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Rebekah K. Volk
Eastern Illinois University

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Color-Blind or Seeing White:

A Pedagogical Approach to Critical Whiteness Studies

BY

Rebekah K. Volk

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Art in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2007

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Abstract

Critical whiteness studies is a primary component of multicultural education that is frequently absent from curricula at all educational levels. This deficiency in the core philosophy of education produces white and non-white students who lack an analytical understanding of the true impact of whiteness on American society, culture, and media. Through lessons infused and influenced by a whiteness perspective, educators may begin the process of creating anti-racist white allies who will continue to change society with a positive impact. Additionally, teachers should help students view their world through the lens of critical whiteness studies in order to promote a more authentic vision and comprehension of America. In order to accomplish this goal, educators should advocate reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* (as well as other texts) from a perspective of whiteness, as literature often elucidates society and culture. If the education system truly strives to construct well-informed citizens who will question, challenge, and recreate the knowledge they have obtained, then there can be no question of the essential need for critical whiteness studies in every classroom throughout America.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family: my husband, Mark, my daughter, Kate, my son, Matthew, my father, John, my mother, Donna, and my brothers, Fr. Luke and Jake. These precious individuals have offered challenging questions, counter-arguments, and revision suggestions. These people have sacrificed their time, their agendas, and their needs in order to sustain my energy for this project. They know how many hours it takes to read endless books and articles; they know how many pages of notes are involved in writing one paragraph; they know how imperative it was that I accomplish this degree; and they know and have encouraged my passion for learning. In addition to my own, their sweat, tears, and smiles fill these pages.

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My most sincere gratitude is presented to all those individuals who have sacrificed their time and who have been instrumental to the completion of this project. I truly appreciate the willingness of my thesis director, Dr. Donna Binns, and my thesis readers, Dr. Ann Boswell and Dr. Tim Engles, to answer questions, offer encouragement and support, and work through electronic mail. Because of their readiness to plan around my special circumstances and work throughout the summer months, I have gained a deep respect for them and all their commitment to quality higher education at Eastern Illinois University.

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Color-Blind or Seeing White: A Pedagogical Approach to Critical Whiteness Studies

> To teach white students how to accept and learn from these painful descriptions, to acknowledge difference to own our racialized history, and to recognize other unearned advantages which have come to us at the expense of those others who do not enjoy whiteness. To teach white students how to shift out of asserting equations between themselves as whites and others who have not benefited from unearned advantages—this whole colorblindness world, we're all the same under the skin—but to make an imaginative connection intended to invite alliance and coalition, not to deny whiteness and its history. (Wilner, et al. 138)

Introduction: The Discovery

"What's wrong?"

"I felt something."

"What do you think it is?"

"I am not sure, but it's not supposed to be there."

According to Arlene Wilner, a high school educator, teaching white students to acknowledge their unearned privileges, disparity in the racial history of America, and the recompense of their whiteness is not only a challenge to high school personnel, but also a painful process to all concerned (Wilner, et al. 138). The pain results not from acknowledging that other racial groups exist or that they should receive equal rights or benefits in America, but because of the revelation that America is *not* color blind and *not* aware of the pervasiveness of its own racial stereotypes. Students become uncomfortable when they must concede their own levels of conscious and subconscious prejudice—and when they recognize that even in 2007 a white woman walking on the street feels nervous when she encounters two African American teenagers, and a white patient questions the competence of an African American surgeon brought in for consultation. Frequently,

white people do not even realize this problem because of the invisible nature of their white privileges.

Decades of high school curriculum guidelines have supported these racial inequities. Many teachers choose novels or other texts based on a standardized curriculum containing a limited scope of authors writing from a predominantly white male patriarchal perspective. High school students have encountered Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* as a novel addressing the raced, gendered, and class-based differences between blacks and whites in Maycomb, Alabama, and they have been conditioned to admire Atticus' noble gesture and to sympathize with the underprivileged Tom Robinson and Boo Radley. Additionally, teachers have incorporated *The Great Gatsby* and marveled at F. Scott Fitzgerald's proficient, perplexing analysis of high-class society, but they typically neglect to integrate an investigation of Nella Larson's perspective in her novel *Passing*. What is missing in these interpretations is a recognition and revelation of what it means to be white in America and a concession of the repercussions of whiteness for Americans of all races. What happens when the reader's focus shifts to a fresh angle and approaches these texts in search of their accounts of whiteness? What happens when white students must search themselves or restructure their worldview? What happens when teachers initiate an investigation of something of which their students were not even aware?

To begin looking at these questions, I will establish a working definition of whiteness based on multiple scholarly and critical perspectives and suggest some ways that critical whiteness studies may be incorporated into the classroom setting. Additionally, I will outline various facets of an educational methodology for teaching

critical whiteness studies and establish a challenge for teachers of literature at the high school level to expand their perspectives and curriculum to include whiteness studies. Within the body chapters, I will scrutinize *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby*, two novels characteristically taught within American high schools, and expose elements of whiteness present in each. Finally, my thesis will propose explicit lessons and activities formulated strategically to integrate whiteness studies into high school curricula, thereby offering students an opportunity to deepen their awareness of these essential components of American literature and society.

Allowing students to investigate these novels and analyze their pages for illustrations of whiteness through detailed lessons and assignments will promote a concentrated understanding of the concept of whiteness and cultivate higher-level thinking skills. The specific lessons presented will encourage and advance students' understanding of whiteness during the early part of the twentieth century as well as expand their vision of the contemporary age by providing real-world examples of conferred perceptions and concepts from America's indelibly racialized past.

In an attempt to break with traditional modes of teaching two classic American novels and expand the pedagogical vision for these authors' texts, my thesis will argue for implementation of lessons specifically designed to broaden students' understanding of and sensitivity to whiteness in America. This plan for employing whiteness studies presents an innovative method for evaluating texts at the secondary level and challenges educators and students to revise their own perspectives on whiteness in our society.

Chapter 1: The Diagnosis

"What is wrong with me?" I ask.

"Well," the doctor says, "you have a tumor. It is cancerous."

"What does it look like?"

"It is a white mass intertwined with red and blue blood vessels."

"Ok," I tell her. "I will fight it. What is our plan of action?"

Whiteness is more than just racism, more than just inequities, more than just unrecognized privileges. People should no longer ignore the reasons for and repercussions of whiteness in America, nor should they feign ignorance about a social illness that rages through American society. Racial whiteness can be characterized as a pathology; a recognition that Phillip Barrish discusses in reference to Lipsitz:

As George Lipsitz observes in analyzing what he terms "the possessive investment in whiteness," "Despite intense and frequent disavowals that whiteness means anything at all to those so designated, recent surveys have shown repeatedly that nearly every social choice that white people make about where they live, what schools their children attend, what careers they pursue, and what policies they endorse is shaped by considerations involving race." (Barrish 8)

While at one time in the past people may not have been able to realize the devastation caused by the history of white supremacy in America, contemporary scholars and educators are greatly aware of what whiteness involves and how the racism that it engenders behaves like a contagion. Much like racism, *whiteism* (my label for the aspects of whiteness that are intolerant) moves in to dominate and control all that survives the initial takeover. *Whiteism* functions like a cancer of our society. It has grown

unsuspecting in the body of America; the malfunctioning cells found a small niche that felt comfortable and secure and began to create a position of security. By binding themselves together, the individual cells continued to develop into a larger mass until finally the expansion could not be ignored and America needed professional help. This illness in our society—which began forming in the beginning of American history—became more readily recognized in the 1960s and still exists today.

When I first learned a year or so ago about the impact of critical whiteness studies on education and society, I became aware of white privileges, an awareness which enriched my understanding of American culture. Why had I never heard about critical whiteness studies? Why did the people around me never talk about race or privileges or unequal treatment? After thorough and intense reading of scholarship on whiteness, I realized that this lack of awareness and discussion is just one small aspect of the privilege of being white—I did not have to be aware of it and it did not seem to impact my life on a daily basis. Rather, this limited exposure reduced my knowledge base concerning how my whiteness affected non-whites.

While I was growing up in small towns in central Illinois, my multicultural education included learning about "other" people who were "different" from mine (a white middle-class family of German heritage living in predominantly white communities). For the most part, my education on matters of race included an African American unit in school where we learned about the contributions of famous African Americans such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and George Washington Carver. My parents taught us that all people, no matter what they looked like, should be provided equal treatment and consideration, and we were under strict instruction to consider

everyone with respect. However, during my student teaching experience, I could not help but grasp the irony of my "multicultural component" when I spent *one week* in a Midwestern Illinois school with a diverse population including approximately fifty percent African Americans and a very low percentage of Hispanics. What did one week in this school truly teach me? What could I do to change this ineffective method and expand my understanding of racial issues in America?

It was after my reflection on these personal experiences that I realized that the white students in my school community and in the classrooms where I teach (a ninety-five percent white and Roman Catholic population) have never heard explanations of their own whiteness and do not realize what whiteness affords them in terms of societal standing, advantages, and opportunities in their future as compared to their non-white counterparts. It was after reading countless scholars and educators' experiences in teaching whiteness studies that I understood how essential this type of teaching is to every classroom in America if we, as educators, are to be instrumental in initiating the necessary modification of current societal beliefs and practices. If possible, it may be even more important to teach about whiteness within predominantly white communities where white students rarely encounter people with nonwhite racial backgrounds or curricula involving nonwhite perspectives, characters, themes, and cultural values.

As an integral component of American life, whiteness is solidly ingrained in nearly every decision, thought, and action carried out by whites, and to a large degree, even by many non-whites. Most white students believe that racism thrived in the past but no longer exists because, as scholars state, this is what mainstream society teaches them. Nevertheless, people who are aware of the ramifications of whiteness—because such

ramifications negatively affect them—can easily detect its lasting influence on American culture. In this sense, whites tend to be relatively naïve—a condition that any educator should want to change. This is not to say that whiteness equals racism; more and more anti-racist white allies are presenting themselves as advocates for change. However, the privileges afforded to whites cannot be denied or explained away as simply coincidence, nor, worse yet, as the result of innate white superiority. Utilizing literary and media analysis, educators can introduce aspects of whiteness. Specifically within *To Kill a Mockingbird,* students will understand how Mr. Ewell represents raw white privilege and the Radley family represents the isolation of the white culture. Likewise, *The Great Gatsby* reveals a journey toward high-class whiteness and elitism of whiteness. Using literature to educate students with the most comprehensive, truthful representation of racial issues and the consequences of living in privilege are as profoundly important as acknowledging the existence of cancer, but knowingly ignoring treatment and taking the 50/50 chance of allowing the disease to continue to damage other vital areas. [1]

[1] Throughout the thesis, my references to students and school communities indicate white students in predominantly white communities. I focus on white students since my experiences as an educator have been in these settings. My suggestions for lessons, curriculum, and literary analysis, of course, can be adapted to non-white educational settings and will certainly expand non-white students' knowledge of white culture.

Chapter 2: The Definition

"The process to extricate a tumor and obliterate a cancer is not a simple method. We may have to excise it and ongoing treatment will be necessary—no simple solution or recovery is available for something that is ingrained at the cellular level," the doctor says.

"Well, then we should educate ourselves with preeminent doctors and read up on the latest procedures. We will fight it. We will purge our system of this parasite. We will work toward a lasting solution."

In order to properly integrate critical whiteness studies within classroom pedagogy, educators must first delineate a comprehensible and unambiguous classification for whiteness. On its most basic level, the study of whiteness is an exploration of what it means to be white in America. Who is white? Accompanying questions include: how do we define membership within a racial majority elite, and what are the consequences of whiteness on non-white minority groups? Based on the current research on whiteness, the terms "white" and "whiteness" appear to be quite slippery. According to Joe Kincheloe, a "complexity of the concept" (166) exists that leads toward "ambiguities of whiteness" (171). Wilner et al. also states that "whiteness is usefully inexpressible. It does not easily yield to a comfortable terminology or offer us the promise of expertise. It resists being known, volunteering only indefinite form" (135). This "nebulousness" (135) makes whiteness studies so essential in a pedagogical approach committed to expanding the perspectives of white students within the classroom.

Regardless of the uncertainty with which scholars and educators speak about whiteness, scholars can provide several common questions and assumptions about whiteness. According to Kincheloe, our questions should include "inquiries into how whiteness functions in the lives of white people—a prerequisite to any attempt to rearticulate white identity" (183). This type of inquiry is certainly a first step for white students who are beginning to scrutinize their identities. To supplement this question, Kincheloe suggests "investigations of how whiteness as a signifier will be received very differently by individuals standing at different intersections of various race, class, gender, religious, and geographical axes of identity; or inquest into the ways whiteness as a norm shapes the lives of both those who are included and excluded by the categorization" (183). The very nature of the concept itself is a challenge both to teachers and students because "the implementation of a pedagogy of whiteness that induces Whites to listen, learn, and change is a delicate operation" (Kincheloe 185). White students must be willing to open their minds to a notion that is vaguely familiar yet not within their grasp. This concept is true, in part, because whiteness has established itself as "normal" and "natural" with nonwhites categorized as "other" and "different" (Rodriguez 4). Leslie Roman discusses how whiteness now often passes for something else: "given the tendency of the multicultural discourse to celebrate diversity without adequately analyzing power differentials among groups positioned by racial categorizations and inequalities, the phrase 'people of color' still implies that white culture is the *hidden norm* against which all other racially subordinate groups' so-called 'differences' are measured" (71 emphasis in original). These racial boundaries still exist and cannot be torn down unless whites are willing to dismantle the systemic Eurocentric perspectives

that drive education, society, laws, and other aspects of American life. As Kincheloe and Steinberg suggest, "Any study of whiteness involves engaging students in a rigorous tracking of . . . racialization, identity formation, and the etymology of racism. Armed with such understandings [which will only come through ongoing exposure to perspectives in whiteness], they gain the ability to challenge and rethink whiteness around issues of racism and privilege. White students then begin to develop questions regarding their own identity" (Kincheloe and Steinberg 10). Thus, the task of every professional educator is to empower white students with this metacognition.

To expand these notions and provide a more distinct definition for the term *whiteness,* the reader must consider primary components of whiteness—racism and privilege. TuSmith and Reddy suggest that "as our American legacy of slavery and genocide attest, [racism] has something to do with human insecurity and its consequent will to power—the fear of being left behind while other siblings get the goodies" (315). Accordingly, several students in Maini's class stated that the definition of whiteness includes "Opportunity, Money, Power, and Respect" (Durso et al. 104). Another aspect of racism and privilege is "the illusion that white is right, true, good, normal" (Durso et al. 106); and as Leonardo explains, "whiteness is characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions" (32). Since many white students have been taught from birth that whiteness is normal and right while nonwhiteness is abnormal and wrong, they do not realize or even know to acknowledge what whiteness has done for them and what whiteness has done to nonwhites. Tim Engles puts this aspect of whiteness into perspective: "The color-blind, liberal individualism

subscribed to so dearly by most [students] impedes perception of the group-bound realities of both oppression and privilege" (67). What is essential for teachers to recognize is the need to assist students in acknowledging these positions and gaining a greater awareness of their racial biases and predilections to prejudice.

A final question surfaces concerning how white people use their racial status: is whiteness a tool for building a greater awareness of racial inequities, or is it for increasing personal advancement and privileges? As Landsman states, "If we have continued to compromise with what we know is wrong in order to maintain approval of our particular White community, we feel a dis-ease [disease] we cannot name. Thus, the cost of White privilege, in all its perpetuation and reinforcement, is a split in our psyche, and in a generalized way this becomes a split in the psyche of our country" (20). Rather than misinforming ourselves about a colorblind society or convincing ourselves with inadequate insight of equivalent prospects for all racial groups, we should "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" (Kincheloe 163). It thus follows that educators must work to integrate a perspective informed by critical whiteness studies into their curricula, and they must help their students' understanding of race, racism, whiteness, and their cultural connections. Without a working definition of this societal illness, treatment will be limited and restricted to symptomatic factors rather than corporal causal factors.

Whiteness looks at how the white culture lives out its unconscious privileges and often times its racist belief system. Although whiteness has changed over the years from

whites being proud of their "dominant" culture to being something that is not politically correct to talk about, some whites are becoming more consciously aware of their white culture and are taking action to either celebrate their whiteness or help promote a greater understanding of the negative aspects of whiteness. Working with students to help them see how whiteness is a significant component in their daily lives will motivate them to take positive action against negative forms of whiteness.

Chapter 3: The Determination

"I don't want this treatment. I don't want to interrupt my life with these changes. I don't have time for this."

"Most people don't, but do you want to survive to see your children grow?"

"Of course."

"Then I suggest you follow my plan."

"I guess I don't have a choice—it is something I must do."

As an educator, I am constantly reevaluating my curriculum to determine if the literary texts or pedagogical procedures I employ within the classroom are valuable, useful, and challenging to my students. Additionally, if I choose to supplement or adjust my current curriculum, I must carefully address the time restrictions in a 180-day school year while still meeting Illinois state-mandated standards. Therefore, before integrating critical whiteness studies into my pedagogical approach to teaching literature, it is essential that I determine the necessity and long-term benefit of including these ideas. From my research, I have discovered that integrating whiteness studies into my curriculum is not only important, but will offer students a much wider/more truthful representation of the world, and will open students to the layered complexity of studying and learning about various perspectives from people with all types of backgrounds, thus yielding a healthier societal prognosis. Therefore, teachers need to determine the value of whiteness, determine the role they will play in teaching whiteness, diffuse and repair students' feelings of guilt and anger when they initially learn about whiteness, and determine the goals they want to achieve through their chosen curriculum.

In order to determine the value of whiteness studies, educators should evaluate the current knowledge of their students in this subject area. White students do not realize what it means to be white simply because of what their white privilege affords them.[2] However, through specific instruction with carefully selected texts, students can become more aware of their whiteness and how this has affected (and affects) other people while simultaneously learning about these people. Barrish demonstrates that although the United States has made some progress in lessening the effects of racism and whiteness, "'progress' in this area is somehow stuck" (16). Therefore,

> if Americans were honest with themselves they would agree that racism still thrives in the country, and they would confront it. Denial and evasion are not going to cure this deep-rooted social disease. Awareness of the problem is crucial; we all need to return to the basics of raising consciousness about racism. We must all become agents for change, because the alternatives are destructive and thus unacceptable. (Torres-Padilla 214)

Educators, then, should take up the work of helping to shape students' growing understanding of race and culture through specialized curricula infused with the insights offered from critical whiteness studies. Because "challenging students' deeply-held assumptions is vital to teaching" (Avakian 150), it is "imperative, for a class of mostly white students, not fully aware of their privilege, to focus heavily on how powerfully whiteness is operative daily in every aspect of our lives" (Avakian 148).

Furthermore, Americans are taught from a young age (according to a perspective based on principles of whiteness) that if they work hard and strive to achieve their goals,

[2] Many whites reject the notion that they possess unconscious privileges because of affirmative action policies and those laws that require equal treatment for all races. In contrast, some whites have begun to feel they are victims of discrimination because no laws exist with specific references to help whites.

they will find success. Individualism and selfishness dominate our social structure and impede acceptance and celebration of diversity. Giroux explains this phenomenon well: "As citizenship becomes increasingly privatized and students are relentlessly educated to become consuming subjects rather than critical social subjects, it becomes all the more imperative for critical educators to rethink how the educational force of the culture works both to secure and to resist particular identities and values" (496-97). Teachers need to respond to and counter these realizations in order to represent America and the world with the most truthful and accurate depictions and shift students' understanding of race along with their role in the privileges of whiteness. This type of teaching involves is getting white students to realize what it means to be non-white since

> most [whites] have never been victims of racism in American nor have experienced racial minority communities in the same way Americans of color do. Whites draw on their own experience to understand inequity, and their interpretation of that experience usually upholds their belief that the rules of society apply roughly the same to everyone. Haves and have-nots rise or fall by their own merit or effort, for the most part. (Sleeter 117)

It is essential that educators help students achieve this deeper, authentic understanding of racial relations in American society in order to amend inaccuracies in their principle belief systems.

During my early years of education in the 1990s, multicultural education was coming to the forefront of pedagogical studies; however, information on what it means to be white was nonexistent in these discussions. Rodriguez explains that "it is important . . . to bring the often absent politics of whiteness into the discourse of multicultural

education. From this perspective, and more to the point, with respect to a critical understanding of race, racism, and race relations, multicultural education must begin and end with the question of whiteness" (3). Additionally, because "real people's histories and collective memories, languages, and futures—their very minds and bodies—are at stake here, as the so often alienating daily experiences of so many persons of color inside and outside of 'our' educational institutions so clearly document" (McCarthy and Crichlow vii), educators are obligated to work toward an antiracist perspective that embraces a truly multicultural society and counters white privilege (Landsman 16). Otherwise, my white students and white people in general will continue "to live in their diverse world handicapped by an ignorance of the other cultures, traditions, and perspectives that constitute the majority of their world" (Babb 171) because unless they come to understand their own racial identity, their knowledge of other races will always be severely limited. This infectious condition will inhibit restorative measures toward a more equitable society.

Whites must also be aware that in the next few decades we will no longer represent a majority in the United States population (Kincheloe 171). How will students react to this knowledge? How can teachers facilitate a proactive response to this shift in point of view? What are the optimum methods for opposing the "assumptions, myths, and misinformation" with which most white students have been inculcated through "media, advertising, education, and exposure to many other social institutions?" (Andrzejewski 9). All these questions initiate and conclude with a determination to recognize the value of incorporating whiteness studies within curriculum objectives and take students' knowledge beyond a limited perspective.

To look at another evaluation, the teacher must determine what role she will play in terms of introducing new information, facilitating class discussions, and evaluating student work. In terms of a classroom dedicated to a whiteness perspective, Christine Sleeter suggests "the need to populate the teaching force with people who bring diverse world views and discursive fields of reference, including those that expose, challenge, and deconstruct racism rather than tacitly accepting it" (168). Torres-Padilla states, "As teachers, we must use our sphere of influence to alert these students to theirs, so that we can break the insidious cycle of racism" (214). It is the responsibility of each teacher to offer a learning environment that will be conducive to the types of discussions necessary to introduce concepts of whiteness to students and deepen their understanding of its intricacies. Because students could find these considerations demanding and disconcerting, teachers should be prepared to encourage students to talk openly about their viewpoints, vent their frustrations, listen to new ideas, and even say erroneous things. The classroom environment should offer students the chance to err, to learn from their mistakes, and to increase their understanding of whiteness as it affects their own worldviews.

Clearly, reframing students' reference points and the foundation of their knowledge base will not be a painless procedure or an unproblematic role for the instructor to sustain. As Leong states, "Learning about the divisions in our society and in our classrooms is indeed painful" (195). Problematic questions will arise concerning the teacher's authority to discuss generalizations of whiteness and the students' roles in whiteness. When teachers begin to incorporate the study of whiteness into classroom discussions and operations, they should confidently prepare to encounter defensive

postures from white students. These feelings represent a typical, initial response to this information, and teachers can assemble strategies to help counter the student resistance.

One specific strategy Vivian Paley suggests is to maintain a comfortable and blameless environment for discussions of race and privilege because "[a]nything a child feels is different about himself which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally, and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning" (xix). Therefore, she explains how "our behavior in the classroom becomes an important part of the 'hidden curriculum'" (xix). Paley underscores that when she became more comfortable discussing nonwhites and whites, the students were more comfortable with it and were able to voluntarily relate to each other and discuss aspects of whiteness without apprehension. Analogous to explaining an illness or death to a child, a confident, sincere approach is consistently most effective. Paley states, "The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, is valued, and can be talked about. It is not easy, because we are influenced by the fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us" (xx). But, if well-prepared teachers can progressively launch discussions on areas of whiteness, students will begin to realize that race, racism, and privileges can be thoughtfully and reasonably considered and that they may take part in those reflections.

Explaining that students have a choice in their personal response to whiteness can be another effective method for countering student resistance. For decades, theories on education methodology have pushed attentiveness to student-centered classrooms where the students themselves direct curriculum choices and classroom procedures. Thus,

permitting students to realize their authority to discuss their viewpoints about whiteness and to reshape their own identities will constructively empower and enable productive whiteness instruction. As Giroux explains, "The pedagogical practice at work here attempts to engage a form of memory-work that addresses whiteness both as a signifier of racial privilege to be unlearned and as an identity in transit offering the possibilities for opposition and resistance" (147). Realizing students have "an identity in transit" and that they can choose their own identity (rather than passively accept what society has customarily taught and sold them) should yield a more consistent and ardent interest in discussions of whiteness.

When learning how to help students transition from a defensive mind-set to a receptive outlook, teachers must also attend to students on a more individual level. They should be aware, for instance, of those white students who clearly do not profit despite being white, and who thus might have more trouble understanding the privileges attached to whiteness. Durso et al explains this significant insight:

> In the lived experience of the majority of my students—including middle class non-whites—race was just not a primary identity category, as were such identities as cool, jock, nerd, clique member, macho, pretty, ugly, Christian and non-Christian. There were, for example, many straight, white, middle-class male students in the class who were being told that they embodied privilege and power but who, because they were not jocks, not cool, because they were seen as ugly or awkward or weird, had been picked on and beaten up repeatedly in high school. In their lived experience, they felt quite powerless, not powerful. (115)

Acknowledging that being white, like being nonwhite, cannot be exclusively characterized or defined in a restrictive manner will also advance students' acceptance of these new ideas and help them to know that simply because they are white does not mean they abuse/benefit from their whiteness. What teachers must distinguish between and help students to grasp, according to Wilner et al, is "the contrast between personal trouble and systemic oppression" (138). Although white students who do not consciously perpetuate whiteism exist, as a whole America is dominated by the abusive presence and destructive consequences of whiteness. If students can learn to perceive the distinction between these two elements, they will begin to escape from their self-protective mode.

Finally, teachers should determine the educational and classroom goals that will enable them to integrate a whiteness perspective most successfully. Because this information on whiteness will be perplexing to students, teachers must come well prepared not only with lessons and curriculum that will promote authentic learning, but also guidelines for instilling this learning. Determining appropriate and attainable goals for lessons that will effectively convey whiteness scholarship is certainly a high priority for any educator attentive on opening students' minds to whiteness.

One of the goals Barrish emphasizes in his classroom is "to foster . . . an experience-based insight about how a lack of diversity could limit their own learning and growth" (51); therefore, "the first step toward a permanent peace is for America to finally confront its deep-rooted racism. Literature teachers can assist in reaching this goal by developing pedagogy that includes race and racism as topics and utilizes literary texts, among other materials, to foment consciousness and agency" (Torres-Padilla 224-25). As Tatum suggests, teachers should empower their students to become "white allies" and

work for a "more just society" (474). Likewise,Victoria Boynton has outlined four of her main classroom objectives, which clearly identify a focused agenda for her teaching. These objectives can easily be adapted to numerous classrooms and encompass multiple aspects of whiteness.

1. To teach white students how to think and act as allies through the practice of reading African-American, Latino/a, Native-American, and Asian-American authored texts in which whites are often powerfully and painfully described.
2. To teach white students how to accept and learn from these painful descriptions, to acknowledge difference, to own our racialized history, and to recognize our unearned advantage which has come to us at the expense of those 'others' who do not enjoy whiteness.
3. To teach white students how to shift out of asserting equations between themselves as whites and 'others' who have not benefited from unearned advantages ('colorblindness'); but to make an imaginative connection, intended to invite alliance and coalition, not to deny whiteness and its history.
4. To teach white students how to avoid the claims that white people too have troubles thereby denying the profound *oppression* experienced by people of color, i.e., to teach the contrast between personal trouble and oppression. (Wilner et al. 148)

Once students have experienced and made contact with theories of whiteness, as Kincheloe states, "armed with such concepts ["the inner workings of racialization, identity formation, and the etymology of racism" (181)], [students] gain the ability to challenge and rethink whiteness around issues of racism and privilege" (181). The

foremost objective, then, is to take students beyond their comfort zones of "traditional" knowledge into an expanse of uncharted but fundamental territory. Farber explains that "when we engender crises in the classroom by asking students to witness something surprising and to give up the safety of what they already believe, learning often occurs at what Erickson refers to as 'the edge of risk'" (60, quoting Erickson 344). Teachers will have then "prepar[ed] students for the traditional societal demands (i.e. high school completion, postsecondary education, workplace requirements, active and participatory citizenship)" (Ladson-Billings 33), where they will increasingly encounter aspects of whiteness in every phase of their lives. By determining the value of whiteness as an essential component of curriculum, determining the active role of the teacher to create an open environment for learning, and determining the goals necessary to accomplish this plan, educators will systematically attack the obstacles to learning about whiteness and invite students to a new frame of reference for their white identities.

Chapter 4: The Design

"You will need thirty treatments over the course of six weeks. We will then let your body rest for three weeks and begin five week-long treatments of chemotherapy over twenty-one weeks."

"Why must it be every day—and why for so long?"

"Your body needs daily exposure in carefully monitored doses in order to eradicate the cancer and prevent a reoccurrence."

Once educators themselves are aware of the systemic constancy with which whiteness emerges from a racially cognizant inspection of literature, they may then move forward "to sort through with students the host of messy and complicated issues in which difference, as perceived by both the societally empowered and disempowered, now embroils us" (Ricker-Wilson 68). Accordingly, educators should determine the most appropriate and successful methods for enabling students to grapple with exigent questions of racial stereotypes, majority privilege, and discrimination, reaching beyond the careless, simplistic portrayal of American society as colorblind, racially concordant, and wholly equitable. As Wood explains, "teaching whiteness allows [him] to create a classroom environment that moves from banal discussion of racial harmony to concrete examples of the way that racial discrimination impacts our lives" (Durso et al. 111). Likewise, Tatum has determined that "teaching about racism needs to shift from an exploration of the experience of victims and victimizers to that of empowered people of color and their white allies, creating the possibility of working together as partners in the establishment of a more just society" (474). In doing so, instructors will raise white students' level of awareness concerning our true American society.

Educators need to challenge students, offering them a greater worldview and expanding their vision beyond personal encounters, viewpoints, customs, and realities. When students look at literature as a means of understanding other cultural structures and identities, they must consider "who tells the story and how it is told" (Ricker-Wilson 72). Unless students recognize the cultural perspective of the author and how the author chooses to represent each racial group or persona, they may neglect an accurate awareness of how the text actually advocates, promotes, or sympathizes. To this end, it is essential to allow (especially white) students opportunities to investigate and gain a greater understanding of other racial identities. As Durso explained, one teacher "ask[s] the class to do a writing assignment and a presentation on what their lives would look like if they were of a different racial background than the one they identified with now" (104). With this project, the students are challenged to first learn about other people and then to apply that knowledge to their own circumstances. Following this example, my students could collaboratively investigate non-white cultures and utilize comparison and contrast writing to analyze these racial identities. More specifically, assignments like these can be connected to the idea of learning about whiteness. Some elements of whiteness tend to insulate its members, encourage isolation, and discourage empathy with and understanding of racialized Others, while these nonwhites are usually forced by hegemony to learn about white lives and white power.

Other teachers have implemented projects, journals, writing assignments, and investigations of multiple forms of media to instill an understanding of the prominence of white privilege and the need for students to realize the repercussions of this dominant societal element. Harvey suggests having students take a "hard look at some portion of

television and advertising and pop culture" to define some of "American mass culture's distinctive features" (65). For instance, he writes the words "black" and "white" on the board to have students make a list of words/concepts they associate with each term (69-70), while Wood persuades "students to define a set of values they see within mostly white institutions" and further encourages them "to list stereotypes and behaviors associated with race" (Durso et al. 108). These activities and assignments are particularly essential for white students who are not consciously aware of their own societal privileges and advantages over those of minorities and racially diverse individuals. White students will need regular contact with these concepts in order to shift their "white" perceptions and realize the true influence of whiteness. To maximize student awareness, educators can expose students to fresh perspectives, encourage students to access literature, media, and culture of other racial groups, question the accuracy of their own entrenched perspectives, and expand their repertoire of whiteness scholarship.

To Kill a Mockingbird will continue to be taught in contemporary high school classrooms from the traditional perspective, accepting the legitimacy of white privilege and not questioning the righteousness of the Southern, Christian lifestyle, and teachers of *The Great Gatsby* will continue to neglect the African American outlook. However, some educators are beginning to elicit a candid and authentic representation of 1930s society to the contemporary time. Their curricula will include information concerning the inequities existing between whites and blacks, the privileges that whiteness affords, and whites' extensive isolation from other racial groups. This pedagogical structure "seeks to engage students, teachers, and other individuals in an ever-unfolding emancipatory identity that pushes the boundaries of whiteness but always understands its inescapable connection to

the white locale in the web of reality" (Kincheloe 189). Thus, educators will cultivate students' understanding of these collective identities by exposing students to realities of whiteness through literature and other products of our American society.

According to Giroux, a "necessity" exists "for cultural workers to develop collective projects in which traditional binarisms of margin/center, unity/difference, local/national, public/private can be reconstituted through more complex representations of identification, belonging, and community" (152). In order to accomplish this goal, I have collected teaching ideas from a multitude of sources in order to present my students with an extensive variety of alternatives for acquiring knowledge about whiteness. The pedagogical methods arise from secondary and post-secondary education instructors and researchers who have tested their effectiveness in the classroom with all types of students. These professionals offer specific lessons designed to advance students along their process of unlearning white privilege and racism, while relearning white antiracist behaviors and viewpoints. The following questions, activities, writing assignments, and projects can be utilized within a classroom informed by whiteness studies:

1. Propose that students ask, "What 'actions and behavior' does someone outside of the United States perceive as peculiarly American?" (Harvey 66); have groups of students each investigate a cultural perspective and report back to the class. Because the default American identity is white, white and non-white students can begin investigating how American culture is perceived, how non-American cultures view Americans, and how to initiate a definition of whiteness based on these perspectives.
2. Instead of studying white and non-white authors, or books with white and non-white central characters, in isolation from each other, pair complementary authors into a

connected unit [i.e., *The Great Gatsby* and *Passing*; *Death of a Salesman* and *A Raisin in the Sun* (Berger 206); and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Seraph on the Suwanee*].

3. Encourage students "to create a personal *bildungsroman* that maps their growth . . . ask them to consider messages that they received or perceived about success, marriage, dating, happiness, and how to treat others outside of their community" (Durso et al. 111). Students can then discuss what ramifications their racial classification has for such factors in their lives.
4. Have students find examples of racism in pop culture: movies, commercials, MTV, songs, and advertising (Wilner et al. 145) and ask them to analyze these examples for how white and black characters are portrayed (Kincheloe 181). For example, a movie was made concerning the death of an African American who was chased to death; however, the major focus of the movie was on the white prosecutor who "saved the day" rather than the African American and his family.
5. Teachers can use the label game to help students understand how we treat people simply based on the labels we automatically assume about people we encounter (i.e., prepare a variety of positive labels of adjectives—friendly, helpful, generous, funny, etc.—and stick one on each student. Students should treat each other as the label indicates and then see if they can guess what their label is based on how people treat them.) (Ponterotto 100).
6. Construct a "personal culture history" (Ponterotto 108-09) to compare the similarities and differences in our histories. Students can complete these by answering a few questions such as who has had the most influence in forming their opinions; what was their earliest memory of an encounter with another culture; what influences have led to both positive

and negative feelings about their own cultural background; what changes would they make in their own perspectives or experiences, etc. (Ponterotto 108-09). Because white students are frequently challenged to define what being white means, this exercise could help them formulate their identity is an more explicit manner.

7. Request that students complete a comparison/contrast writing assignment by completing the following statement: "I'd rather be a_____than a_______, or I used to be_____but now I am ______." (Landsman 225) with explanations and connections to their identity formation or cultural perspectives.
8. Each student can choose a day to represent whiteness in America by selecting a song, newspaper article, poem, quotation from an historical person, or another source, provide a copy of the text for the class, and write a paragraph explaining why the particular piece is important, meaningful, and connected to whiteness studies (adapted from Landsman 229).
9. Show students Peggy McIntosh's list of privileges (McIntosh 33); have them think of more privileges that are specific to their communities and families; have them write a paper about what "privilege" means to them. Ask students to make connections between those who have privileges and those who do not and what impact this has on America. Alternatively, have them write about why such privileges are difficult for whites to acknowledge and keep in mind.
10. Utilize *Unsettling America* as a text upon which to based questions for discussion starters or for initial writing assignments/journaling suggestions (Landsman 232). This text poses questions and writing topics based on problematic racial issues in America and asks students to consider varying perspectives on these issues.

11. Introduce the "myth of objectivity" and "ask students if they can identify societal institutions that claim to be objective, neutral or value free. If the students don't identify education, science, or the media, add them to the list . . . discuss . . . the purpose of fostering the impression that an institution is objective when it isn't . . . who benefits most from the educational institutions. Who benefits the least? As they think of their own education, which group or groups are made to look like 'heroes' and which appear to be 'problems'? How are women made to appear? People of color?" (Andrzejewski 8) (also discuss perspectives of Columbus as discoverer or invader). Through this activity, the students can "identify hidden biases in education, the media, science, and other fields" (Andrzejewski 8), which is an indispensable and critical expertise to obtain.
12. Have "discussion groups . . . compare and contrast the arguments used to justify the oppression of various groups, the policies and practices through which the oppression operates, and the consequences of the oppression to the perpetrators as well as the victims" (Andrzejewski 12).
13. Ask students to keep a journal or log of questions they have about whiteness, racism, or cultural groups. Ask them to "identify and record examples of oppression they observe or experience" including "comments, jokes, actions, policies or rules, unwritten institutional practices, written materials, or audiovisual media" (Andrzejewski 20). Students can use journal entries as a basis for student essays about what white individuals might do to combat such realities.
14. Group students into various cultural classifications and have them research and "assimilate" or master the practices of their assigned group. Students may then begin to interact with other groups of students and begin teaching them various aspects of their

group in order to learn about people of backgrounds different from the students (Sleeter 125).

15. Find articles from Alternative Press Center on human rights issues and also find one from main-stream media and compare how each story is presented in terms of racial difference (Sleeter 126).
16. Propose a project for which students go to a toy store (or another retail shop) to "analyze the packaging" and determine "how stereotypic these representations often are" (Kopperlman and Richardson 153). Also, students may compile statistics regarding racial representation in such toys—do the proportions between different groups represent those in America's population?
17. Students can analyze magazine and television advertisements, comic strips and Saturday morning cartoons for other instances of stereotypical behaviors or attitudes as well as a dominating presence of white influences (Kopperlman and Richardson 153).
18. Ask students to create a "Why?" essay based on something that they do not understand about race, social class, and/or gender (Sleeter 119). Use these as a basis for classroom discussions and investigations. If there are students of color in the classroom, ask whether they have different understandings from those of white students. If so, highlight this difference in perspective and encourage consideration of its causes.
19. Have students "focus on interrogating and naming those aspects of normative discourses that are oppressive—oppressive because they attempt to neutralize and even obliterate difference. Thus . . . uncovering the hidden curricula of normalizing systems . . . would bring to light and teach subjugated histories . . . that have long been silenced in the name of socially constructed sacrosanct norms" (Rodriguez 33). Specifically, they can define

areas of America culture that try to hide privileges of whiteness and demonstrate how the white culture has traditionally attempted to isolate itself from non-white cultures.

20. Challenge students to write down stereotypes other people have of their own culture and social groups (i.e., Italians are mobsters, blondes are stupid, fat people are lazy, etc.). Then discuss these stereotypes, repercussions, and stigmas, asking students to respond from personal experiences. Draw correlations between the students' personal understanding to instances of racial stereotyping between whites and non-whites.
21. Analyze words themselves: "In our society, divided racially and culturally, stratified along racial and cultural lines, language is encoded with privilege, oppression, bias, bigotry, and power. Modern American English tells us something of who we are, where we have been, and where we are going" (Ayers 130). For example, the term "white" is defined as "free from spot or blemish," "free from moral impurity," "innocent," while the term "black" is defined as "soiled," "dirty," and "thoroughly sinister or evil" (130). Therefore, have students utilize their dictionary skills to search for terms that address this "encoded . . . privilege, oppression, bias, bigotry, and power." Have students choose one word and investigate its etymology and social history in order to discover how the term's negative connotation developed.

The challenge to educators of presenting literature (and by extension society) from a truthful and accurate perspective can emerge as a daunting undertaking. Simply defining the terms *whiteness*, *racism,* and *stereotype* requires strategy, determination, and critical attention, but also regular repetition. The ultimate goal for teachers should be to instruct students about white privilege and societal inequities in order to eliminate stereotypical norms and subconscious behaviors from students' conscious reactions and

perspectives. Doing so effectively calls for a regular usage of a wide repertoire of pedagogical methods, such as those listed above. As Engles states, "Periodically addressing the issue from various angles more fully engages white students in discussions of race" (71). From Kincheloe's viewpoint, "When teaching about whiteness . . . 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 people . . ." (170). As painful as this process of enlightenment and revision might be for students and educators, an extensive awareness of whiteness at work in American society will begin to eradicate the tendency to remain blinded to raced, gendered, and class-based inequities. With this knowledge, students can then reflect more honestly on a realistic image of society as well as an unhealthy malady that disrupts the proper functioning of our social systems.

Chapter 5: The Deliberation

"How will we know the treatment is working?"

"Well, we will continue to monitor your body's response to the treatments and periodically conduct body scans. I know you want time to think about it, but the longer we wait the more your condition and outcome will worsen. You should also know that your body will weaken with treatment before it regains its healthy strength."

Toni Morrison establishes the intention for her text *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* by outlining the following focus: "more interesting is what makes intellectual domination possible; how knowledge is transformed from invasion and conquest to revelation and choice; what ignites and informs the literary imagination, and what forces help establish the parameters of criticism" (8). Morrison also discusses her proposal to "examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability and availability on nonblacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered those notions" (11). Her objective focuses on analyzing the Africanist persona in literature for its ability to reflect whiteness and on more fully understanding the largely unacknowledged and unexamined interdependence between black and white identity in American culture and literature. In addition to these questions, Morrison addresses "the ways in which artists—and the society that bred them—transferred internal conflicts to a 'blank darkness,' to conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies" (38) because this transferal, according to Morrison, is a significant theme in American literature.

More than anything else, Morrison's text is a direct challenge to scholars to concentrate on depictions of ontologically dependent whiteness in American literature

rather than to foreclose adult discourse (9) on "a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness" (47). Morrison outlines numerous focal areas that should be investigated to allow a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the "Africanist" component and persona in American literature. According to Morrison, scholars should explore how an imaginative encounter with Africanism allows whites to think about themselves (51), how Africanist language is used within texts to establish a division or estrangement between whites and blacks (52), how Africanist characters are employed to "define goals and enhance the qualities of white characters" (52), how the "manipulation of the Africanist narrative" acts as a "meditation—both safe and risky—on one's own [white] humanity" (52), and other equally daunting themes. While Morrison's text offers an endless expanse of scholarly opportunities for innumerable works of American literature, in the following chapters I will concentrate and scrutinize *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* with attention to the authors' representations of blacks and whites. Doing so will reveal connections to whiteness in American society and assist students in understanding the how whiteness saturates our culture today.

Clearly one of the most relevant methods for introducing whiteness studies within the literature classroom is to demonstrate constructions of whiteness in the context of literary texts. Through the characters, setting, conflicts, and social structures within the texts, students may gain a greater awareness of racial tensions/resolutions represented by various authors. Students should have the opportunity to view works from two different authors who share a time period and story line. By using this method, we can study and analyze the different perspectives within the texts.

According to Atticus Finch, "it is a sin to kill a mockingbird" (Lee 90), but is it a sin to be white? Harper Lee's novel have been widely hailed as a keen analysis of racial injustice in the South during the 1930s, and for the most part, educators concentrate on this aspect of the novel to focus their lessons. While acute awareness of our society's racial inequity and discrimination are essential elements of any students' education, Lee's text also incorporates numerous expressions of hegemonic whiteness underlying her message of racial, class, and gendered stereotypes. The most prevalent images of whiteness include the Radley family, Bob Ewell, and Mrs. Merriweather. From these examples, the reader can recognize and distinguish unmistakable elements of white society which Harper Lee chooses to elucidate and criticize (and at times present uncritically as the norm).

For some readers, the Radley family simply fades like a vapor into the background of the novel's significance; for others, Arthur Radley is merely an object of the children's fascination throughout the novel. Upon a closer reading, however, the Radley family suggests a striking statement concerning whiteness. Mr. Radley as the dominant father figure isolates Boo in his home for over fifteen years—subdues Arthur's passions—and ultimately controls the family. Additionally, the entire family isolates itself from the community in its rejection of social contacts, commitments, and especially Sunday visits. Even after his death, Mr. Radley's presence lingers in the form of his oldest son Nathan, who returns to Maycomb and embodies the temperament of his father. Calpurnia, the Finches' cook, states, "There goes the meanest man ever God blew breath into" (Lee 12) when Mr. Radley is "carried out" after he passes away. This statement

shocks Jem and Scout because "Calpurnia rarely commented on the ways of white people" (12).

A whiteness-cognizant teacher should ask students, what is so shocking about Calpurnia's declaration? Is it that she (as a black woman) speaks out about a white man or that the children are actually made aware of a white man's actions? Had the community simply accepted the right of a white man to imprison his son in his home without question or concern for the son's mental, physical, or emotional wellbeing? If a black man had imprisoned his son or daughter in his home in the same extreme manner as Mr. Radley, would the community response and that of the Finch children have been the same? Would the members of Maycomb have taken a black man's word as authority as they did for Mr. Radley? Would the authorities have released a black boy charged for disorderly conduct to his parents as the courts did for Mr. Radley? These questions cloud simple acceptance of a white man's word and the portrayal of white society. More importantly, this is a moment in the novel where Lee acknowledges what few whites of the time, and even now, would admit—that blacks had and still possess a critical, perceptive eye for whites and their ways. Lee chooses not to include Morrison's "Africanist presence" in Calpurnia's character, but rather exhibits a character with insightful knowledge of white people in the community.

In addition to Mr. Radley's dominance as an exemplar of whiteness, the reader encounters Arthur Radley, the forced recluse and mysterious presence throughout the novel. Arthur Radley finally reveals himself as the Finch children's champion when he defends them against attack by Bob Ewell. In her description of Arthur Radley, Lee employs the word *white* four times and connotes a pale, insipid, colorless human being:

> He [Arthur] had been leaning against the wall when I came into the room, his arms folded across his chest. As I pointed he brought his arms down and pressed the palms of his hands against the wall. They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light of Jem's room.
>
> I looked from his hands to his sand-stained khaki pants; my eyes traveled up his thin frame to his torn denim shirt. His face was as white as his hands, but for a shadow on his jutting chin. His cheeks were thin to hollowness; his mouth was wide; there were shallow, almost delicate indentations at his temples, and his gray eyes were so colorless I thought he was blind. His hair was dead and thin, almost feathery on top of his head. (270)

As the reader more fully encounters Arthur Radley through the eyes of Scout Finch, we see him clearly described as an unhealthy individual—a shadow of himself—and a shadow (phantom) of what he could be apart from the isolation of his existence. At one point early in the novel, Miss Maudie informs Scout of her memory of Arthur Radley: "I remember Arthur Radley when he was a boy. He always spoke nicely to me, no matter what folks said he did. Spoke as nicely as he knew how" (Lee 46). To extend this point, Atticus, in his explanation of the Radley family to Jem and Scout, clarifies "that there were other ways of making people into ghosts" (Lee 11), referencing Mr. Radley's purposeful subjugation and oppression of Arthur.

Perhaps Lee is commenting on whiteness to some degree with this character. Thanks, in part, to their privileged social positioning at the top of the racial hierarchy, white people forcibly keep themselves isolated from the societal Other for so long that

sickness or fear of others, and of otherness, overtakes them. They become a shadow of their true or potential identities, and they become timid and fearful of the world outside the security of their conceptual walls. Much like the figure of Arthur Radley, whites have encountered isolation to the extent that comfort, security, and sanctuary exist only within that white seclusion and sheltering. As Lillian Smith explains in her prescient study of the white southern psyche, *Killers of the Dream*, there exists a "collective fear" (16) that "block[s]" whites "from sensible contact with the world we live in" (16). Smith also states that "to keep this resistance strong, wall after wall has been thrown up in the southern mind against criticism from without and within" (16). Through the example of the Radley family, the critical reader can unmistakably observe a parallel between the seclusion of Arthur Radley and the isolation of whiteness.

A second predominantly white presence within the novel is Mr. Bob Ewell, whom students can be encouraged to read as a representative of white culture. Ewell lives and breathes upon his white privilege, which allows him to bend the rules, interpret the law, and justify his own crimes. In Atticus' description of Ewell, he reveals a man who neglects his children, squanders what little money he receives in aid, and habitually violates the law. Atticus depicts Ewell in the following passage from the novel:

> Atticus said the Ewells had been the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations. None of them had done an honest day's work in his recollection. . . . They were people, but they lived like animals . . . He said that the Ewells were members of an exclusive society made up of Ewells. In certain circumstances the common folk judiciously allowed them certain privileges by the simple method of becoming blind to some of the Ewells' activities. (Lee 30-31)

Ewell is clearly a lowly character in town, one whom most other would derisively lable "white trash," yet from two separate incidents, the reader can perceive Bob Ewell's white privilege and his exercise of this advantage for his personal benefit. The first of these involves Mr. Ewell's deliberate rejection of and disregard for the laws of Maycomb County. Rather than living within the regulations for hunting, drinking, and the care of one's children, Bob Ewell hedonistically hunts when he wants to, recklessly drinks when he pleases, and always neglects his children. The white members of his community, like the Finches, rationalize that it is easier to allow Ewell to ignore the laws for his children's sakes. But what benefit does the Ewell system offer those children? Would the white response to a black man neglecting his children be similar? Would whites allow a black man to disregard the law and act however and whenever he wishes? Would a black man be allowed the same privileges? How do these privileges of hypocrisy and denial still exist for whites today? Clearly, separate rules exist for the privileged white male.

The other incident demonstrating Bob Ewell's white privilege involves the central conflict of the novel. When Ewell falsely accuses Tom Robinson of raping and beating his daughter Mayella, the reader identifies an unconcealed and deliberate disregard for the human rights of both Tom and Mayella as well as a premeditated use of his white privilege in an attempt to exonerate his personal involvement in the neglect and abuse of his daughter. Ewell's allegation against Tom Robinson exhibits a distinct example of what TuSmith and Reddy explain is integral in understanding racism and whiteness: "human insecurity and its consequent will to power—the fear of being left behind" (315). Bob Ewell hides his insecurity, his fear of failure, and his incapacity to succeed beyond his current social status behind his white privilege. What literary scholars do not often

discuss is that "Robinson is the victim of her [Mayella Ewell's] sexual advances" (Dorr 711). From Kreyling's perspective, "what [the novel's scholars] miss completely is the anguish of Tom Robinson" (71). However, in the mind of Bob Ewell, the entire community would not question his accusation because of his racial background and that of Tom Robinson. His anger throughout the novel stems not from the fact that his daughter is beaten, not from the fact that his name has been shamed, and not from the fact that people in Maycomb view his family with derision, but that Tom Robinson is not immediately hanged or shot for his supposed crime—and finally, worst of all, that Atticus Finch plans to defend Robinson with integrity in a court of law.

Unfortunately for Tom Robinson, Bob Ewell's white privilege is more powerful than the proof of his impotent left arm—Robinson is sentenced to die by a jury who refuses acquittal of a black man because a white man has accused him. Even though every piece of evidence throughout the trial argues Tom Robinson's innocence, the white jury denies Robinson's freedom in order to preserve white privilege. According to Dorr, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* suggests that social prejudices, attitudes, and beliefs, controlled primarily by race and class attitudes, determined justice. Lee makes a valid observation: justice was emphatically not color blind in the segregated South" (713).

Representing another aspect of the existence of whiteness throughout the novel is the hypocritical Mrs. Grace Merriweather. According to Scout, Mrs. Merriweather assuredly is the "most devout lady in Maycomb" (Lee 230) whose "eyes always filled with tears when she considered the oppressed" (230). Mrs. Merriweather suggests the large number of white Americans who subconsciously adhere to stereotypical and prejudiced beliefs but outwardly consider themselves righteous, tolerant Christians.

During her missionary circle report, Mrs. Merriweather sympathizes with the missionaries who encounter the "squalid lives of the Mrunas" (228) "living in that jungle with nobody. . . . Not a white person'll go near 'em but that saintly J. Grimes Everett" (230). When the discussion leads to the contempt with the Mrunas who live in "sin and squalor" (231), the other ladies enter the conversation and mistakenly reference Tom Robinson's wife and children as the topic of conversation. The missionary circle ladies believe "that church ought to . . . help her [Helen] lead a Christian life for those children from here on out" (231), not realizing the biting insincerity behind their carefully chosen words.

The Christian white women of Maycomb believe that their duty is to educate foreign people about their own *civilized* ways of living, rather than accept alternate worldviews or cultural divergence. These women do not consider their unwillingness to reach out to Helen Robinson; they do not consider their lack of support unchristian in any way. As Smith states, "We whites have a color glaze on our imaginations that makes it hard to feel with the people we have segregated ourselves from" (62). They are merely enacting a supposedly *natural* and subconscious part of their Southern existence—a part that remains present in the subconscious minds of white people today. Prejudice and segregation between whites and blacks is something the women of Maycomb have encountered every day of their existence, so they function like innate, instinctive components of their lives. Writing a decade or so earlier, Lillian Smith emphasizes her discovery of the paradoxical circumstances surrounding such women and their positions in society:

> I learned that it is possible to be a Christian and a white southerner simultaneously; to be a gentlewoman and an arrogant callous creature in the same moment; to pray at night and ride a Jim Crow car the new morning and to feel comfortable in doing both . . . I learned it the way all of my southern people learn it: by closing door after door until one's mind and heart and conscience are blocked off from each other and from reality. (20)

Just as Miss Maudie describes the citizens of Maycomb as the "safest folks in the world" (Lee 215) who are "so rarely called on to be Christians" (215), Smith learned to "split [her] conscience from [her] acts and Christianity from southern tradition" (Smith 18). No doubt this paradox leads to Scout's confusion during the missionary circle conversation as well as throughout the entire Tom Robinson trial and controversy. This paradox is entrenched in believing that one is righteous, while performing acts and benefiting from actions that are corrupt. One question teachers might pose to students is to consider how whites today embody, embrace, and perpetuate this paradox throughout their daily lives. By examining the still thriving inconsistencies, students may add this element to their increasing definition of whiteness.

White presence within *To Kill a Mockingbird* directs the critical reader to recognize several key components of whiteness including an underlying, subconscious racism framed by classic Southern etiquette and Christianity; a compulsion and gravitation toward isolation from the racial Other; and a deeply centered, highly functional set of privileges all promoting the white American lifestyle, white American values, and white American superiority. To encounter whiteness within the novel allows the reader to understand the insidious condition that pervasive whiteness constructs

within society (and that still exists today), and it is clear that the southern Jim Crow-era whiteness depicted by Lee shares elements with today's whiteness. As Morrison explains, "[examining] the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability and availability" (11) reflects aspects of whiteness in American culture and demands that whites recognize their interdependence on non-white cultures. After learning to recognize whiteness throughout literature and American culture, educators must then realize the necessity of expanding white students' knowledge of this extensive, subversive societal element of which they are a part and to which they (either knowingly or unknowingly) contribute.

Chapter 6: The Desire

"I want to learn more about this disease."

"I can certainly point you in the right direction to find resources and information."

"Good. Educating myself with the facts will help me stay focused on a resolution for a positive change and outcome."

Henry Giroux frequently interprets and responds to concerns about whiteness expressed by whites by taking a psychoanalytical approach. One statement he has made draws a conclusion about the effective connections that readers can make between what we know about people and how people are represented:

> As a pedagogical practice, 'performative interpretation' [in the words of Jacques Derrida] suggests that how we understand and come to know ourselves and others cannot be separated from how we represent and imagine ourselves. This is not merely an attempt to reassert the pedagogical/political significance of storytelling as a performative practice as much it is to reaffirm such narratives as an integral component of memory-work and the need for people to speak affirmatively and critically out of their own histories, traditions, and personal experiences. (147)

Reading and analysis of literature can, then, truly offer students a contrasting view between actual and perceived knowledge about groups of people. This insight becomes especially accurate and effective when teachers pair texts in order to gain an understanding about a social context or personal experience from two varying perspectives. By itself, *The Great Gatsby* is a text with a powerful statement about the perceptions of upper class white people, but if teachers would read *The Great Gatsby*

with Nella Larsen's *Passing*, the impact would be that much more compelling and would enable students a wider vision of cultural positions. Scholars such as Teague and O'Brien feel that "pairing *Gatsby* and *Passing* enables a study of contrasting worldviews within small parameters of space and time" (144). Teachers have begun using a growing array of minority texts, encouraging students to better understand minority perspectives. However, as Harvey indicates, teachers should "invite discussion of the mixed, conflicted, and multiple character of *all* American identities" (63), including white identities, as this will offer students a view of the interconnected layers involved in viewing the world from multiple perspectives or points of view.

Literary analysis is actually a powerful tool that educators and scholars utilize to gain a deeper understanding of the author's representation of particular cultures, time periods, people, and places. Anthony explains that literary analysis "offer[s] students a chance to see how various contemporary American authors were both enacting and critiquing (often simultaneously) the ways in which the notion of American identity . . . depends upon the act of storytelling—upon the stories we tell others and hear from others, as well as the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves" (72). The knowledge we can gain through close study of literature will enhance our understanding of American culture and guide our interpretations of future texts. As Barrish states, his objective is to "help empower students and teachers to view the work of analyzing literature as offering the possibility of an unexpectedly proximate social and political payoff" (7). Furthermore, Barrish works

> through demonstration to remind students and teachers that closely reading literature—even literature that may seem anachronistic or "irrelevant"—can

> sometimes improve our leverage over contemporary modalities of identity and power without our needing first to elaborate historical genealogies. The same attentive, complex, and creative readings of literary texts that we develop in our classrooms and writing assignments may, at least in some cases, be self-consciously turned or "troped" to shed new light on even the most intricate dimensions of the social world that permeates our classrooms and ourselves. (7)

In some ways, the study of literature can "help to get students past some of these prejudices" (Wilner et al. 134) because the literary works are "less threatening" (134), perhaps because the students are discussing characters rather than real people. Thus, in such a context, discussion of the often sensitive and alienating subject of whiteness can be effectively encouraged.

One mode of literary analysis that Karen Hall utilizes is to have the students focus on what she calls stance and counterstance. For her classroom, "stance" is the position of mainstream media, society, power, etc., while "counterstance" represents the margins around the dominant position. Hall explains her strategy and her questioning quite well:

I continually used this language of stance and counterstance throughout the course, both as we analyzed films and literature, novels, short stories, and poetry. I would ask the class: is this character coming from a stance or a counterstance? A stance—and I had charted power on the board with a circle saying, okay, there's a center and a margin—so is this character representing the power and the stance of the center? Are they coming from the margin, the counterstance? Is it a complex hybridization of the two? Does it flip back and forth? Does this not even fit this character and why or why not? As we would

discuss these things, frequently students would have passionate remarks. (Wilner et al. 144)

These explanations clearly demonstrate the usefulness of literary analysis in terms of facilitating students' awareness of whiteness in American culture, society, and media. Students will encounter theories or social structures on a daily basis that are considered the standard, so, of course, our goal should be to respond to and counter these "standards" with resources that will challenge their limited frames of reference. Giroux echoes this idea: "Texts are now seen not only as objects of struggle in challenging dominant modes of racial and colonial authority but also as pedagogical resources to rewrite the possibilities for new narratives, identities, and cultural spaces" (494). Therefore, through close interactions with carefully selected literary texts containing multiple points of view, students may develop a heightened awareness of whiteness to begin analyzing everything they see, hear, and read. As McGee states, "English studies should no longer be the domain of a monological voice but the field of open debate and dialogue between different voices, backgrounds, and subjectivities" (287).

We need to teach from a critical perspective where we prompt students to question everything they read and to analyze what they encounter for instances of unconscious/conscious white discrimination, privilege, or power. Students need to learn how to distinguish racial influences and determine faulty logic or automatic unthinkingly "white" perspectives. Edgerton employs these notions in her utilization of Toni Morrison to teach race and identity and explains that "we can learn from the insights of the psychoanalytic process and its implications for and in pedagogy, and that we might do this through reflective readings of literature, both marginalized and canonical" (233),

effectively demonstrating that "this process produces a blank space to allow for new interpretation, thinking, and theory that students may not have conceived previously" (Patterson 119).

In terms of the project suggested here, teachers can very specifically investigate texts to determine how authors represent characters as a white man or woman by asking, "In what sense do the author's descriptions of characters reveal his, and American culture's, imaginings of Whiteness?" (Harvey 70). Specific to *The Great Gatsby*, readers can ask themselves who or what Jay Gatsby represents. According to Matthew Bruccoli in the preface to *The Great Gatsby*, "Gatsby is the American self-made—indeed, self-invented—man. He believes in the American Dream of success ("the orgastic future"); he fulfills it; he confuses it with Daisy; he is betrayed by it. The appellation *great* as applied to Gatsby reverberates with irony" (xi, emphasis in original). Additionally, the reader may investigate what whiteness-influenced values are presented within the characters, setting, and text along with careful attention to how characters react to particular situations or people throughout the novel.

Students also need to look at what Gatsby represents on a deeper level focused on whiteness. Gatsby's whiteness (and maleness) enables him to create a fantastical life loosely based on facts that people question but do not really challenge—mainly because they are too intoxicated by his wealth to care. The East Eggers realize that Gatsby's money is new, and although he is not entirely accepted in their society for this reason, he is still a wealthy white male who has the power to manipulate his wealth to his advantage. Likewise, they profit from Gatsby's generosity and extravagance for their own pursuits and enjoyment.

Gatsby exploits his privileges—privileges clearly not afforded to non-whites of his time, whether male or female—in order to create the life he desires for himself. He is able to obtain Daisy's favor because of his position, his wealth, and his domineering manner. When Daisy and Gatsby first meet, the reader is given the impression that Gatsby's lack of wealth and stability for Daisy (in addition to his military service in WWI) thwarts their relationship. Gatsby does not let this impede his plans for a life with Daisy but determines to construct another more acceptable life to impress and acquire Daisy. Through his "drug stores" and other less-than-honest financial ventures, Gatsby gains financial wealth and attempts to generate a notable existence. Basically, Gatsby has the luxury of moving in and out of prestigious circles (he is able to *pass* for a wealthy man—albeit new money) essentially because he is white and male. As Nick states, "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world" (48). Therefore, even though he has accessed wealth and the privileges that are connected to being affluent, he is not wholly accepted by those who were born into their prosperity.

Another example of this exploitation occurs when Nick and Gatsby are driving into New York to have lunch with one of Gatsby's friends. When they are stopped by a policeman, Gatsby responds in the following manner:

> "All right, old sport," called Gatsby. We slowed down. Taking a *white* card from his wallet he waved it before the man's eyes.
>
> "Right you are," agreed the policeman, tipping his cap. "Know you next time, Mr. Gatsby. Excuse me!"
>
> "What was that?" I inquired. "The picture of Oxford?"

> "I was able to do the commissioner a favor once, and he sends me a Christmas card every year." (72-73, emphasis mine)

Gatsby literally waves a *white* card at the policeman and reminds him that Gatsby has the connections to influence the policeman's superiors. Although, what is intriguing and complex about Gatsby's character is the fact that he actually has to carry this card around with him. If a person has to prove his privilege, does he truly possess it? Is Gatsby's privilege authentic or simply created by extreme means?

The entire novel seems to be written from an elitist, racist, white supremacist perspective, and the characters indicate their compliance with these views. When Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Nick first visit with one another in the novel, the subject of white domination arises from Nick's comment about feeling uncivilized. Tom responds by saying, "'Civilization's going to pieces . . . Have you read 'The Rise of the Coloured Empires' by this man Goddard?'" (17). Tom then continues to identify his racist position by explaining, "'Well, it's a fine book and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved . . . This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or these other races will have control of things'" (17). Teague and O'Brien establish that "this attitude is unanswered by Nick or any of the other characters, so the reader is left thinking this was a common view held by wealthy White Americans during the 1920s" (138). After Tom discovers Daisy's affair with Gatsby, he explodes with derision for people of lower class and multicultural backgrounds. Daisy asks Tom to control himself and his opinions, but he responds,

> "Self control!" repeated Tom incredulously. "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out . . . . Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white." (136-37)

What Tom fails to recognize and acknowledge is that he is "sneering at family life and family institutions" (137) as well, given that he is having an affair with Myrtle Wilson. From Tom's perspective, he is excluded from reprisal and apparently does not even believe he is at fault because he is wealthy, he is white, and he is male. Tom crosses class boundaries by remorselessly taking Myrtle Wilson as his lover as only a white man can. Tom's inability to conceive of interracial marriage demonstrates his racist views and if the reader does not already feel contempt and disdain for Tom, they certainly do after this point in the novel. Educators can use this element of racism in the novel to connect with contemporary forms of racism, such as white fears of illegal immigrants, fears of becoming a minority, and fears of losing job opportunities through affirmative action policies.

From his comments concerning how Daisy met Gatsby, Tom also exhibits his chauvinistic double standard for men and women. He states, "By God, I may be old-fashioned in my ideas but women run around too much these days to suit me. They meet all kinds of crazy fish" (110). Nick confirms the white, wealthy advantage of Tom and Daisy when he explains his feelings about Tom at the end of the novel. Nick discloses that "[he] couldn't forgive [Tom] or like him but [Nick] saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless

people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (187-88).

In addition to these examples of privileged whiteness and Gatsby's search for white identity, whiteness-cognizant teachers should look at how Fitzgerald displays (through his characters) a desire for a homogenous society throughout the text. When describing Gatsby's parties, Nick reveals that "instead of rambling, this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the countryside" (49). Nies explains how "fears play themselves out in *The Great Gatsby* . . . despite Fitzgerald's lampoon-style representation of Tom. Nick Carraway longs for the whiteness of the ethnically homogenous Middle West while Myrtle Wilson lies dead in the road of an ethnically mixed intersection outside of New York" (5).

We see Tom's fears of losing the purity of the white race thus far preserved by its wealth along with Gatsby's fears of losing his dream of a white life with Daisy thus far preserved only by his hope, and "the fear of merging finds respite in images of physical continuity and sameness" (Nies 87). These fears are represented in conversations, settings, and descriptions that all include references to the word white and "register a nostalgic return, despite its [the novel's] explicit satire of those who would pine for a homogenous America" (Nies 104). Even Nick states in the beginning of the novel that he "wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (6) with a desire for everyone to be ethically upright and fundamentally decent—qualities typically

"representative" of whiteness, which, more explicitly then than now, was directly counterpoised with the projected opposites of such qualities in non-white people.

The word *white* appears over forty-five times all throughout the text, with as many as four instances on a single page, "representing all people in a whitewashed vision of normalcy" (Nies 3). Additionally, color words and imagery abound on almost every page of the novel. Fitzgerald refers to "the white palaces of fashionable East Egg" (10), "a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion overlooking the bay" (11), "the windows" that "were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass" (12), and Daisy and Jordan, who were "both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering" (12). Nies explains that Fitzgerald's "texts function as a nostalgic return to an unchanging whiteness . . . Whiteness here is signified as a merged state, but it's a merging with sameness, a merging so complete that no other folk even appear" (17). To provide additional examples, the text refers to "a low white-washed railroad fence . . . under Doctor Eckleburg's persistent stare" (28) (who, by the way, has blue eyes); the appearance of Wilson, who wears a suit covered by "a white ashen dust" (30); the apartment buildings that look like "slice[s] of "white cake" (32); the airedale's "feet that were startlingly white" (32); Mr. McKee, who has a "white spot of lather on his cheekbone" (34); and Myrtle's sister Catherine, who has a solid sticky bob of red hair and a complexion of powdered milky white" (34). What is Fitzgerald hoping to accomplish through all the uses of the word white? What does it mean to be white in Fitzgerald's world?

To discover the designation of whiteness, readers can also look at what is *not* white throughout the novel—specifically the valley of ashes. When the reader is first

introduced to this location, we read about "a certain desolate area of land" (Fitzgerald 27). According to Nick,

> This is the valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally, a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (27)

Part of what makes the valley of ashes so desolate (in addition to its lack of wealth) is its ethnic diversity. Nies notes, "this place of George and Myrtle Wilson's residence is depicted as a 'graying' landscape, not only graying in an industrial sense, but more importantly in an ethnic sense. The occupants include Greeks, Italians, Jews, and African-Americans (passing by) who frame the graying George Wilson, the anemic center of this ethnically diverse place" (99). It seems that this place and its people are being divested of life because of the lack of whiteness, lack of money, lack of high society, and all those elements that offer privilege in upper class circles. The people, landscape, and buildings are all described in terms of death, dying, or ghosts; and these references imply a draining of life and a disparity. Fitzgerald seems to imply that a life outside of the implications of whiteness is diseased, decaying, and dying; he appears to elevate the empty, evacuated whiteness in American society; and he critiques the bland, self-satisfied emptiness of the wealthy white characters throughout the novel.

Even though Gatsby does enjoy certain privileges associated with his whiteness, he has numerous "black" characteristics. These could possibly represent Morrison's Africanist presence, employed to "define goals and enhance the qualities of white characters" (Morrison 52). Gatsby's associations with Meyer Wolfsheim denigrate his integrity and encourage suspicions from other characters in the novel. Likewise, the methods by which Gatsby obtains his wealth are not righteous, honorable means, but a scheme that is underhanded and illegal during this time in American history. Fitzgerald establishes a system of inheriting one's wealth as the highest, most acceptable course conflicting with Gatsby's self-made course (the less conventional and more questionable). Certainly, Gatsby's attempt to reestablish and secure a married woman's love through secret encounters is distinguished as dishonest, dark conduct. Teachers could point out the differences in how various racial identities are portrayed, especially non-white identities, and establish a relationship between how these identities are formed and defined by today's standards.

From the beginning of the novel until the end, Fitzgerald upholds the wealthy, white lifestyle (although Tom is ridiculed through his assorted comments in the novel), while these "esteemed" members scoff and sneer at lower class and culturally diverse people throughout the text. When Tom and Daisy look at Gatsby, they see what they are not—and the derision they behold Gatsby at the end of the novel allows them to escape back into their safe, white, and legal world. Even Nick, our semi-trustworthy narrator, acknowledges his condescension toward Gatsby, "who represent[s] everything for which [he has] an unaffected scorn" (Fitzgerald 6). Possibly, it is Gatsby's capability to exploit the "white system" to his advantage even with his manipulative nature that angers Tom,

Daisy, and Nick so much. But this allows them to uphold their righteous stature and keep Gatsby at a distance, convincing themselves that they are not like him.

Finally, the reader can look at Morrison's discussion of how authors "transferred internal conflicts to a 'blank darkness,' to conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies" (Morrison 38). The internal conflicts of George Wilson, resulting from the discovery of his wife's affair and her subsequent murder, lead him on a frenzied pursuit of the perceived murderer/lover. When Tom identifies Gatsby as the owner of the yellow car, George "violently silence[s]" (38) Gatsby by murdering him, effectively removing Gatsby from everyone's memory. After Gatsby's death, most of the East Egg inhabitants proceed as if Gatsby had never existed and do not even consider attending his funeral. Nick is unable to persuade anyone to revisit their connection to Gatsby and describes his death as "the holocaust" (Fitzgerald 170). It is clear that Fitzgerald represents Gatsby's darkness in the other characters' eagerness to disassociate with him and all he signifies throughout the novel. Maurice Berger makes a strong connection between characters' blackness and whiteness that connects quite well to Fitzgerald's representation of Gatsby as well as other characters throughout the novel. He states the following:

It is the awareness of the blackness in our whiteness, and the whiteness in our blackness, that most confuses us, disrupting our complacent fantasy that our racial and ethnic identities will always be manifest, simple, pure. Whiteness, like blackness, is not an immaculate, concrete truth but a social construction designed to mark the boundaries of race. Rather than attempting to identify what whiteness is, to make it visible so that we can better understand its potency, scholars might well contemplate the value of admitting what it is not. (206)

What disrupts Gatsby's fantasy about a life with Daisy is the knowledge that he will never be considered as white as Daisy and Tom and that Daisy's brilliant whiteness will never permit her to be "grayed" by Gatsby's influence. Because of Gatsby's "bi-color" lifestyle, he was able to pass between both worlds—but was never guaranteed acceptance from either one. Gatsby virtually becomes an Africanist "blankness" when other "whiter" characters project onto him their own disparaging fantasies about types of people supposedly "darker," and thus below, themselves. Jay Gatz is non-white, as are some of his associates, such as the Jewish ganster, but it is the "whiter" characters who establish the negative aspects non-whiteness.

Nies explains that "those who gained power and prestige throughout history do not represent 'the whole of American experience' but rather a select few who have succeeded in gaining societal prestige often at the expense of racial or ethnic Others. Bryan Washington finds *The Great Gatsby* a text obsessed with '[e]thnic cohesiveness and familial continuity' in ways which devalue the plural nature of American society" (17). Indeed, the reader is consciously aware of the obsession Fitzgerald appears to have with the concept of whiteness, and we can easily distinguish how the word white represents power, wealth, and purity in this novel, just as it did during Fitzgerald's time. With Gatsby's desire to attain the "white" Daisy (even her name is a white flower), this involves achieving wealth and power—acclimating to Daisy's purified, white life. The only way Gatsby can achieve upward mobility is to purify himself of poverty, lack of family importance, and other aspects of his life that make him "dirty" in the eyes of upper-class citizens. It is through his attempts at purification that the reader sees Gatsby as Fitzgerald's "other" and recognizes the author's struggle to contemplate the value of

whiteness. Teachers would do well to explain Fitzgerald's conflicting position between his own obsession with white rich people and an evident scorn for their excesses and ridiculous fears and ask students to examine these characteristics within contemporary society.

Conclusion: The Destination

"Everything is so uncertain—the life I knew before is gone and what has replaced it is something that is unknown. How can I adjust to all of these new thoughts—these new demands on my life?"

"Well, you can either accept them and move on or dismiss them and gamble with your life. Either way, you are not in control of what happens."

"The implications of this disease are too glaring to be ignored, though. If I disregard what the doctors have told me, the illness will not leave, but rather continue to leave its mark on my body."

"What will you do?"

"I need to change my outlook and find a source of positive power to reframe my vision and look with hope to the future. I need to look at life from a fresh perspective. At the very least, I need to appreciate my new experiences, knowing that each one will become an invaluable component of who I am."

When any teacher begins to look at integrating whiteness studies in her curriculum, the process can seem daunting because she is asking (especially white) students to restructure nearly everything they have been conditioned to believe is true, good, and right about America. We can teach students about the American Dream—but we also need to teach them that for many people in mainstream society, this is a dream that is not black and white—is not in color—but is brilliantly white—blinding people to the point of debilitation. The prospect of working toward a solution for this debilitation is not only overwhelming, but it is unsettling because many students are so inexperienced about what whiteness involves or how it involves them.

August 28, 2007 will mark more than four decades since Martin Luther King, Jr. voiced his great American vision of freedoms and equality for all people. When I first heard the words of this renowned speech (at around ten years old), I was amazed that an African American would have the courage to stand up and state such passionate words aloud. Now, twenty years and multitudes of whiteness scholarship later, I am actually able to *hear* his words. My dream has now become to reveal the true nature of whiteness and support students as they eliminate their inadequate understandings, helping them to become the next generation of physicians who work for a cure.

When the cancer cells spread to the blood stream—the lifeblood of the system—the chances of survival or overcoming the disease look bleak. But with continual systemic treatment, the body will begin to heal itself and begin a progression toward recovery. For this reason, educators can begin to teach the healing process for a society inundated with the repercussions of whiteness, such as living with presumptions about non-white races, blindly accepting traditionally accepted definitions of all racial relations, and passively accepting the destructive influence of white privileges. Exposing students to elements of whiteness in literature, media, societal institutions, and other aspects of American life on a regular basis will unmask the layers of privilege and dominance that lie hidden within white communities, white schools, white families, and membership in the white world.

This healing process will not transpire immediately. Patience is needed in order to diffuse biased responses; knowledge is needed in order to provide counterstances to society's stances; and a commitment to the truth is needed in order to encourage students

to discover for themselves the pervasive nature of the elements of whiteness. Durso et al. explains her expectations for her students:

> I don't think any of my students are going to walk out of my classroom and all of a sudden they're going to understand the complexity of whiteness or the complexity of ethnicity. But if they can just move a step in understanding other people who are different than they are, if they can understand what the literature is saying to them, if they can walk out of my classroom . . . if they can walk into high school and be able to teach *The House on Mango Street* with any level of depth and understanding then I feel we have profited immensely. But I don't pretend that by giving them one semester I have changed the world. We're just moving in one step. (126)

By concentrating on calculated progress rather than attempting to incorporate every element of whiteness, teachers can initiate the process of learning. Probably one of the most frustrating components of teaching literature is determining what to include in the curriculum out of the countless texts available, and each teacher acknowledges that she cannot possibly teach everything. Therefore, engaging the most significant and relevant texts will generate a well-balanced curriculum with the most constructive results. As Rodriguez states, "through the process of 'naming whiteness,' white people can begin to see it at work in their own day-to-day lives and experiences and therefore be in a position to begin the quite arduous task of living out their whiteness progressively" (10). Sleeter echoes this call by explaining "as whites learn to hear how Americans of color experience white racism in general and our own actions in particular and as we learn to examine our own worldview in order to identify its boundaries and limitations, we can

learn to engage in more productive dialog and action" (152). From this point, students may enter into deepening discussions of whiteness and develop their position as an antiracist white ally.

Rather than accommodating racist behaviors and positions, white educators and students alike can "begin to take seriously the ways non-Whites see them, [and] they concurrently learn to address social, political, and economic structures that perpetuate the cycle of racism" (Kincheloe and Steinberg 194). Roman considers the movement from traditional curriculum and pedagogy to a pedagogy of whiteness when she explains that "learning when to move over in order to permit the speech of those who have been silenced and when to speak against racism in an alliance with others would mark a profoundly postcolonial rupture in the texts of curriculum theorizing and pedagogy" (84-85). Even educators must rethink every text they have ever taught and reevaluate its position in a revolutionizing curriculum for a society that is being transfigured yet crippled by its own ignorance. Ignoring these issues will benefit no one—and will only promulgate the privileged ascendancy whites unconsciously maintain for themselves. As Winant states, "it is no longer possible to assume a 'normalized' whiteness, whose invisibility and relatively monolithic character signify immunity from political or cultural challenge" (40) because "race continues to play its designated role of crystallizing all the fundamental issues in U.S. society. As always, we articulate our anxieties in racial terms: wealth and poverty, crime and punishment, gender and sexuality, nationality and citizenship, culture and power, are all articulated in the United States primarily through race" (Winant 49).

Making the transition to become a white ally involves understanding that students can make changes in their communities, their schools, and even their individual families. Converting to an ally position means taking action to promote positive change rather than compliantly yielding to and ignoring racist behaviors. Teachers may actively involve students in this process by offering an optimistic view for the future of critical whiteness studies. Tatum explains that "[h]eightening student awareness about racism without also providing some hope for social change is a prescription for despair. We all have a sphere of influence, some domain in which we exercise some level of power and control . . . consider how it might be used to interrupt the cycle of racism" (465). Rodriguez emphasizes this call to action: "serious racial concerns arise as white students are made aware of the issues at stake in living out their whiteness progressively in the name of racial justice. From this perspective, they are invited to consider what they can *do* with their whiteness in light of the broader project of expanding democratic possibilities" (17-18, emphasis in original). Through all these lessons and encounters with whiteness, students must learn that they have the influence to change even a small component of this cycle—if they can understand the implications of whiteness on a personal level and prevent themselves from abusing the privileges of whiteness, then they will have become an ally.

More specifically, teachers can address these issues of whiteness in their curricula by asking students to question media myths, investigate unwritten social structure and patterns, and challenge traditionally taught notions of culture and race. By incorporating a study of the terms *black, white, multicultural, minority, non-white,* and other related terms, students can begin to grasp how biases are evident even in the terminology of

publishers. To initiate this process of learning, teachers need to prepare regular, sequential, and ongoing lessons designed to strategically elucidate the major components of whiteness and allow students to articulate their own perspectives on the repercussions of whiteness.

These formative lessons would incorporate a wide range of multi-faceted resources and manifest to students how widespread whiteness permeates our culture. These resources should include all areas of media which they encounter on a daily basis, particularly emphasizing advertising, books, music, newspapers, and television. The more areas of American culture students can witness influences of whiteness, the more quickly they will be able to realize its lasting impact—its pervasive nature. Without this instrumental knowledge, white students and their communities will remain ignorant about true cultural life in America in addition to remaining ignorant about their own culture.

After completing these investigations of whiteness, students may continue learning more by extensive readings of literature as one avenue to deepen their understanding of whiteness. Reading texts such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* from a whiteness perspective will allow students greater insight into the subconscious presence of whiteness in everything we see, hear, and read. These texts, written during crucial racial decades in American history, have quite a story to tell our students. Lee and Fitzgerald have both infused elements of whiteness in their texts that teachers may use to teach conventionally-taught social behaviors and translate how these behaviors are frequently still present in today's social structure. By addressing authors' representations of society through the reactions and dialog of characters, teachers can augment students' understanding of whiteness.

Throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird*, critical readers will recognize the underlying racism softened by professed Christianity, privileges abused by white characters, and white isolation from racial Others, demonstrating central components of whiteness. Examining these elements will allow students to recognize the omnipresent structure of whiteness in American society during the 1930s and translate this knowledge in order to scrutinize today's society. Analysis of *The Great Gatsby* provides students with an essential consideration of how aspects of whiteness can be considered in terms of class differences. Teachers can direct students' understanding of the complexities involved in moving from one class position to another and how the definitions of whiteness change from one class to another.

Teachers cannot complete this education process alone, and other sectors of American life will need to begin promoting whiteness-cognizant belief systems; however, we cannot deny the urgent necessity of introducing whiteness studies within the classroom. Rather than passively accept perpetuated myths about race and American society, white students will hopefully feel a responsibility to define their own identity, to learn about the identities of non-white races, and to examine the society in which they are being educated. James Baldwin states that "the crucial paradox which comforts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society" (326); but "the obligation of anyone who thinks of himself [sic] as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk" (326). Ann Miser explains the indispensable nature of this knowledge:

> It is too easy to hide behind caution, too easy to observe quietly while inequities continue to corrupt our children's school experiences and teachers continue to be frustrated by lack of academic progress in their students. Is it not the moral obligation of the privileged to rid the world of privilege? We control the system—the culture, the rules, the priorities, the avenues of dialogue, the policies, the finances, even the sound waves. If we are to build democratic and ethnic schools, we must unsilence the silenced. (190)

Thus, the call goes out to scholars and educators to first educate themselves about whiteness studies and then ascertain how they may cultivate an understanding of whiteness within the minds of the people they encounter on a daily basis in order to bring about restorative healing to America's infirmity. The next generation will remain symptomatic unless teachers raise students' conscious responsibility toward the entanglements of whiteness. The healing will involve work—but what a highly valuable and indispensable vocation it is. Frederick Douglass closes these thoughts with a fundamental message:

> If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men [sic] who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightening. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

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