Winter 2006

From Traditional to Liberal Racism: Living Racism in the Everyday

Francisco Rios
Western Washington University, francisco.rios@wwu.edu

Margaret M. Zamudio

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/education_facpubs

Part of the Education Commons

FROM TRADITIONAL TO LIBERAL RACISM: LIVING RACISM IN THE EVERYDAY

MARGARET M. ZAMUDIO
FRANCISCO RIOS
University of Wyoming

ABSTRACT: *This article examines hundreds of entries in student journals collected at a university in the Mountain West and captures a striking contradiction between an articulated understanding of racism as "a thing of the past" and the reality of a persistent and pervasive racism. This qualitative study documents everyday racist events taking place in the life of students. These events are coded into either a traditional or modern "liberal" category to demonstrate the link between past and present race projects. The authors conclude that the contemporary "colorblind" discourse of the liberal era suggests an ongoing race project centered on the maintenance of white privilege. The mediating role institutions play between individual and structural relations of inequality implicates the university in the maintenance of white privilege.* Keywords: institutional racism; liberalism and racism; racism in higher education; race project; race talk; colorblind.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) uses the term *colorblind racism* to describe the dominant form of racism that persists in the post–Civil Rights era. Like the systematic brutal racism in the pre–Civil Rights era, colorblind racism functions to reinforce "the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege" (Bonilla-Silva 2003:9). Instead of using state-legitimated violence to maintain these social relations, Bonilla-Silva suggests that the racism of the post–Civil Rights era can be seen as "racism lite" or "discrimination with a smile." And while the racist ideology of a colorblind discourse is captured in peoples' words, attitudes, and less racially explicit deeds, Bonilla-Silva argues that the heart of racism is rooted in the material rewards of white privilege. In his book *Racism Without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva explains:

> . . . racial structures remain in place for the same reasons that other structures do. Since actors racialized as "white"—or as members of the dominant race—receive material benefits from the racial order, they struggle (or passively receive the manifold wages of whiteness) to maintain their privileges. In contrast, those

Address all correspondence to: Margaret M. Zamudio, Department of Sociology, 401 Ross Hall, 1000 E. University Ave., University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82072; *phone*: (307) 766-2098; *e-mail*: mzamudio@uwyo.edu.

defined as belonging to the subordinate race or races struggle to change the status quo (or become resigned to their position). Therein lays the secret of racial structures and racial inequality the world over. They exist because they benefit members of the dominant race. (P. 9)

We agree with Bonilla-Silva's (2003) substantive position that material rewards and hegemonic structural relations continue to influence the attitudes and ideology of the white masses. Our position states that not only do material rewards for whites motivate the persistence of racial attitudes, the activities (or just as often, the inactivity) of institutions serve to reinforce the new colorblind racism. We would like to add that while attacking Jim Crow institutions served to undermine Jim Crow racism, today the mechanisms that promote colorblind racism serve as an important front in the struggle against racism. Thus, one of our goals in this article is to identify ways racism is "played out" in a "colorblind" setting.

One of the major mechanisms at work in our new colorblind society is the primacy of the discourse that obscures both the prevalence of racism and the extent of white privilege (McIntosh 2004). Thus, one aspect of the struggle against racial inequality must be to demystify this discourse, to look at how this seemingly benign discourse around race and the institutions that promote it, put their stamp on a continued racial project where whites benefit at the expense of the racialized Other. Bonilla-Silva (2003) claims that "although some whites fight white supremacy and do not endorse white common sense, most subscribe to substantial portions of it in a casual, uncritical fashion that helps sustain the prevailing racial order" (p. 11).

According to Michael Omi and Howard Winnant (1994), "a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (p. 56). Racial projects are situated within a sociohistorical process of racial formations where the very meaning and subsequent consequences of race are politically determined. In this sense, racial projects are simply an attempt to create, maintain, destroy, or alter the existing prevailing racial categories and their structural relations (Omi and Winant 1994). The notion of a "colorblind" racism reflects the contemporary race project in its attempts to perpetuate existing structural inequality by obscuring the structural dimension of racial inequality. The race project of the post–Civil Rights era largely depends on promoting a "colorblind" discourse to denounce the traditional racism of the past, on one hand, while denying that traditional racism continues in the modern era to affect structural inequality, on the other hand.

The discourse of the colorblind society is thus further advanced by two widely held beliefs in contemporary America. One is the belief that racism is a "thing of the past," something ameliorated during the gains of the Civil Rights Movement with the specific policies of integration (in schools and other public places), affirmative action, and the creation of governmental agencies (e.g., Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) to enforce antidiscrimination legislation. Given nearly forty years of real and imagined gains for a substantial number of people of color, whites often assert that racism is no longer a persistent or significant

obstacle for people of color. Embedded in this belief is an assumption that racism appears in only one form: explicit behavioral racist acts. This view further limits racism to actions of individuals against other individuals. Thus, if a person believes that he or she (and related friends and family members) is not racist, then racism must only exist in those extreme and rare instances wherein a "die-hard" racist acts in ways that are explicitly racist. This belief leads to a second related belief underlying a colorblind discourse, mainly that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement have leveled the playing field and that any racial inequality today is due to individual and cultural deficits in communities of color. Racism as historically developed and persistent in contemporary institutional, societal, and civilizational ideologies (Scheurich and Young 1997) conveniently disappears into the fog of persistent "liberal" colorblind discourse.

One way of demystifying the racial project of a "colorblind" racist society is simply to admit that racism exists and that all white people benefit from it. We believe that coming to an understanding of the various ways in which racism plays out and is understood, legitimated, and contested serves to demystify the racial project of a colorblind society. By no means do we exhaust the various understandings of racism in contemporary society. Joe Feagin's (2000) *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* provides a thorough evaluation of the forms of racism. Our goal is to isolate an ongoing racial project as it is played out on a college campus located in the Rocky Mountain region.

The discourse central to the contemporary racial project is also captured in Myers and Williamson's (2002) article on "race talk." Myers and Williamson rely on key informants at a university campus in the Midwest to covertly document private talk on race. Their data reveal that despite the assumptions that traditional forms of race talk are less acceptable and prevalent in a "colorblind" society, individuals widely engage in traditional forms of race talk when thought to be in private conversation. Their research challenged the findings from survey data suggesting that racist attitudes have largely declined in the post–Civil Rights era. Our own research supports Myers and Williamson's findings as well. In fact, the data from our study suggest that traditional racist talk is even more common than the race talk underlying the more subtle forms of racist oppression we associate with "colorblind" racism. Our data also show that while politically unacceptable traditional racist talk dominates the discourse of race, the racist discourse of the liberal era serves to legitimate the underlying assumptions of traditional racism.

This article reports on the findings of hundreds of pages in student journals that capture an unflattering depiction of contemporary race relations. More specifically, students were asked to document racist events in classes, on the university campus, and in the communities in which they find themselves. There is a striking contradiction that emerges from the encounters students document with race and racism at the university, in the local community, and in their hometowns and how they make "sense" of these encounters to fit with their articulated understanding of racism as "a thing of the past." The stark contradiction between a "colorblind" political discourse and the reality of persistent racial inequality, widespread racism, and racist attitudes prevalent among white college students suggests the nature of the race project at this university as well as at

other educational institutions (Feagin et al., 1996; Omi and Winnant 1994). From a perspective that sees race as a central organizing principle in society, the racial discourse in the university setting provides the ideological link to the institutional dynamics that serve to organize societal resources that maintain the privilege of whites while obscuring the disadvantage of people of color (Omi and Winnant 1994). In this sense, the university provides a setting for the racial formations of the larger society. Omi and Winnant (1994) "define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 55). The institution where this process is played out either passively or actively serves as an instrument of racial oppression when it works to obscure the centrality of racism and the privileges allotted to whites (Allen 1991).

TAXONOMIES OF RACISM

There are several provocative taxonomies of racism (for extended descriptions of these, see Brislin 1988; Fiske 1996; Myers and Williamson 2002; Patton 2004; Scheurich and Young 1997) that have informed our work. In considering these typologies, we are led to believe that all of these various categories, even the smallest or most subtle, represent "racism as praxis." We argue that this is true because what all these levels, categories, and taxonomies share are ways in which the Other is dehumanized while leaving in tact a hegemonic ideology concomitant with maintaining white privilege. We appreciate these typologies, and they served us well as we began to consider the data presented to us. However, for sake of clarity, we have chosen to consider racism as essentially living along two dimensions: traditional racism and liberal racism.

Traditional Racism

As suggested above, one of the underlying assumptions of a colorblind ideology is that racism only exists in one form; this form is best described as "traditional" racism. These are acts that almost all people would agree constitute racism. These include everything from using racial epithets to refusing to rent an apartment to an African American couple to burning a cross on their lawn to killing people because of the color of their skin. Underlying this form of racism is an arrogance and pride in one's bigotry. Traditional racism emerged to reinforce the transfer of wealth from people of color to whites through colonialism, slavery, and legalized segregation (Cox 1948; Du Bois 1996). There have been different race projects associated with traditional racism, including Jim Crow and segregation. While traditional racism is no longer as effective in this transfer of wealth as in the post–Civil Rights era, as we will see, it is far from being characterized as a "thing of the past" and, in fact, continues to be an effective means for perpetuating and reinforcing inequality at the market level (Bobo et. al., 1997). In this article, we present traditional racism in its varying forms.

Liberal Racism

Contemporary colorblind racism evolved from traditional racism. Black protest, in particular, from the 1940s to the 1970s made it increasingly difficult for

white elites to carry out neocolonial policies in the third world under the guise of equality and democracy when at home whites were beating and murdering blacks involved in nonviolent protest against segregation (Feagin 2000; Omi and Winnant 1994). In fact, the shift away from Jim Crow racism served the needs of white elites more than it represented a genuine change in racial consciousness (Bell 1980). The 1960s thus marked a shift from traditional racist rhetoric to a "liberal" rhetoric of racial equality. This official break with blatant racism has allowed white America to disconnect itself with this country's racial history; for them, history no longer matters, and in a colorblind America, individuals rise and fall on their merit (Villanueva 1993).

Thus, we associate colorblind racism with the triumph of liberal ideology that underlies the discourse of the post–Civil Rights Movement. As Myers and Williamson (2002) point out, today the public face of racism reflects the official rhetoric of formal equality and antiracism, but the deeply ingrained racism captured in private race talk reflects the racist ideology "deeply embedded in our social structures and practices" (p. 22). The colorblind race project of the liberal era attempts to obscure the connection between a public and private discourse of race and between the race projects of the traditional and liberal historical periods. Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that racial meanings are interpreted through cultural frames and that the frame of abstract liberalism provides the dominant interpretive mode of colorblind racism. Bonilla-Silva provides an example: "For instance, the principle of equal opportunity, central to the agenda of the Civil Rights Movement and whose extension to people of color was vehemently opposed by most whites, is invoked by whites today to oppose affirmative-action policies because they supposedly represent the 'preferential treatment' of certain groups" (p. 28). Thus, relying on liberal principles as central to the colorblind race project works to deny the existence of the structural disadvantage of people of color, while simultaneously obscuring the structural advantage or embedded racial privilege of whites. In this article, we present liberal racism in its varying forms.

We have outlined these two dominant typologies of racism as a backdrop for examining the discourse central to the racial formation of the liberal era. They show us the pervasiveness of racism as it moves from explicit/provocative to the more subtle/implicit. Moreover, they help us understand the very nature of race projects as they form within distinct sociohistorical periods. Additionally, these two distinct typologies allow us to follow a historical link between one racial formation and the next as they are connected by well-defined race projects. Notwithstanding, we believe it is essential to test these theoretical frameworks against actual empirical data gathered by real people in the everyday. The intent is to provide participants' narratives as "skin to the bones" of these theoretical assertions. In doing so, we might be able to modify the frameworks to better (and more fully) represent the varying ways in which racism manifests itself. The net contribution of this study will be a more robust understanding of racism, with the concomitant knowledge serving to help us identify robust approaches to addressing racism in its varied forms. We now turn to the institutional context that provides the stage for the colorblind race project.

THE STUDY: RACISM IN THE EVERYDAY

Context

This study was conducted at a university in the Mountain West part of the United States. It is a research-oriented university with approximately 12,000 students (nearly 9 percent ethnic minority, the largest group of which is Latino; ethnic minorities make up 12 percent of the state's population). The university is situated in a small town and is one of the primary employers for the city. The mission of the university includes the desire to "nurture an environment that values and manifests diversity, free expression, academic freedom, personal integrity, and mutual respect" (University of Wyoming 2003:6). Yet the university and host city are not without their challenges, as exemplified in the national attention it received after the murder of a young homosexual student in 1999.[1]

Data Collection and Analysis

The data we examine were captured in the journals of university students enrolled primarily in Social Problems, an undergraduate sociology course cross-listed with Women Studies and Chicana/o Studies. The assignment was part of a national study overseen by Dr. Joe Feagin and his student Leslie Houts at the University of Florida, whose goal was to document the national atmosphere of racism on college campuses. The journals were collected in these classes from fall 2002 through fall 2003. The assignment was voluntary and for extra credit. Students were provided with Internal Review Board (IRB)–approved consent forms to participate in the study. Students were instructed to write a description of a situation that involved race. This situation could be negative, positive, or neutral. The only requirement is that it involves an experience of race. The situation could be the interaction between a mixed race group, conversations overheard on or off campus, or personal conversations. Students were asked not to analyze what they thought of the situation but only to document it. However, the majority of students attempted to explain what they thought the incident meant.

Each student was asked to fill out a coversheet stating his or her race/ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation. We collected eighty-seven completed journals with a combined total of 1,263 entries. Of these, sixty students properly filled out an IRB consent form and are included in this study. Seventy-two percent of the participants were women, and 28 percent were men; 82 percent of the participants were White, and 18 percent were an ethnic minority. These sixty journals had a total of 951 entries. Our qualitative analysis draws from this data pool. In relation to the general population of the university, both women and minorities were overrepresented but reflected the population of students that enrolled in the classes generating the journal data. The overrepresentation of women and minorities is likely the case because the courses had subtitles such as "Racism, Patriarchy and Resistance," likely attracting more women and minorities to the class.

We were amazed at the sheer number of instances students identified. We were also angry and unsettled by the data set before us. As strongly identified with the struggles of people of color, we are well aware of the persistence and pervasiveness

of racism on university campuses. And as activist scholars, we are continuously frustrated with any institution's failure to address the seriousness of this problem.

Despite our own personal and intellectual insights gained as "inside outsiders," we set out to let the data talk to us. We began with agreement to follow an emergent grounded research approach to data analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998). We asked ourselves, as we looked at the data, "What is in this material?" We began to look at the data with initial theoretical assertions anchored to the data. The themes that emerged were mapped onto existing frameworks (the typologies described above) and juxtaposed and melded to develop more robust, appropriate categories that allowed us to aggregate coded data and formulate hybrid theoretical assertions. Throughout, we used each other to help define and understand these themes and theories.

Our qualitative review of the data produced four typologies of racist events. We then generated a random sample to get a better understanding of the distribution of racial events among the data set. The random sample covered a third of the data for a total of 329 entries. Although 11 percent of the entries fit in more than one category, we coded the entry into the most dominant typology represented. While the original project called for the collection of racial events only, one class allowed for students to identify gender and sexuality issues. These events are included in our sample but are not analyzed. As we further examined the data, we developed the two major typologies that correspond with the discourse of two salient racial formations in U.S. history and are widely used in the race projects of the traditional and liberal era. The four categories developed fit within one or the other of these two typologies.

Unexpectedly, entries that fit into racial events associated with traditional racism emerged most often. Fifty-one percent of the entries captured racial events associated with traditional forms of racism. Thirteen percent of the entries were coded as a liberal racial incident. The remainder either captured a gender/sexuality (25 percent) or inconclusive race event (11 percent). Thus, traditional racist events (51 percent) occurred more than three times as often as the more subtle forms of racism associated with the liberal era (13 percent). This finding, in particular, supports Myers and Williamson's (2002) study on race talk, which shows the dominance of racist speech that occurs in private conversation.

FINDINGS: HOW RACISM PLAYS OUT

One difficulty we face with the problem of racism is its amorphous and chameleon character. While there are obvious forms of racism, for example white superiority, this form manifests itself in various degrees, ranging from the Ku Klux Klan and Texas Rangers to the more subtle attitudes of students who treat diverse faculty differently than they do white male faculty. While both forms of racism may reflect notions of white superiority, the former example exemplifies a typology of racism that is explicit and more dehumanizing, whereas the latter example represents a typology of racism that is more confused and may capture unconscious discomfort on the part of the racist actor. Like Bonilla-Silva's (2003)

notion of colorblind racism, Bobo et al., (1997) use the term *laissez faire racism* to denote society's shift away from traditional Jim Crow racism to a more complex and subtle form of domination. The fact that racism is played out in so many different forms necessitates an articulation of the various typologies.

We have organized our typology of racism and the various ways it is played out into clusters that capture the most extreme forms of racism as praxis to the more subtle yet nevertheless still dehumanizing (and violent), albeit at a different level. The more extreme forms of racism are associated with the traditional era, and they can be captured in the first two clusters we call "no doubt" and "segregationist." The last two clusters capture the racial assumptions of the liberal era; we identify them as "revisionist racist" and "equal opportunity racism." Together, they show the underlying discourse and practices that we have come to call "colorblind" racism.

Within these clusters, we get another level of range and variation. Thus, these categories are not "pure," and oftentimes, examples show how forms of racism overlap each other. Indeed, the fact that these categories bleed into each other reminds us of the tangled and seamless web of ideologies that make up racist thinking (Weiner 2000). Furthermore, the melding of categories demonstrates the strong link between racism of the past and racism of the present.

Traditional Racism Cluster 1: No Doubt Racism

Our first traditional cluster demonstrates "no doubt" forms of racism. Common stereotypes, "othering," and various forms of dehumanization are common among this type of racism. We label these forms "no doubt" racism because there is likely to be very little disagreement that the instances described are undoubtedly racist. Even those that uphold the notion of a colorblind society tend to condemn this type of racist talk. But for them, these instances are, in fact, isolated instances. Like the occasional snowfall in Los Angeles, it is just not a significant part of the race relations landscape from this perspective. In condemning this form of racism, on one hand but minimizing its saliency, on the other, proponents of this perspective are engaging in "revisionist racist narratives" that serve to deny the reality of oppression based on color in this country.

In contrast to the assertions that traditional forms of racism, particularly "no doubt" forms, are a thing of the past, the student journals suggest that this type of racist talk is frequent and pervasive. In fact, the student journals captured this type of talk more than three times more often than its "liberal" counterpart. Central to traditional racism is an element of hate. Sometimes we see that hate motivating violence against the "other." For example, N.P.,[2] a nineteen-year-old white female documented the following example of traditional racism:

> I got an email from a friend in the marine corps today. He is getting shipped to Afghanistan. He said he was really excited to shoot up some rag-heads.

N.P. also captured the commonness of violent racism in the university environment. She states, "Tonight I was out consuming beverages. And one guy called another a spick and the fight was on."

The race project of the traditional era developed grotesque stereotypes of people of color that continue to underlie much of the discourse of the present in one form or another. Stereotypes about groups serve to erase individuality and ultimately dehumanize its victims. It is a form of othering and is the outcome of hundreds of years of traditional racism. Stereotyping and the dehumanization it creates often precede violence. For example, in our society, we have often associated people of color with criminality. This stereotypical relationship has allowed a system of injustice to penalize people of color at far greater rates than whites. From racial profiling to the death penalty, people of color, particularly black and brown men, are at far greater risk than the general population to be victims of institutional violence. And despite the evidence, many continue to stereotype people of color in the most grotesque ways. C.R., an eighteen-year-old white female detailed the following scenario (note: James is biracial):

> I was eating dinner with my friend (James) and my boyfriend (John) at Penny's Diner. James starts talking about his chicken and how it was "screaming." We all start laughing at the remark and (John) begins to tease him. (James) replies "Come on (John), haven't you ever sat at a table full of black people?" John replies, "No (James), I've never been to prison." Everyone laughed, including James.

The fact that this stereotyping takes place within the context of a modern "joke" is often defended as simple humor. In this way, traditional racism is legitimated in a post–Civil Rights society. The fact that people of color sometimes engage in this form of humor is further used to justify racist humor. In doing so, the historical origins of stereotypes are ignored.

Stereotyping is so prevalent in our society that it oftentimes becomes nearly automatic. We have been socialized to think of people of color in particular ways that even the first few seconds of an interaction are sufficient to call forth a wave of stereotypes. Consider the following instance described in a journal by L.D., a white female:

> I was walking in Rob Hall today around noon and I noticed a very tall black man coming in the opposite direction. The first thought that came into my mind was that I wondered if he was a basketball player. I wish I wouldn't have thought this automatically. Some of the black students in the class have even expressed that when people come up to them the first question they get asked is what sports do they play for the university—as if they wouldn't be here if it weren't for the athletics. Then there I go making judgments about someone I don't even know just because he is black and tall. It's that problem again of knowing better but being so internally programmed that things like this come up without thinking first.

N.Y., an eighteen-year-old white female, also documents the ingrained nature of the stereotypes she holds. She writes:

> An incident happened while I was riding in the car with my friends when we saw a really nice car and there was a black guy standing next to it. One of my friends said, "he's probably trying to steal it." The sad part about that is I probably would have said that myself. It's weird because it almost seems normal for me to say a comment like that, like coming out naturally.

C.Y., another white female, has an interpersonal dialogue wherein she struggles through her own stereotypes and relies on spiritual guidance to help her respond. In her shorthand, she writes:

> Computer lab. Me, a white male, a white female, a black male and a white male lab assistant. I had to leave my disks in the room. My first emotional response was to turn to the other girl. She would be the most trustworthy I seemed to feel, then the white male but I was most apprehensive of asking the black male to watch my things. My "instincts" said, "be afraid of him" but there was really not reason to be. At end, I ask the Black male, "with the direction of the lord god," to watch my stuff.

Unfortunately, far too few students detailed situations where they actually stopped their worst instincts from demeaning a person of color, as illustrated in this last example.

Stereotypes often lead to "othering." Othering is an approach to talking about people in such a way that it implies foreignness, marginality, and being different than the taken-for-granted assumptions we make about "normalcy." In effect, it implies that people of color are something "other than human," and is therefore central to not only "no doubt" racism but also to the relationship between racism and violence. Dehumanizing people of color made it possible for whites to legitimate colonization, slavery, and genocide. While most people today would no longer argue that indigenous people lack a "soul" or blacks are innately unequal to whites, various forms of dehumanization carry on into the contemporary period to legitimate violence and hate. R.J., a twenty-two-year-old white male, describes the following situation:

> My friend got pissed at my Asian friend and told him he would "blindfold him with dental floss if he didn't turn around and eat his egg roll."

D.R., a white female, relayed a similar example:

> I went to a party one night with three of my white friends. As we were walking up to the party a group of white males I think it was four of them were running to the car and they were yelling comments like "the last one to the car is a dirty jap; the last one to the car is an oriental." I was with a friend who busted out laughing and said "see I am not the only one who hates japs."

M.N., a nineteen-year-old white female, offers another example of othering that shows the extent racism devalues the lives of people of color and how whiteness is equated with being American. Her journal entry states, "I was in the store and I heard a conversation about the shuttle crash. They were talking about the people on the shuttle and one of the men remarked that he thought there was a 'rag head' on there with the Americans."

The process of othering goes a long way in explaining the unearned privilege of whiteness and the cost of color in a society rooted in the myth of merit and embedded in a system that commodifies competition. One student whose father is a dean of a notable college documented the following: "I was telling my sister about my racism class, and she expressed her concern that she thinks she might be a racist because whenever she is watching game shows she wants white people to win because they'll do better things with the money." Ultimately, the fact that

white people want other white people to "win" whether consciously or unconsciously explains why when it comes to competing for jobs, educational opportunities, and/or making one's case in a courtroom, whites tend to "win."

Interestingly, this othering is positional; that is, while othering people of color, they are not othering themselves. It is common, for example, to discuss how people of color self-segregate (in lunchrooms or classrooms) but not to also identify the ways in which whites segregate themselves from people of color in these same contexts. This was not lost on C.O., a Latina female, when she relates the following classroom instance:

> I normally sit in the front of the classrooms with my friend. One day we decided to sit in the back for a change. There was a group of friends that were all people of color sitting near us. They kept talking and laughing the whole class period and being pretty rude. But my friend couldn't just take it as that. She had to make the comment to me that we were sitting in the colored section. What kind of bull crap is that? It's not like they were the only colored people in the whole class but she made the choice to single them out.

Traditional Racism Cluster 2: Segregationist Racism

The second cluster of racist behavior is best described as segregationist racism, marked attempts to distance people of color from whites. This distance may be either physical (staying away from the Other) or psychological (distancing oneself from becoming to close to the Other emotionally or psychologically). Within this cluster, our data suggest several variations of segregationist racism. Segregationist forms of racism have its roots in the traditional period of racial formation. As a formal policy, segregation served to disenfranchise people of color from the opportunities available to the white majority. Moreover, early policies of the traditional racial formation era served to expropriate land labor and wealth from communities of color (Blauner 1972). Segregation represented one race project among many to facilitate this process of exploitation. The end of official segregation, however, hardly altered the forms of distance developed in the traditional period. In terms of residential segregation, for example, blacks in northern cities where more than twice as likely to be segregated in the 1970s than in the 1930s (Massey and Denton 1993). Various segregationist strategies developed to maintain white privilege through exclusion and outright avoidance.

Oftentimes, the students document that there is an intergenerational influence where white parents council their white children to avoid and distance themselves from people of color. In one example, a nineteen-year-old white female states:

> I told my dad about my new boyfriend today. I was telling him what he was like, and I said he had blue eyes, and dad says "that's great then he has to be white." He only wants me dating white guys.

When outright exclusion is not an option, social strategies informally sanctioning interracial relationships can also come into play. For example, O.D., an African American male, relayed his frustration with trying to get someone to acknowledge that he was even in the room, reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's (1995) *Invisible Man*:

> I and one of my white girlfriends went to get some ice cream. When we arrived in the ice cream store, the people acted real funny about serving us. I had to say something to the woman for her to realize that we were there. It was as if we were invisible.

In the past, segregationist policies legally dictated personal and public relations. The Civil Rights Movement tore down these official barriers, but unofficial patterns of interaction to either exclude or make people of color feel unwanted have developed in their place. U.U., a white male, documents these invisible barriers. He writes:

> Ever since I have been in my social problems class I have really been trying to watch how minorities are treated. Tonight I was working in the pharmacy and it was extremely busy for a Sunday night. As I was filling prescriptions I noticed this Hispanic man standing very patiently. When I asked if he had been helped, he said very politely "no." I felt terrible because he had been standing there for at least 10-15 minutes before even being helped. All of us in the pharmacy felt bad. But all I could think about is that this man goes through crap like this probably more than he would care to, that's for sure. Needless to say we had a staff meeting the next day and hopefully this won't happen again in the future.

In addition to the psychic toll racism takes on people of color, our "colorblind" society continues to find ways to exclude people of color from employment and other social resources that whites continue to control. L.O., a nineteen-year-old white female, documents the following: "A couple of guys that I work with were saying that it would be weird if our boss hired this Latino who had come in for an application. I was appalled but then I thought about it and the only people working there at the time were all whites."

Beyond the physical boundaries that segregation carves out, there is a tendency to segregate away from the ideas and experiences of minority communities. This form of intellectual segregation is often seen in student journal entries that indicate their discomfort with difference. In the following example, a student relies on "no doubt" racism to justify her disdain for integrating minority perspectives into her studies. L.J., a white eighteen-year-old female, documented the following: "My old roommate had gotten her first reading assignment in English, and said 'great I get to read about fags and Mexicans, that's just great.'"

As is evident in a substantial number of examples we read, students tend to document this discomfort when they find themselves sharing physical space with minority groups. One student states:

> I had overheard a conversation going on next to me when the girl talking had said something that caught my attention. She said, "don't you hate how there are so many beaners in University Town."

Discomfort with difference is especially evident when white students are in situations where they are the minority. Consider the journal entry by V.P., a white female:

> Today I took a road trip to University City. I went to some parties with some friends. At one party we walked in and I felt so uncomfortable. We were the only whites. I didn't have a problem with any of them, but I felt out numbered. I think now I know how it feels to be a minority, and how it feels to be different, and people looking at you.

Liberal Racism Cluster 3: Revisionist Racist Narratives

Central to the liberal era is a public understanding that racism is wrong and socially unacceptable. A colorblind race project first and foremost acknowledges that people of color are entitled to equal and fair treatment. Within the "colorblind" discourse, there is a general acceptance that the racial policies of the pre–Civil Rights era led to the racial inequality that existed prior to the movement. In doing so, the "colorblind" race project can condemn "no doubt" and segregationist practices of the past while refusing to acknowledge that these past practices contribute to racial inequality in the present. When "no doubt" forms of racism do emerge, the colorblind discourse relies on narratives to minimize this talk as isolated or not at all intended to be racist. Within this view, there is no relationship between the structures/ideologies that created racism in the past and the racial inequality of the present.

We call the third cluster of racial events "revisionist racist narratives." These events are closely associated with the "liberal" era. Revisionist racist narratives are central to the "colorblind" race project of the "liberal" era because they attempt to redefine, revise, or recast racist actions in ways that suggest that they are not racist at all. These "revisionist racist narrative" forms include denial (racism as not real) and minimizing racism. What is striking about this cluster of racism is that the "revisionism" often takes place in the face of "no doubt" racism.

There were several instances reported by students wherein attempts were made to deny that racism exists. T.M., a white female, relates the following:

> I was in Johnson at the hairdressers place. You know having your hair done is like having a relationship with whoever is touching your head. You get into some pretty personal conversations. June is her name. She believes racism is dwindling. However she is grateful that the illegal immigrants are working in Johnson; otherwise how would we support the tourists. She is not friends with many of "those people."

Sometimes the denial of racism is evidenced in the recast of explicitly racist instances as surprising and not really possible. One student documents a situation, and her commentary exemplifies the strong denial aspect of revisionist racist narratives. E.Q., twenty-three-year-old white female, states the following:

> I am at a family reunion and I am speaking with my brother and sister in law in my parent's camp trailer. We were talking about how my mom and dad don't have much money and they are almost in their fifties. They don't have a retirement plan and all of us agreed it was a sad situation. My sister in law Karen said it doesn't seem right that they should have to continue working like … she stopped and my brother asked her what she was going to say.

> I thought she was going to say work like dogs…I don't think its right they should have to work like "niggers." Both my brother and I were surprised at her choice of words…She doesn't make racist comments but somehow it seemed as if the words were coming to her mouth anyway.

Another form revisionist racism takes is in attempts to minimize racist actions as not racist at all. R.U., a Latina female, describes her friend's attempt to revise the racist remarks made by one of her family members:

> I was at a friend's house when his grandparents arrived for the weekend. After a while of conversation his grandmother asks: How are the little nigger boys down the street. She did not even flinch when she said it. Later that evening my friend commented by saying she was raised in the south. It's not that she's racist, that's what they were called back then.

There is a widespread belief that as long as one defies segregationist practices and interacts with people of color, that act alone clears them of racist intentions. We tend to understand the absurdity of tokenism with denunciations of "the some of my best friends are [insert racial group]" justification to personal racist attitudes. A student documents the full absurdity of tokenism evidenced in ways people convince themselves that they are not racist by their superficial or limited contact with people of color. This is not lost on V.P.:

> Today I was so shocked at the actions of an individual. This girl and I were walking back from class and she made a comment that she was not racist. Then she said look I will prove it. Then she turned to a black man and said "Hi." She had no idea who he was. This to me was so rude. I could not believe she did that. I think that it symbolized that she was racist.

What is telling about these revisionist forms of racism is that in all these examples, the "liberal" element comes into play, and racism is acknowledged as unacceptable as a way to distinguish it as different from traditional racism.

Liberal Racism Cluster 4: Equal Opportunity Racism

Finally, the discourse underlying a society that has shifted its rhetoric from blatant racism to the rhetoric of racial equality while continuing to benefit from the "unjust enrichment" of whiteness (Delgado 1996; Williams 1991) and the "unjust impoverishment" (Feagin 2000) of people of color necessitates the development of a discourse that embraces liberal principles of equality while simultaneously facilitating the extraction of racial privileges from a liberal democratic society. Central to a "liberal racist" discourse is a new victimology that serves to obscure the real racial processes that privilege whites over people of color. E.R., a nineteen-year-old white male, documents an element of the new victimology: "I was talking with one of my friends about getting into medical school and I was told that I would never be admitted because I did not come from a wealthy family and because I was not a minority race." What is striking about this new victimology is how widespread these false assumptions are. The notion that somehow affirmative action denies whites their "rightful" place in the university escalated all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, prompting the recent affirmative action rulings.

Students get a small understanding of the irrationality of their assumptions when they learn that their university has a very open admissions policy.

The popular mythology about the unfair advantage afforded to people of color serves to perpetuate popular stereotypes while at the same time denying white privilege. M.U., a nineteen-year-old white female, captures this point: "A man in class said 'Blacks have it easy. They're good athletes, everyone feels sorry for them, and now they have affirmative action. I wish I was black.'" In another journal, V.J., a twenty-year-old white male, takes this point to an extreme. V.J.'s journal states:

> I was sitting in my dorm room with my roommate while watching a basketball game on television when he (my roommate) made comments about how high the black athletes could jump. He said, "I wish I was black. I can't see what they complain about, we breed them into super athletes. They have the highest verticals and biggest dicks. Shit I wish I was black." The comment did not startle me because we joke about this type of thing often; we do feel there are some black privileges.

For insecure angry white boys, the myth of unfair advantage for people of color legitimates their hate and anger toward minority students. In fact, it is the assumptions underlying liberal racism that form a strong bond between traditional and liberal racist forms. It is under the guise of supporting liberal principals of equality and merit that the most reprehensible stereotypes and dehumanizing ideologies about people of color are disseminated. These myths fuel the volatile environment that students of color in white institutions experience, and it is clear that the institution's silence over these issues fosters an environment where the irrationality of a white victimology is allowed to flourish.

Liberal racism propagates an ahistorical view of the world and obscures the underlying social relations. The new victimology element of the liberal racist discourse works so well because we have taught people to ignore history. There is a level of absurdity in liberal racism that often goes undetected by white people in the absence of a historical backdrop. U.M., a biracial (black/white) twenty-year-old female, notes the absurdity of the new victimology:

> A friend of mine came to me yesterday and told me something that literally made my jaw drop. First let me give you a little background about my friend. She's twenty one and has lived in very diverse Chicago and also a small town in Georgia. Nevertheless she has experienced the North and the South, the big and the small. She was talking to the same girl in our house who made the unintelligent comments in the earlier journal entries and she said, "Today is Presidents Day, shouldn't we be off from school? We give black people holidays like Martin Luther King Day, but not us?"

The rhetoric of equality in the absence of a critical analysis of unjust enrichment or unearned privilege encourages absurdity among whites. In this worldview, power does not exist and every group has an equal opportunity to wrongly dominate another group. Again, this "logic" reflects theories of social order popular among the liberal elites who posit an atomized individual negotiating contracts in the marketplace. It is with this image of an equal playing field that imagined notions about what constitutes "fairness" develop. A journal entry from U.Y., a twenty-one-year-old white female, captures this conversation:

> I was at the hospital with my friend Cassie while she was in labor. Her father-in-law and brother were in the hall waiting and I would relay progress reports to them. Once when I came out, they were discussing how if there is going to be a Latin Grammy Awards then they should not be eligible for the regular Grammy Awards. Either that or there should also be the White Grammy Awards.

In addition to the liberal logic underlying this conversation, the entry captures the pervasiveness of racism and metaphorically illustrates the normalization of racism that permeates the lives of our students from the moment they are born. Unfortunately, only a few are ever exposed to a critical and oppositional discourse that challenges the worldview, thereby providing a security blanket in a society rife with racial contradictions.

CONCLUSION: RACISM AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The totality of these race events reflects the ways that the colorblind race project is practiced and lived in the everyday. The examples shared show a range of ways in which racism plays out, from the explicit to the implicit, from the internal beliefs to the external actions, and from traditional to liberal racist ideologies and practices. The above examples only begin to capture the extent (both in number and intensity) of the experiences related by the students in these journals. The full scope of these can only be captured in part by the narratives shared above.

We also argue that racial praxis in the university is part and parcel of ongoing racial projects that serve to obscure the systemic distribution of racial privileges to whites (see also Lewis et al., 2000). Indeed, institutions are nested within larger social contexts that also advance a racist ideology (Lewis et al., 2000). Yet we recognize that the empirical support for a direct implication of the university based on the data we present is tenuous at best. Our argument about institutional responsibility rests on our theoretical understanding of social institutions as mediating structural relations of inequality. The university provides the social context in which the colorblind race project is played out. In fact, 31 percent of the race events the students documented took place within the university context. This context includes the classroom, dormitories, and campus. Some of the race events stem from direct interactions with faculty and staff. For example, students documented the following events involving university representatives. From a twenty-one-year-old white male:

> My roommate here is a black guy from California. He is really quiet and we hardly ever talk. I was talking to my coach about him the other day and during the short conversation my coach made an excuse for him being shy. He said that "he is in whitey world now," referring to the larger portion of whites here compared to California. I don't think he meant any harm, but it came out kind of weird.

Consider the next two journal entries. A twenty-four-year-old white female states the following:

> In my Econ class which is at 7:00 PM we were talking about other countries and what products they produce. My teacher Fred was talking about the Japanese, but instead of using the politically correct term Japanese he said "Japs." I know that he didn't mean it in a racist way but that is how I took it.

A Chicano student documents the second situation in the classroom:

> I was sitting in my Art History class from nine thirty to eleven and I was half asleep when the professor was giving a lecture. . . . The class discussion was about minority groups and leading feminist activists. She had been rambling on and had not grabbed my attention until she started talking shit about Chicanos and the Chicano Studies program. She had said that she can't believe how much money these types of programs get and that the Chicanos that are in the school don't even support the programs set up for them.

While these few examples in themselves do not directly implicate the university's direct responsibility for the significant racism that takes place within the institution, they do demonstrate the everyday practices that make up the contemporary colorblind race project. The fact that they do take place in a liberal public institution where the rhetoric of equality is foremost does, however, problematize the role of the institution in the racial formation of the liberal era. We could include the ways in which the institution is quiet around issues of race and racism as further evidence (albeit harder to document) as part of the null curriculum (Lewis et al. 2000) as also worthy of consideration.

Following from Patton (2004), it is our position that any university's silence on issues of racism allows the attitudes and actions of white students detailed above to take root and thrive on campus. Just as most universitys participated in blatant traditional racism prior to the Civil Rights Movement, today they participate in a colorblind racism. Failing to recognize the experiences of people of color in institutions of higher learning, or resistance to taking more aggressive steps in building a diverse community, further facilitates the entrenchment of a new white supremacy, which sometimes is not so different from the old white supremacy. This is the case simply because without a critical mass of people of color, there are few people to provide a counterhegemonic narrative to the colorblind discourse. In the absence of a critical discourse, white supremacy narratives, as detailed above, thrive (Hunt 1997).

The failure of the institution to nourish a critical discourse is particularly frustrating given that the students' journal entries also suggest the many instances wherein students did, in fact, trouble out the instances they report. Indeed we would argue that the strength of this activity for the participants is in making students see others (most frequently) and themselves (less frequently) through a new lens where race is placed as a central element in social relations.

Indeed, students often find themselves frustrated in our classes because they feel they are presented with a problem that lacks a solution. There is some merit in their discomfort. The problem of racism often seems intractable even to us. But there is one aspect to the problem of racism that can lend itself to a breakthrough. As members of an institutional educational setting, we are better situated than most to address a structured racist discourse and make institutional overtures toward creating a more inclusive community. This is clear in the way that students engaged in self-reflection, suggesting that many are just as prepared to learn to identify racism as they are to learn that the earth really is round.

An analysis of the student journals suggests that as educators we must make explicit the extent to which racism persists in our work with students. The data

presented here demonstrate that racism, particularly in its traditional forms, are not merely residual isolated incidences but are a pervasive element of contemporary society. In fact, the data suggest that the discourse of liberalism provides a vehicle for the articulation of traditional racist forms. In doing so, whites continue to benefit from their unearned racial privilege while simultaneously embracing the value of equality and merit. The data representing the "colorblind" race project point to weaknesses that prove to be valuable teaching moments. It is these points of weakness in the system that should give us some hope for reclaiming a critical education for our students.

NOTES

1. For a detailed description of the challenges and constructive engagement the university is engaged in with respect to diversity, see Trent et al., (2003).
2. We have used initials and names different from the students' actual initials or names to assure anonymity. We also have edited all student quotes for writing mechanic errors exclusively in hopes that the content of students' entry not be overshadowed by concerns about their writing ability.

REFERENCES

Allen, Walter. 1991. "Introduction." Pp. 1–14 in *College in Black and White,* edited by W. R. Allen, E. G. Epps, and N. Z. Haniff. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bell, Derrick. 1980. "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma." *Harvard Law Review* 93: 518.

Blauner, Robert. 1972. *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper and Row.

Bobo, Lawrence D., James A. Kluegel, and Ryan Smith. 1997. "Laissez-Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a Kinder, Gentler, Anti-Black Ideology." Pp. 15–44 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990's: Continuity and Change,* edited by S. A. Tuch and J. K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2003. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Brislin, Richard. 1998. "Prejudice in Intercultural Communication." Pp. 329–44 in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, edited by L. Porter and R. Samovar. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Cox, Oliver. 1948. *Caste, Class and Race*. New York: Doubleday.

DuBois, W. E. B. 1996. *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, edited by E. J. Sundquist. New York: Oxford.

Delgado, Richard. 1996. *The Coming Race War?* New York: New York University Press.

Ellison, Ralph. 1995. *Invisible Man*, 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Press.

Feagin, Joe. 2000. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge.

Feagin, Joe, Vera Hernan, and Imani Nikitah. 1996. *The Agony of Education: Black Students at White Colleges and Universities*. New York: Routledge.

Fiske, John. 1996. *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hunt, Darnell M. 1997. *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots": Race, Seeing, and Resistance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, Amanda E., Mark Chesler, and Tyrone A. Forman. 2000. "The Impact of "Color-blind" Ideologies on Students of Color: Intergroup Relations at a Predominately White University." *Journal of Negro Education* 69(1-2): 74–91.

Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McIntosh, Peggy. 2004. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Pp. 103–08 in *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, edited by M. Anderson and P. H. Collins. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Myers, Kristen A. and Passion Williamson. 2002. "Race Talk: The Perpetuation of Racism through Private Discourse." *Race and Society* 4(1): 3–26.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winnant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1990's*. New York: Routledge.

Patton, Tracey Owen. 2004. "In the Guise of Civility: The Complicitous Maintenance of Inferential Forms of Sexism and Racism in Higher Education." *Women's Studies in Communication* 27: 60–87.

Scheurich, James and Michelle Young. 1997. "Coloring Epistemologies." *Educational Researcher* 26: 4–76.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Trent, Allen, Francisco Rios, Judith Antell , William Berube, Steve Bialostok , Dolores Cardona, Edward Paradis, and Tim Rush. 2003. "Problems and Possibilities in the Pursuit of Diversity." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 36 (3): 213–24.

University of Wyoming. 2003. *General Bulletin*. Laramie: Author.

Villanueva, Victor, Jr. 1993. *Bootstraps.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Weiner, Lois. 2000. "Research in the 90s: Implications for Teacher Preparation." *Review of Educational Research* 70(3): 369–406.

Williams, Patricia. 1991. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.