

“Race Matters and Pedagogy in Higher Education: Ongoing Work”
***Race and Pedagogy Journal* Special Issue: Race and Higher Education**

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My thanks to all at *Race and Pedagogy Journal* for inviting me to review and comment on the articles accepted for the special issue. I’m in the concluding years of a career spanning more than fifty years during which so very much of my teaching, research and scholarship, and administrative involvements and services have been devoted to *critical* explorations of race matters in higher education, in the encompassing historically informed socio-political, economic, and cultural environments as well: that is, explorations intended to produce understandings that accounted for the who, what, when, where, how, and why of “race” matters, and that provide guidance for efforts to remedy race-affected conditions that have been, are, *invidious* to human well-being.

It has been especially rewarding reading the accepted articles and thereby bearing witness to the important stature that *Race and Pedagogy Journal* has garnered as a venue for scholarship explicitly dedicated to critical explorations of race matters affecting pedagogy in higher education. While the *Journal* is by no means the first to explore such matters—the pioneering efforts of, among others, Carter G. Woodson (*Journal of Negro Education*) and W.E.B. Du Bois (*Crisis Magazine*) are to be remembered—to the best of my current (limited) knowledge it is a surviving venture among many launched during the past half-century that has been sustained and become an important medium for teacher-scholars of a critical temper: that is, persons with grounding and guiding concerns for the well-being of faculty, students, and administrators of African descent, in particular (though not exclusively); persons who are committed to crafting research-based articulations as contributions to national and international communities of discourse regarding teaching and learning, curricula, research and scholarship, institutional organization.

The *Journal* is thus influential, for it is evident in the accepted articles that, to an important extent, the authors have forged *critical* orientations to their own pedagogical practices, to their agendas and commitments grounding and guiding their teaching and institutional involvements. Widely shared across the articles are commitments to anti-racism; to opposition to institutionalized

projects of White Racial Supremacy; to education—teaching—as a venture characterized by and devoted to cultivating *critical* personal and shared understandings that aid in fostering “progressive” social transformations, within institutions of work and service, and within the polities in which the institutions and the various communities they served are situated. Likewise, the authors share commitments to “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusiveness,” to “justice” generally, in the organization of institutions of higher education and in the practices by and through which institutional life is fostered and the institutions perpetuated. Further, several of the authors are concerned with institutional experiences resulting in “trauma” suffered by students and faculty of color; with “racial battle fatigue” suffered by students and faculty of color; with “emancipatory” pedagogies. And several authors were explicit in drawing upon resources of “Critical Race Theory” and “Critical Social Theory” in order to forge their accounts of problematic matters involving “race” in particular institutions of higher education.

Again, virtually all these concerns are quite familiar to me, are, in many respects, “music to my ears.” I remember all too well the excitement and lasting impacts of reading, then teaching, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (recommended to me by a close colleague-friend) during the early years of my career. For several decades I devoted much of my attention to reading, understanding, and drawing on writings by key figures in what became known as the Frankfurt (Germany) School of Critical Social Theory. And across the entirety of my career, I have labored to understand and contend with ventures of *racism*, but, also, with how best to understand human bio-cultural, self-reproducing social groupings—how best to understand *Homo sapiens* as a *social* species constituted by relatively distinctive cultural groupings living in organized polities.

I have long been, and remain, convinced that contending with, opposing even, *racism* does not necessitate, nor imply, that conceiving of such human groupings as *races* be regarded as irremediably invidious requiring these groups be dispensed. Efforts to ground thinking and valorizing human beings as *individuals* only, even first and foremost, is, I am convinced, profoundly wrongheaded and misguided. *Individuality* is to be valued and cultivated, but not elevated to a dogma at the expense of the full recognition of the evolutionary, anthropological reality of the *social* nature of our species. There can be no individuality with the enabling conditions of sociality. No “I” without the enabling “we” of various enveloping scales.

These understandings compel me to point out what I think are several important challenging responsibilities in the current historical moment for *Race and Pedagogy Journal*. First, there is a

need to take a well-reasoned, well-articulated position on the vexing question whether the concept of *race* is, or is not, a viable one for considering human bio-cultural population groupings. Such a position should then serve as a platform on which to work out the terms and rationale for “inclusion” of “diverse” (racially and/or ethnically?) persons in institutions of higher education, and for why curricula and pedagogies should be fashioned to contend with such persons, their histories and cultures, respectfully, with “equity” and “justice.” Both of these concepts need to be explicated and made viable for being put to work in scholarship, for fashioning and employing institutional policies and praxes.

To my mind, there is yet to be worked out and widely shared in higher education the well-integrated conjoining of these key concepts even though there is much rhetoric, much recruitment and hiring, much teaching and research supposedly in service to making institutions more “racially” equitable, just, and inclusive. Still to be constructed and legitimated for and with widespread acceptance and implementation in higher education in the United States of America, and within and across government at all levels, is a viable notion of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic *democratic* polity, and how such a polity is to be achieved and sustained from our historically conditioned current circumstances. I take it that some such polity is an *ideal* for many of the authors wrestling with race matters motivated by concerns for equitable justice. Is this an ideal undergirding *Race and Pedagogy Journal*? Was this the motivation, at least in part, for devoting a special issue to “race and higher education”? The matter should be made clear to readers and to scholars aspiring to publish articles in the journal. Relevant and pertinent discursive communities would be well served by a clearly articulated position.

But not just regarding an ideal by which invidious race matters are addressed in ways that have cumulative effects in bringing about democratic, just, multi-racial, multi-ethnic institutions of higher education and local, state, and national polities. There is the need for clarification and consensual agreement regarding the conceptual and practical viability of important ideas that are put to work in the articles accepted for inclusion in this special issue. For example, while nearly all the authors are concerned for the well-being of students, faculty, and administrators of color in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) of higher education, there is little to no concern expressed for the well-being of White students! Not only is this ethically unacceptable, it is also shortsighted pragmatically: if the long institutionalized programs devoted to White Racial Supremacy are to be disrupted and displaced, this will require that current and successive

generations of White college and university students be educated in ways *quite* differently from the education of the great majority of their ancestors. Consequently, the concern to “decenter Whiteness” might be misguided. The need, rather, ought to be to sharply *center* focus on invidious *Whiteness* the better to engage it critically in order to renovate *Whiteness* as a conception of modes of personal and social identification that are void of *all* investments in ideas and ideals of White racial superiority and/or predominance. It is not at all in the best interests of folks of color to leave the education of successive generations of White folks to White folks alone. It is in our best interests to be involved quite substantially in shaping and delivering their education via “anti-oppressive pedagogies” in terms of both praxes and curricular content.

From reading the accepted articles I sense that there is a pressing need for a renewed discussion of the *missions* undertaken by faculty and administrators of color who accept positions in PWIs. I was quite struck by the frequency with which authors, say of “Treading Water...,” write of the “trauma” experienced by faculty of color in PWIs; by “racial battle fatigue” as a condition highlighted in research work published by a scholar that several of the special issue authors referenced; of the “extra burden” of “cultural taxation” experienced by faculty and students of color; etc. Indeed, the wear-and-tear on one’s body and soul over years of engagement in a PWI are all too familiar to me after more than forty years as a member of the faculty in two such institutions, as a distinguished visitor in two other PWIs. However, I *chose* to accept offers of positions in the institutions and *chose* to remain on the faculties even as I learned just how taxing the engagements. In choosing the contexts of engagement, I regard the “taxations” as what comes with the territory, as it were. To be clear: the costs are real, though they are not the same for, nor are borne the same by, all folks of color. Individual life conditions matter.

My concern is that several of the authors raise the matters of costs incurred as though those costs are part of the injustice of the institutional situations. I think, rather, that these are the costs of the necessary *work* of contending with injustices. And how long will renovation take of any PWI conditioned by injustices? Depends on many factors, but the time will not be short, as the author(s) of “The Perpetual Disservice of ‘Passive Action’...” rightly conclude. To be considered: whether PWIs can be renovated without renovation of the environing socio-political orders in which the institutions are situated. I think not. Nonetheless, in committing to work and service in a PWI as a person of color, one should do so with the understanding that the work to be accomplished will be cross-generational and not at all likely to be completed during one’s period

of service, or even one's lifetime. To be considered: the committed mindfulness of many Black women during and after enslavement: laboring for those not yet born as well as for those already living with no promise that those laboring would live to harness the fruits of their labors...

My worry for several of the authors, of "Treading Water..." for example, is whether they have sufficiently well-developed critical, historically informed senses of the "waters" they were getting into when accepting offers to work in the institutions of their concern. What are the guiding and sustaining professional and life *missions* of the various authors? For many of my generation who became teacher-scholars out of the cauldrons of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, renovative work was a life-commitment, stresses and strains expected. For the current generation(s) of authors, is the counselling of Wise Ancestors expressed in the spiritual "Chil'ren Don't Git Weary" no longer pertinent?

The need for informed orientation to the demographic cultural and political currents and rapids (to continue with the "institutions-as-water" metaphor...) of institutions in which one invests one's life is made strikingly clear in the otherwise quite important article that recounts the experiences of five Black women attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in an urban city. As a research venture, the article is quite important in highlighting the experiences of an under-researched population in a particular institutional context. What I found striking were matters that the author *did not* take note of: that, apparently, the Black female students had had *no* counselling regarding the institutional cultural world they would enter in matriculating in an HSI. Nor, apparently, was such counselling a part of their orientation, or ongoing negotiation of life in the institution, after matriculating. Apparently, *no one* urged the young women to make a priority of learning to become proficient in reading and speaking Spanish as part of their gaining and cultivating new competencies appropriate to their educational context. Further still, what was included in the article of transcriptions of recorded interviews with the young women revealed, to me, a pressing need for them to have been hard at work cultivating their competencies in "code switching": that is, in being able to move easily and with confidence, whenever appropriate, among the modes of vernacular speech of their life-worlds, Spanish, and "standard English" expected in places of work and learning in which the speech codes of middle- and upper-class White folks predominate. To my mind, it is irresponsible and unethical to leave Black students without preparation for the cultural traveling they will encounter on matriculating in HSIs and PWIs.

Race and Pedagogy Journal has a hard won and important place among journals devoted to research and scholarship regarding pedagogy and race matters. I urge those responsible for the journal to fortify this place and stature by staking out well-thought and well-articulated positions on the notions that are focal concerns for the authors of the articles for the special issues, and to be ever diligent in requiring that submissions meet rigorous standards for both scholarship and reasoning when wrestling with challenging concepts.