I ask the clerk, who happens to be one of the young men who brought us our iron earlier, what has happened. He says the security guard saw "them" acting suspicious and arrested "them." I then ask the security guard, who is also behind the counter, what they have done. He says that he was walking around the back of the hotel by the pool when he saw a group of black kids (he "saw a group of black kids"—those were his exact words) standing around the pool looking suspicious, so he figured they must have been selling drugs or something. I reminded him that these girls were the same ones who were in my room when he

came there earlier to deliver the iron. Besides, Janene had that all-important letter jacket on, so it was obvious she was with our group.

The guard told me that he hadn't done anything but fire this pistol over their heads to scare them into stopping. He then took out the pistol and showed it to me. It looked to my former police eyes like the .38 revolvers I used to carry as an Air Force policewoman. He said he only fired blanks and the boys and one girl ran and got away but these two girls did not. I asked him again why he shot at them, and again he said that he "saw a group of black kids who looked suspicious;" so he tried to sneak up on "them," but they must have seen the light reflect off the muzzle of his gun and they ran. He said to me that usually when "we" (in my naivete, I wonder, "who the hell is 'we?'") see a group of black kids huddled in a group we assume they are up trying to sell drugs or something else illegal.

I later discovered that the two girls (Janene and Mona) attempted to run to the front of the hotel, but the boys and Raynette ran inside through the back poolside entrance. The guard ran after the two girls. Since they were both in their bedroom shoes, one of them stumbled, allowing the guard to catch them. Once he caught them, he had them kneel in the rain on the wet cement, handcuffed them, and took them into the hotel lobby where they were forced to sit while hotel guests paraded in and out of the building. The guard only removed the handcuffs immediately prior to my arrival at the lobby.

I will not bore you with the details of the remainder of our dispute with the hotel. You probably would not care to know that the hotel denied any culpability in this incident even after the Brownsboro police arrived and issued a warrant for the arrest of the security guard (who, by the time the police arrived, had absconded) on a charge of illegal discharge of a firearm.

What I will tell you is what happened after the police took our statements. I called my principal, and we decided we had to stay at the hotel since we couldn't afford to go somewhere else. My kids were scared. Scared is the situation that one feels when one feels danger is imminent. They all asked to sleep in my room, which I allowed them to do after we had called parents and I had prayed. They talked all night and I wrote all night. I refused to cry, because it would generate fear among my kids if I appeared not to be holding it together.

Predictably, we did pitifully at the tournament the next day. When we finally got on the road, it was dark. I lay across two seats in that yellow bus in the dark, the rain was pouring by now, with my legs extended across the seats, my Grandma's handmade quilt covered my entire body, and for four dark hours I either slept fitfully or cried quietly.

After the shooting incident, I tried to repair my spirit and bring my mind back to the middle. I could not believe how much more racist I had become in the four short years since my return to the South. Coming to the same school for two years after the year of the shooting and seeing the same students whom I felt I had failed to protect gave me mixed feelings that migrated from sadness, to anger, to despair. Consequently, I sought employment in another system. Eventually, I was recruited by the principal of the high school just a few blocks from where I lived in an adjacent county, a county unofficially designated for white flight. Unfortunately, I did not do my homework; and it was not until I began to teach Elie Wiesel's (1969) *Night* that I realized that people with ideas like mine were not welcome in a system like this. I left the predominately black school in the hopes that the lack of exposure to reminders of the incident would bring me back to the ideological middle; instead, I ended up closer to the extreme of emotions precipitated by reminders of how normalized racializing can be in our world. This part of me I could not love. I had to do something.

By this time I was studying for my PhD and enrolled in a data collection course. As a part of this course, I decided to study the members of this community who so unabashedly waved the Confederate Flag and issued racist epithets. According to my sources, many whites in this community supported or were actively involved in the Klan, and encouraged the suppression of anti-racist discourse of any kind. I felt I needed to talk to the people who influenced these students, their teachers, administrators, community members, and parents. I intentionally chose not to interview students as a part of this study, because I did not know what kind of harm my interview would cause to them.

The results of my initial study were so interesting that I decided to continue it into a second year; but not before parents circulated a petition requesting my dismissal on the grounds that I was teaching books like *Night* and Ernest Gaines (1983) *A Gathering of Old Men*, books that parents and

other teachers thought were unsuitable for their students. I was told on several occasions that I did not “fit in” this environment and my occasional complaints about the wear of Confederate paraphernalia by students were not acceptable in this community. I decided it was in my best interest to accept the full-time assistantship that the University offered me and get a break from Dodge before I decided what to do with the rest of my life. I left the system and continued my research by interviewing future teachers at UGA, parents in the university community, and anyone else who I found had an interesting story to tell. What I have found is that the issue goes much deeper than the Confederate Flag—that the issue is not this symbol of racism but whiteness and the idea of racializing in general (Apple, 1979; Britzman, 1994; L. Delpit, 1995; L. D. Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Du Bois, 1953; Fanon, 1967; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Johnson-Bailey, 1998).

The Initial Research Project

This project has paralleled my advancement in theoretical understanding of how I should approach the issues that concern me during the dissertation research phase of my PhD program. In that journey I have become attracted to postmodernism and poststructuralism, with their de-centering of the subject, rhizomatic formations of knowledge and power, non-linear analysis of history, and especially their concepts of the diasporic nature of power (Arac, 1988; Baudrillard, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1989; Derrida & Caputo, 1997; Foucault, 1977, 1984; Lyotard, 1984). I am also interested in womanist/feminist theory and praxis inasmuch as it deconstructs the “master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984), proposes the questioning of our own subjectivities as educators and teaches this praxis to students, thereby, making the issues related to power, voice, positionality, and agency central to the new praxis for all visionary educators (Boxer, 1998; Hooks, 1994; Johnson-Bailey, 1998; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Weiler, 1987). Finally, I have been informed and become repentant after studying “postcolonial,” and what Smith (2002) calls “decolonizing” literature. I now realize that racializing and colonization are as intertwined as kudzu and weeds on a Georgia hillside.

One notable absence you will note from my theoretical foundation is that of critical race theory. I have no critique of these theories and enjoy and use the thoughts of some of these theorists when it fits with the project; but what makes me uncomfortable is the recent focus of these theories on the idea of the “talented tenth,” an idea that harkens back to the time of Du Bois and the Niagara Movement. Perhaps we should follow the advice of Cornell West (1994) and stop looking for a

messiah to bring black folks to the Promised Land. Perhaps also, we, as people raced black, should think in terms of a talented 90th instead of a talented tenth. With this type of thinking, we would no longer follow the racialized practice of considering those who are gifted and successful as the exception, and instead believe that all of us have the capacity for self-actualization. This mode of thinking fits what Lani Guinier (Guinier & Torres, 2002) calls an act of “magic realism” because it treats an extraordinary event as if it occurred everyday. In this life of magic realism, the exception would be those of us who did not realize our potential. As far as current thinking about race, I am sure that I would not qualify for the talented tenth based on either Du Bois’s original configuration or any modern adjustments to that standard. Even though I take from race theory what I can embrace and put the other on a side table; I will always, forever, be working the racing problems in the space where I am planted regardless of what theory I embrace.

Data Stories

In the course of this study I have collected data stories and interviews from such a large and diverse group of people that space does not allow me to present each story. I hope that the ones I have chosen will impart the major facets developed during this study. After reading and re-reading Michel Foucault’s “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1977 Pp. 139-164) and critiques of his idea of “effective history” (Arac, 1988; Breuer, 1989; Chambers, 2001; Foucault, 1977), I believe that Foucault’s approach (he eschews calling it a “philosophy” or even “methodology”) to the analysis of power apparatus and their effects works best for my own efforts. There are two reasons why this is true. First, postmodernism in general and Foucault in particular are structured so that not only other theoretical regimes but its own are constantly in a state of critique. This allows for changing knowledge, visionary developments and ideas, and what Foucault calls the deveneration and parody of “monuments,” the “dissociation” of “ancient continuities,” and a “destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge” (Foucault, 1977 p. 164). This effective history deconstructs apparatuses used by white supremacists to advance a new (but old) epistemology, especially by using so-called “cultural literacy” and “white history” as posited on sites like the infamous “Stormfront” white supremacist website.

Another concern of effective history is the approach to power as neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Foucault’s effective history holds that power “doesn’t only weight on us as a force that says no,” it also “traverses and produces things,” “induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and

produces discourse” (1984 p. 61). Foucault’s theory of power fits nicely for those who have been identified as victims for generations. These include the so-called “marginalized” (who are no longer on the margins since there is no longer a center), the racialized, economically disenfranchised, the so-called “handicapped,” the mentally ill, the prisoner, the rape victim(ized), children, the hip-hop generation, those pejoratively called “trailer trash,” those with leprocized diseases (SARS, AIDS, Ebola, Sickle-cell), and the gendered other. Cornel West (1994), a visionary in his own right, made a statement that sounded strikingly postmodern to me. He said that people could be victimized without becoming victims.

Given Foucault’s theory of power and his effective history approach along with West’s theme of the non-victim, I will try and dispense with totalizing labels like these and speak of what agents, apparatus, and discourses do. I will attempt to “distinguish among events,” “differentiate the networks at levels to which they belong,” and “reconstitute the lines” where they “are connected and engender one another” (Foucault, 1984 p. 56). In other words, I will not (just as Foucault did not) attempt to give an effective history of the whole of those who have been racialized, of all the effects of the apparatuses used to race people or the apparatuses used to perpetuate white supremacy. Instead, I will give examples from my own qualitative and archival research that demonstrate the effects of these phenomena on people in the North American South.

Racializing Incidents

In citing incidents of racializing, I would like to focus on three particular individuals whom I interviewed during this study. The first is Miss Sadie, an elderly woman of African descent whose house was firebombed by the Klan during the Civil Rights Era. The second is Leah, a Jewish high school teacher and drama coach who has suffered numerous incidents of racializing and harassment during her 20 odd years in her current assignment. The third is Matthew, a government executive whom I knew as a child, and who shared many of the same racing experiences that I did during that period.

Miss Sadie

I called Miss Sadie after her daughter-in-law shared that her house had been firebombed during the Civil Rights movement because her son had marched for integration. Miss Sadie agreed to be interviewed on Saturday, November 22, 2002. She gave me directions to her house from the

university. I couldn't wait until the next Saturday. I always get excited about sitting around with older people and letting them regale me with tales of the past. Sometimes their pasts are quite painful, but in sharing with me, I feel that they are giving their story immortality. I knew I would not be disappointed with my interview with Miss Sadie.

Saturday morning, I went by the bookstore and bought a baseball cap with the school emblem on it for Miss Sadie. I didn't know what else to get her; but I knew most old ladies in the South like to collect hats. I drove away from the city as the malls and fast food restaurants gave way to farmhouses, cows, grassy meadows, and horses. I turned south off the main highway, carefully following Miss Sadie's directions while trying to allow the landscape to build a picture of the communities that occupy this part of the state. I drove through wide expanses where nothingness told the story of plantations long ago deserted--farms hibernating with the winter vegetation. This could have been any small town in this state. The usual pine trees stood guard on their stationary outposts while the hawks flew high and gracefully providing a mobile patrol for the area. The houses that lined the streets were usually colonial cottages with a few Georgian plantation houses near its very center. At the center of town, a few young black people stood sentry on the corner in front of the dollar store, expectant for the nothing that was about to happen. While they did perk at the sight of my bright red sports car, I could see a visible slump in their countenance when they realized that, like most everyone else, I was just passing through.

I turned instinctively the opposite direction than the one Miss Sadie told me because I had a feeling she thought I was coming from the opposite direction. I spotted the library, a new modern building sitting in a fork at the road. I took the northwest fork, drove about one mile and passed what appeared to be a brand new high school. Past the high school I could tell that suburban sprawl had hit this small town. I must have passed three new subdivisions before I arrived at the one where Miss Sadie lived. As I turned into her subdivision, I noticed that all the neighbors I saw were white and that they all waved in the southern fashion. I also noticed that they would stop raking leaves, playing with the kids, or whatever they were doing to keep an eye on that red car until I was out of their sight. I guess it was the red car. I drove to the end of the entrance street where it turned to the left towards Miss Sadie's house.

The house was slate sided white shuttered two-story cottage. It's front yard had a few dying flowers but it seemed that during the spring and summer someone probably took good care of it. It was wooded in the back and similar houses aligned both sides. The sun was bright and wintry. I realized long ago that the sun was different in the winter. Today's sun was that typical silvery sun. Everything that sun touched caught a silvery shimmer, as if there were microscopic icicles being cast about by the star. The winter sun makes everything--even the death around it--seem bright and full of potential. It can make the dark sediments of pine bark shine, as well as dying grass. It makes the radiant pomegranate color of the trees seem brighter and full of life even though they are proceeding toward a long winter death. Dead pine needles cloaking the ground look as if they want to dance when the sunlight touches them. Miss Sadie's house was surrounded with sunlight or sunlight reflected and refracted. Miss Sadie's house spoke peace to me.

I walked up onto the porch and rang the doorbell. It took Miss Sadie about five minutes to get to the door. She said to me, "Hello, T___ #2" (referring to the fact that I looked like my sister). I said hello and gave her a hug. Miss Sadie was dressed in a pale blue housecoat with faded vertical stripes crossing it in various hues of pink and white. She wore her bedroom shoes, and her silver hair was knotted atop her head. She immediately invited me inside.

Miss Sadie did as most elderly women from the South do when someone visits, and escorted me to her bedroom where she could sit in her favorite chair by the window. She used a walker, but I had a feeling that if the right gospel song played on the radio, she would let loose with a good shout. She seemed happy and serene. Her bedroom was cozy and warm. It's quilts and old pictures belied this otherwise modern home that Miss Sadie shared with her daughter and grandson. A picture of Miss Sadie's father sat prominently on her dresser, overwhelming the other pictures of her nine children and numerous grand and great-grandchildren.

I asked Miss Sadie if she minded me videotaping the interview and she said not as long as I let her put on her wig. I told her I didn't think she needed a wig (and I was being sincere). Anyway, she insisted and placed a cute silver bobbed wig on her head, positioned it perfectly, and never once consulted the mirror to see if it was strait. She looked great. I noticed the sun reflected her natural hair much more prettily than it did the wig. There was a luminescent quality to Miss Sadie's natural silver hair—quite like leaded crystal against fine pewter. As she sat in that rocking chair, she

looked like an angel. Like the ones on that TV show just after they tell their “assignment” that they are “an angel, sent by God.” The silver sunlight wrapped itself around her chocolate velvet skin like waves of water flowing over rounded worn pebbles in a gentle brook. The sun seemed there to serve her—to keep her smooth wrinkleless face warm and her arthritic joints pain-free.

As I mentioned earlier, Miss Sadie’s house was firebombed during the 1970’s. She recounts the incident thusly:

Miss Sadie: *They were holding a meeting the night they threw the bomb. They threw two bombs, one in my house and one in the other leaders house across the street. I was at home and my youngest son was at home. My youngest daughter who lives with me now, she wasn’t at home she was at the meeting. And my son R_____ was here. And the only reason he wasn’t at the meeting was that he had a part time job after school at the cotton mill, and he had some lessons to get out. And I was in the bathroom and I heard a noise. I thought he had dropped something. Then he called me and told me they had threw a bomb. The bomb came in the dining room window and it had set the curtains on fire. I had a pasteboard box on the floor and it had some glasses in it. And I had a wall cabinet with glass doors. It cracked that glass. And it burned the pasteboard box and broke the glasses. And I told my son to go get the hose to put the fire out. And he did. And we started to go get my [other] son and [R_____] got the hook gun. [She told R_____ to get the hook gun because] I felt like the mayor was the cause of it cause the mayor was the one who made him get into the car. [The mayor had pulled up beside one of Miss Sadie’s son’s one day as he was walking home and told him to get into his car. During the conversation between the mayor and Miss Sadie’s son the mayor gave a stern warning and implied the threat of physical violence if Miss Sadie’s son led a march to protest segregation]. And I told my son to shoot the window [in the mayor’s house]. And the mayor must have been the cause of it cause after that he took his wife and moved away. That same night after the word got out everybody came to the house. And I asked G_____ had he locked the back door. He said no. So I went to the back door and there was water on the floor and I slipped and knocked my shoulder out of joint. So my son got somebody else to drive his car and take me to the hospital; and when I got to the hospital there was several old [white] men sitting*

outside the hospital. And I asked them what they were doing there. And they said, "I don't know why I'm out here, somebody just told me to be here tonight." See? They was expecting it'd be a whole lot of black people to come in.

Vj: So was anyone injured in the fire?

Miss Sadie: Naw . Cause they were at the meeting.

Vj: Did it burn the house down?

Miss Sadie: Naw. Because it was the little white man. I think he was a policemen. And he claimed he was coming to work and he saw the blaze when he went by the house. And then he notified the firehouse. And after that my neighbor, her husband got sick. And I went over to help her. And she had called the ambulance to come and get [her husband]. And she was trying to get him some socks on, when who should come to the door but this little fireman. And he looked and saw me and looked like he almost fell down. And I didn't say nothing to him and he didn't say nothing to me. And later on I was at the post office and I saw him again. And I said, "It is mighty funny that every time I turn around there you are." And he said "I didn't have nothing to do with it Miss Sadie." And I said, "God wouldn't keep putting you up in my face every time I turn around." And I had my arm in a sling for a while. And of course I said some bad words. And I was walking to town and I met this white woman—she had been good to me—and she said, "Lord Sadie, what's the matter with your arm?" I said, "Some SOB crawled on their belly and come to my house and I don't care if it's a he or a she, if I catch them even if it's under the red light, their mine." And she crawled up in a knot. And the window. At the warehouse down there they charged me too much for the window [to replace the one broken when the house was firebombed]. They charged me 50 dollars. So I stayed mad about it. I went on to the bank and they know me down there. And they asked me the same thing. "Sadie, what happened.?" And the water bill came. And I told the children I said, "You know, I always carry a twenty dollar bill down to pay for my water bill. And she always give me back my twenty-dollar bill plus the change for a twenty-dollar bill. I said so I ain't worried about it, cause I paid for the water but the city paid for that window." So it verily died down. But I believe its worse now than it was then. They built a new school and I heard that the principal said he was going to get rid of all the problems [meaning black children] before they get

into the new school. And he did. He sent all the black children to the alternative school. And since a little altercation come up they sent some white children to cover their tracks.

Vj: So you feel they punish white kids but differently?

Miss Sadie: I don't know but they tell me they found a gun on one of them. And the principal's son and a group of them they broke into the school and they went to the cabinet and got enough chemicals to make a bomb in the bathroom. All those children finished school. The same boy that had the gun, his daddy was a policeman, and after that they say he came back with mace. They say the school is going to be investigated, because there are only one or two black teachers.

Vj: But do you feel like they have respect for you?

Miss Sadie: Well, I think they still remember.

Leah Steiner

Today Leah is at school and in her room long before most people arrive. She shares a small building with three Social Studies teachers and a Latin instructor. Leah teaches U.S. Government, Sociology, and drama. When I enter Leah's classroom, I notice that her pale yellow walls are covered with Broadway playbills and posters advertising Broadway plays. Some of the posters are even signed by actors or other members of the production team. Leah has a dark wood pedestal style podium in the front of her room. Behind her podium, her tall stool with its corduroy cushioned chair sits waiting on Leah to begin the day's lectures.

The desks in Leah's room are split into two groups that form about five rows of three desks and face each other against two opposite walls. Leah's desk is in the rear of the room. She has papers piled almost two feet high. Behind Leah's desk is a filing cabinet completely covered in bumper stickers advertising several liberal causes including environmental causes and women's rights. Leah's care about getting the message out is evident. Directly behind Leah's desk there is a door that opens to the backstage of the school's new ultramodern auditorium. Leah is the Queen of the drama center. One must get through Leah in order to use the auditorium or operate the sophisticated audio-visual equipment inside it.

I have discovered much about Leah in the past six months. When I first met Leah, I thought she was somewhat standoffish. She would not speak to me unless I initiated the conversation. Likewise, she didn't seem to socialize with many other faculty members. I later discovered that Leah was Jewish, which in this small Protestant community might [in their minds] put her somewhere on the cultural margins. Leah is also very liberal with regards to her ideas about race and other politically charged issues.

Leah even dresses differently from the other teachers. On any given day Leah is probably dressed in a long-sleeved shirt, front-buttoned, in muted blue, burgundy, or green stripes, or a solid color that is likewise muted. She usually wears khakis, gabardine, or corduroy pants and oxford type shoes. When the occasion calls for dressing up, Leah will wear similar clothing in a more conservative and formal color grouping such as black pants and starched white shirt.

My interview with Leah was one of the most informative and most disturbing of all. Not only has Leah had to confront elements of the KKK directly from her students, she also has had to deal with anti-Semitism. At 52 years of age, Leah projects a cool, but almost militaristic air. Leah styles her brown hair in a short bob and wears plain military style glasses. If one listens carefully during her classes one might hear her talking emotionally about the Holocaust, the Civil War, or the Civil Rights Movement. Leah and her students have staged a total of three productions this school year. She is an active believer and participant in her religion's observances and beliefs. This combined with the fact that Leah is originally from the Midwest, gives her a unique perspective on the problem. In spite of the problems Leah has encountered in this school, problems that become apparent in the course of the interview, she has remained there for over 20 years. She has developed a small support group, but for the most part she keeps to herself and as she puts it, "stays out of the line of fire."

Leah also has painful memories of being raced not only during her childhood in the Midwest, but also in the school located in a small southern town.

vj – You think there are klan members in this community?

ls – Oh, yeah! There's one at _____ high school.

vj – You think people are still prejudiced against Jews?

ls- Yes – Absolutely. When we were at the old high school, and I didn't know if it was a teacher or a student, but everyday when I came into my room there was a Nazi sign on my board.

vj – No! Oh my God! So what did you do about it?

ls – I reported it and I erased it every day. But I couldn't get anybody to do anything. [The incidents] lasted from about the middle of the year to the end of the year.

ls – This year was the first year we had a National Memorial Menorah. And I watched it on Whittle (classroom television broadcast) and some kid in the back of my room said that was the dirty Jew's Christmas.

vj – Did he know you were Jewish?

ls – It doesn't matter.

vj – You're right. It doesn't matter.

ls – I didn't say anything because I was so shocked. I'm trying to help these kids' lives and nobody said anything.

vj – What about [anti-Semitic remarks or actions] from adults, parents?

ls – Oh. Absolutely! At the lunch table this was when they had a controversy about prayer before football games. They thought they should always have prayer and it shouldn't be interdenominational, but should be the prayer the community would embrace and, I don't remember the comment that was made.

But I didn't agree and I got up and left. One person said the one thing that was wrong with me was that I wasn't Baptist.

vj – And they probably said that as a joke.

ls – No. They were serious.

vj – So, when you deal with parents, do you have any problems?

ls – I don't usually have problems with parents. But I remember at the end of each year the faculty got together and go out to eat. I used to go, but I haven't been since this happened. Somebody was leaving and we were trying to figure out what each person owed off the ticket. And the person sitting next to [another faculty member] felt that [this faculty member gave] an insufficient tip and they called her a "stingy Jew." I was so shocked[that] it was said, I didn't say anything. I just got up and left. But I don't go around that person anymore.

vj – So are any of these people still working around the high school?

ls – Yeah.

vj – Do you feel you have any influence over the policies at school?

ls – No. Because I don't have any influence. I just try to dodge the bullets. I have to take personal days for Jewish holidays that fall on school days. You know to get off that day you have to take a personal day and in thirty years that adds up to sixty days.

vj – Wow. That's really sad.

Comments on Leah's Interview

As an African-American interviewing a Jewish woman, this interview showed my own presuppositions and failures as much as it does those whom Leah identifies as acting in a racist manner. Two comments illuminate this issue. The first is when I ask Leah if the students who made the comment about the “dirty Jewish holiday” knew she was Jewish. Leah responded that it should not matter. My question places me in the discursive position oftentimes occupied by white people when dealing with racializing incidents. In other words, my question suggests that if the student does not know Leah is Jewish, this fact mitigates his anti-Semitic remark. The fact is, as Leah points out, that it does not matter if a member of the target group is present, the remark is no less demeaning. Another comment that I made equally disturbs me. When Leah explains the things other educators at the school have said about Jews in general and her in particular, I try to mitigate their remarks by suggesting that they were joking. Again, I am reminded of Foucault's focus on what discourses do (not necessarily what they say or what they “mean”). If the comment offends, it does not matter that it was said as a joke. For a moment in our interview, the “white girl” in me came out through my brown skin and I assumed the role of white advocate. What a troubling thought.

Matthew

Matthew is a childhood acquaintance who, because he and I are about the same age and grew up in the same area, mirrors many of my own experiences growing up raced. Matthew comes from a large southern family. His family, like most of the black families in our neighborhood, settled in the hills north of the mid-sized southern town in the 1940's. Most came from the county north of the city in search of employment in the nearby cotton mills or as domestic workers for wealthy

white families. Many of the men in these families used the abundant lumber in that area to run saw-milling businesses. The progeny of these men and women still lived in that area until the 1970's when many went away to college while others obtained more prominent employment and built houses in other parts of town.

Matthew and I attended the same "colored" elementary school during the 1960's from first to fourth grade. A group of black children from our neighborhood would have to walk about 2 miles to catch the city bus that dropped us off about four blocks from the inner city school. As he states in his interview, Matthew was a stellar academic student until he entered the white neighborhood school in 1967. This school was one of the most affluent in the city. Like my own experiences, it was not until he entered this school that he became aware of being raced "colored." Matthew's grades began to drop as the school began to pull all black students from class each afternoon and make them go to a designated area below the auditorium for special classes. The school said that we were behind because we had previously attended the "colored" school.

Matthew began his descent into trouble around this time. Although the white children and adults respected him for his athletic prowess, in the classroom they constantly reminded him and other black children that we were not and would never be able to meet the skills of white children. Throughout the remaining years of elementary school and high school, Matthew almost became a self-fulfilling prophecy. He dropped out of high school and entered the Army during the Vietnam War. Luckily, Matthew avoided service in Vietnam, instead serving most of his career in Germany.

When Matthew entered the army he discovered that he had a gift with electronics. He was assigned to the Signal Corps, where he learned to operate communications and signaling equipment. After serving his term, Matthew was honorably discharged and obtained his GED. He then attended technical school at night and worked during the day. He earned a certificate in electronics.

This certificate paved the way for Matthew to obtain employment with the railroad as a signal repairman. As he notes in the interview, the very technical area in which Matthew worked at the railroad was a predominately white domain until he went to work there. He comments in his interview on how they warned him that they would be watching him closely to make sure he didn't mess up. But Matthew had already messed up the status quo at the railroad company by becoming

the first signal repairman in what he felt was a field dominated by nepotism. His performance at the railroad helped Matthew obtain a high-level government job. Ironically, Matthew now inspects the railroad companies where he used to work. He travels extensively as a part of his job as electronics inspector and accident investigator.

Matthew and his family now live in a large two-story home flanked by a lake in one of the suburbs of a large southern town. He married a hometown girl, and they have three children. The two girls are now in college, and their son is in high school. Family is very important to Matthew and his wife. All three of their children have been trained in music and dance. One of his daughters danced in both an Olympic opening ceremony and a Super bowl halftime show. Although he maintains close contact with his family, Matthew, like the rest of our peers, has formed new groups of friends and associates through his church, his job, and his community activism.

Matthew usually comes to family and community events clad in his signature leather box cap atop his cleanly shaved head. His usual attire includes jeans or khakis, and sweaters. Matthew has a ready broad smile that lights his six-foot brown sugar frame. His eyes come to life when he speaks of something about which he cares strongly. A consummate storyteller, Matthew can't tell a funny story from our childhood without breaking into intermittent laughter. He has that extraordinary ability to go from laughter to somberness with a seamless change of expression and voice. He cannot resist a challenge involving either a computer problem or some sort of electronic dilemma around his house or anyone else's. He loves the outdoors so much so that often when he visits my house, he leaves with transplants of the flora from our country property, excited at the prospect of returning to his city home and planting them in the perfect spot on his land. He and his son have also erected a Purple Martin birdhouse to forestall the mosquito attacks from the nearby lake. Matthew is an excellent research subject because he has achieved the level of success that allows him to talk about race in his life without fear of reprisal. He also seems to have dealt with much of the emotional baggage that comes from being subjected to white supremacy; therefore the information he provides has an added degree of veracity.

Vj: But you know a lot of white people who wear the flag say that it is not racist. They say it represents “our southern culture.” What do you have to say to that?

Matthew: I think that it is a way of segregating. It's like this. If I'm walking down the street and someone is displaying that flag on their vehicle, I'm going to be apprehensive. Well, it just a reminder of the Civil War. And it tells me to be aware of that person, because that person is outwardly trying to display things that are racists.

Vj: When you were a child do you remember having any encounters with race?

Matthew: In the neighborhood there was no prejudice with the kids I played with. There were some kids who were not allowed to play with us but the ones we played with there was no prejudice. I think there was more of a stigma for white girls not to associate with black girls than there was for boys. I remember the white boys playing ball at the school and they would invite me to play.

Vj: Did white kids who played with you at home act differently at school?

A few did. At school you know you always gonna have your groups. At certain parts of school it was ok. But there was always a line that you didn't step over.

Vj: In terms of socializing with whites?

Matthew: Yeah.

Vj: Have you ever encountered fear from someone you didn't even know?

Matthew: Yeah frequently when you leave the mall or some store and a white person sees you they get in their vehicle quick and lock the doors.

Vj:: Actually, I do that too.

Matthew: But this is not in a situation where they should have to do this.

Like I've had this happen to me. I'll be in a store or something and a white lady with a little child. And the child will look up at me and says, "Mommie, look at the nigger." But I can't hold it against the child. It's the way he was raised.

Vj:: Is it a safe assumption that your children will have to deal with racism?

Matthew: Yes.

Vj:: So how do you go about indoctrinating them to this?

Matthew: I teach them not to reciprocate it, but also to be aware of it too.

Vj:: But what about the time when they must confront it head on because not to do say would be a betrayal?

Matthew: It depends on how they feel like they need to respond. It all depends on their responsibility and how they feel about their responsibility.

Vj:: So at what time should your son confront these types of things?

Matthew: When he feels threatened.

Analysis

bell hooks (1994) describes the goal of the educator as one that teaches students to “transgress” against racial, sexual, and class boundaries in order to achieve the gift of freedom. In light of my findings about the effect of racializing and the troubling evidence that young white children are being taught to profile black people as “other,” questions arise that speak to and extend hooks’ challenge to “share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students” (p. 13). First, can an educator teach children to transgress for freedom when the students themselves think they have already obtained this goal? Second, in critique of emancipatory theory, who decides how freedom really is exemplified in the lives of others? Also, what should be done if the educators’ entire geopolitical and historical perspective is completely anathema to that of the students she teaches? Finally, how does an educator who does not believe in emancipatory theory approach a situation in which students continue practices that are considered by some to have racist, culturally, and religiously essentializing characteristics? Since I believe that any practice that imbeds my ideology and culture into the minds of students without their being aware and critiquing what I am presenting colonizes the students (Ellsworth, 1992; Smith, 2002), I am left without the answer that I promised in the beginning.

I cannot say what educators should do; first because parents have a greater burden to become aware of attempts by supremacist to indoctrinate their children and intervene in this phenomenon. I also feel that feminist praxis suggest that we not enter the classroom with a strong preestablished agenda—that we not “bank” ideas in students’ minds (Alverman, 2001; Boxer, 1998; Freire, 2000; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Johnson-Bailey, 1998; Morrison, 1992; Tatum, 1995; Weiler, 1987). Consequently, it will become the duty of each anti-racist pro-feminist educator to research the propaganda (especially on the Internet in Websites like “Stormfront.org”) and decide what praxis is best for the group of students whom she teaches. I can, however demonstrate how I attempted to conduct effective history on the problems posed by the Neo-confederate children whom I taught and my solutions to these problems.

Effective Praxis

In order to understand my students, I had to first understand the social forces that impact education and those who create it in this particular school system (Taba, 1962, in Schultz, 1998 p. 110). It is interesting that Taba's analysis of the conception of school replicate the perspectives that have contributed to my students' ideas about the world. For instance, Taba states that one group sees education as the preserver of cultural heritage, especially Western culture. This group stresses the need for cultural continuity in order to preserve "our" traditions and pass on certain "truths" worked out in the past to future generations (p. 113). This raises two questions: Who is "us" and what is "truth?" Those who support this Neo-Confederate movement would consider themselves preservers of their (not necessarily "our," depending on who "we" are) cultural heritage. As a matter of fact, when I ask my students to explain their reasons for embracing the Confederate flag, the answer usually embodies some desire to reify and preserve their cultural heritage.

Taba's statements are also echoed by Hirsch (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1987). Hirsch implies that in order to survive as a unified society, we must speak the same cultural language. He uses the Tower of Babel as an allegory to demonstrate this principle (In Schultz, 1998 p. 7). Additionally, Taba states that the supposed goal of this group is to "develop common background and loyalties." These theories are attributed to rational humanists and classists and are inextricably bound with the theory of human nature as intrinsically rational (In Schultz, 1998 p. 113). If then, I agree with the theories of the rational humanists and Hirsch, et. al., I should not bother these students—I should allow them to develop and understand their heritage. The problem is that this effort would support the very historical practices Foucault critiques (Foucault, 1972, 1977).

Although the ideas of "cultural literacy" and the preservation of cultural heritage appear to be altruistic on the surface, there are many problems inherent in embracing this type of enculturation. Taba (In: Schultz, 1995) demonstrates one of the problems in the same article cited above wherein she discusses another group of educators, the progressives, which include Dewey, Mann, and others. The progressives viewed schools' goals as transforming culture. "[Dewey believed] the role of education in such a society is to inculcate the habits that would make it possible for individuals to control their surroundings rather than merely to submit to them. A progressive society would 'endeavor to shape the experience of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on

their own” (In Schultz, 1998 p. 117). Obviously, I cannot be both a promoter of wholesale promoter of Antebellum culture and a transformer of society. Also, Dewey and the others are in direct conflict with Hirsch et. al. because the promotion of the Neo-Confederate culture encourages students to “reproduce current habits” instead of shaping a new, more inclusive society.

My solution to the specific dilemma I faced is to apply feminist and anti-racist praxis in my classroom. I employ feminist praxis by allowing students to have as safe a space as possible in order to explore their own and other’s attitudes, express themselves and challenge each other without fear of reprisal, engage conflict in a constructive discursive form, and admit it when they need to perhaps revise their own beliefs and ways of expressing values (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 1994; Jones, 2003; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Tatum, 1995). Likewise, I learn to teach in an antiracializing way by also being brutally honest when I detect my own use of racist discourse in and even outside the classroom (Smitherman & van Dijk, 1988). Hopefully, modeling this behavior will encourage students to examine their use of unnecessary racist discourse. And finally, since I am a literacy educator, I must encourage students to think by writing (Richardson, 2000), question by reading (Rosenblatt, 1994), and finally to question everything (either orally if acceptable or on their own). Student ought especially be encouraged to question the way history is written and presented as well as the way groups are objectified in literature (Kendall & Wickham, 1999).

As I stated earlier, even after applying this praxis in my own classrooms I was not able to sustain it because of resistance from parents, other educators, and administrators. So much of what we do is dependent on those outside of our own classroom sphere. Unfortunately, this can make a teacher’s job harder. But we as educators must always remember that we are simply casting our bread on the water. In other words, we may not see the immediate effect of our praxis, but what we give to students always comes back to them in some form at a later period in their lives. Ours is, as Freire put it, “an act of love” (2000 p. 50), and in committing this act, we must give freely and rest on a faith that even though we may not see the immediate results, what we have done is always working somewhere in the minds of those whom we teach.

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