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Allusive, Elusive, or Illusive? An Examination of Apologies for the Atlantic Slave Trade and their Pedagogical Utility

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ABSTRACT

This critical essay explores the topic of slavery within the context of public apologies. Drawing from both the historical lens of *cultural memory* (Le Goff, 1977/1992) and the *critical race theory* construct of *interest convergence* (Bell, 1987), the authors offer critical examination of the following questions: (1) Where do collective apologies fit in the narrative of slavery in the US? (2) What affordances might they offer to the social studies at the intersection of curriculum, instruction and the historical memory of enslavement? (3) What do apologies for slavery in the present potentially reveal about contemporary social and political relations as narratives? Central to the aims of this paper is an effort to situate recent engagements involving revisions to the historical memory of enslavement as US institutions attempt to atone and offer regrets for historical associations and affiliations with the Middle Passage and transatlantic slave trade.

Introduction

So, let me start with Roger Brooke Taney, and what it was like to grow up as a Taney. To grow up as a Taney, in terms of how we feel about him, it's a mixed bag. It's a very mixed thing. Because on the one hand, as a Taney, you're proud of him. He was one of the longest serving chief justices, the bible he swore Lincoln in on is the same bible President Obama was sworn in on. However, that's not what he is known for. What he is known for is one thing. He is known for the Dred Scott decision. And just so we all...want to get a handle on that, let me read a sentence that he wrote. It was his opinion at the time...that African Americans...here's the quote: 'For more than a century have been regarded as beings of an inferior order, unfit to associate with the white race. So far inferior they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.' So... you might be proud of him, but you can't duck that. You can't duck that.

I looked up reconciliation. I looked it up this morning. And there are three steps: the first step is apology, the second step is forgiveness, and the third step is a new trust that grows out of that. [But] My daughter Kate said [to me], 'a Taney bringing an apology to a Scott is like bringing a bandaid to an amputation. It is just not enough.'

So let's make a little history today. From the Taney's to all the Scotts, you have our apology. (Longoria, 2017)

Made on day two of the 2016 Dred Scott Reconciliation Forum, Charlie Taney, great-great grand nephew of former Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney, offered these remorseful and sorrow-filled remarks while reflecting on the experience of being related to a historical figure whose infamous written opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) specified the constitutionally inferior legal status of all “person[s] of african [sic] descent” living in the United States (p. 588). In addressing descendants of the man who made efforts 160 years prior to secure legal emancipation from enslavement, Charlie Taney recognized his forebears’ violent foreclosure of Dred Scott’s citizenship rights, while also acknowledging the potential insufficiency of offering a collective apology for the historical misdeeds of his antebellum, pro-slavery relative. And yet, with an expressed hope for reconciliation, he proceeded in extending an apology on behalf of the entire Taney family.

Representative of a global phenomenon spanning several decades, collective apologies such as the one made by Charlie Taney instantiate common memorial discourses and practices across western industrial societies. Examining this phenomenon nearly twenty years ago, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2000) described the rise of “collectivities throughout the world... fac[ing] one another, demanding, offering, denying, or rejecting the explicit recognition of guilt for offences committed from a few years to many centuries ago” (p. 173). Speaking for a range of historical memories of trauma constituting historical and contemporary experiences shaping identities of particular collectives, movements organized by and for the marginalized and historically oppressed endure in pressuring representatives of historically dominant collectives to atone in the present for associations and affiliations with sites of historical trauma. Ever present in global public discourse and saturating scholarly work across the humanities, widespread emergence of the “culture of public apology” (Mills, 2001) corroborates Trouillot’s (2000) turn of the century assessment and prediction that “there is little indication that the wave is likely to stop in the near future” (p.173).

Indeed, the “age of apologies” (Brooks, 1999) has yet to lose steam as institutions around the globe deploy partisan histories (Friedman and Kenney, 2005) and regularly engage the politics of memory (Bell, 2008). Recent examples include government institutions in Hungary apologizing for the Roma Murders of 2008-2009 (Subert, 2019), the Canadian government formally apologizing for imprisoning Canadian citizen Omar Khadr at Guantanamo Bay (Austin, 2017), and Mexican President Andreas Manuel Lopez Obrador’s March 2019 call for Spain

and the Vatican to apologize for 500 year old crimes against indigenous peoples (Minder & Malkin, 2019). Participation in the culture of public apologies has not eluded institutions in the United States. Whether it be a formal apology by President Ford for Japanese and Japanese-American incarceration and subsequent reparation payments under President Reagan, the Apology Resolution signed in 1993 acknowledging US involvement in the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii (Callies, 2011), the *Hartford Courant* apologizing for its antebellum advertising the sale of slaves (Berlin, 2004), or UNC Chapel Hill Chancellor Carol Folt's 2018 apology for the University's historical links to African enslavement (Fortin, 2018), the "global frenzy to balance our moral ledgers" (Dwyer, 2003, p. 81) very much includes U.S. institutions.

Emerging alongside this phenomenon, critics and detractors of the age of apologies are numerous, diverse, and vocal. From across the political spectrum, the logic, sincerity, efficacy, and advisability of collective apologies draws skepticism, scrutiny, or outright rejection (Griswold, 2007; Jenkins, 2018; Lowenthal, 2008; Trouillot, 2000). Voices of critics are most clearly heard in conflicts consistently unfolding across a number of sites as various ideologies and material interests maneuver to secure protected values bound up with selective representations of the nation's past (e.g., Cannon Debate in Gates, 1992; Culture Wars in Hunter, 1991; History Wars in Engelhardt and Linenthal, 1996). Battles over social studies/history curriculum during the past thirty years illustrate a representative sample of the larger composition of public spectacles surrounding historiographical debates inherent to the dialectic of hegemonic powers sustaining collective memories aimed at reproducing asymmetrical relations of dominance (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). Evans (2004) offers an even more specific, but no less illustrative example within the social studies/history curriculum wars concerning the historically shifting narratives representing the memory of the transatlantic slave trade in the United States.

Central to the aims of this paper is an effort to situate recent engagements involving revisions to the historical memory of enslavement as U.S. institutions attempt to atone for historical associations and affiliations with the Middle Passage and transatlantic slave trade. For critical teacher educators and researchers concerned with social justice and equity in education, attending to debates over the legitimacy and advisability of collective apologies is a peripheral concern as our primary focus is directed beyond questions explicitly concerning notions of collective guilt or the politics of responsibility (Levin, 2008). Instead, we shift our gaze to examining contemporary collective apologies for historical associations with the institution of slavery in an effort to expand discussions among scholars of memory and social studies/history education concerning the pedagogical utility of

contemporary apology culture (see *Dangerous Memories* in Christou, 2007; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2008). In pursuing pedagogical possibilities at the intersection of collective apologies, memory, and historical narratives of slavery, our examination adopts a reflexive approach interrogating the cultural mechanics of public spectacles generated by apology culture to question, following Arnold-de Simine (2013), “what the focus on memory reveals, while bearing in mind what it might screen” (p.19). Therefore, in focusing on the apologies offered by U.S. government institutions, corporations, and universities, this critical examination asks: (1) Where do collective apologies fit in the narrative of the transatlantic slave trade in the U.S.? (2) What affordances might they offer to the social studies at the intersection of curriculum, instruction and the historical memory of enslavement? (3) What do apologies for the transatlantic slave trade in the present potentially reveal about contemporary social and political relations as narratives constituting historical memories of slavery shift in response to the culture of apologies?

In the following section, a brief review of the literature on memory, history, and identity will situate a discussion of the meaning and significance of collective apologies in the social studies/history curriculum. Next, we provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks guiding this analysis: *cultural memory and critical race theory (in education)*. Through these frameworks we present findings from our analysis of recent collective apologies made by state, corporate, and university institutions. Findings illustrate that too often, apologies for slavery separate the past from the present, while tethering forgiveness and forgetting with little room for justice. The article concludes with a discussion of findings and the implications they have for both teacher education and social studies education.

Review of Literature

Moving from the work of a range of scholars of memory, this paper recognizes the historical increase in both public and academic preoccupation with memory and the rise of particular memorial practices over the past several decades as a phenomenon constituting “memory cultures” across western societies (Erll, 2011, p. 49-50; Huyssen, 2000). In celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the founding of an organization committed to the memory of the “untoward” (Tuan, 1977, p. 131), the Dred Scott Reconciliation Forum’s participation in the “culture of anniversaries” (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 17) is representative of particular movements common to the cultural mechanics constituting the transnational phenomenon of memory (Erll, 2011, p. 4). Theorized from various points composing the global field of humanities research, scholars from a range of disciplines have discussed the *memory booms* of late 20th and early 21st centuries extensively (Berliner, 2005; Blight, 2009). Historicizing the rise of memory

cultures, much of the literature draws historical linkages between increased preoccupation with memory and the traumatic events associated with the second World War and rapid advances in technology that have altered communicative practices across the globe.

Emerging from a convergence of shifting modern social structures, technological change, and watershed events of the 20th century (see Erll, 2011), memory cultures of postmodernity have been characterized by scholars such as David Lowenthal (2012) as discourses and practices split between those who wallow nostalgically in the past and those who dismiss it entirely. However, he argues this seeming contrast actually, “reflect[s] the same overriding tendency to fold past within present” (p. 2). Instantiated by an impulse to “domesticate” the past, Lowenthal (1998) and others theorize the rise of memory culture in terms of modernity’s “acceleration of history,” which according to Pierre Nora (2002), “shattered the unity of historical time...which traditionally bound the present and the future to the past” (p. 6). In the upending of traditional western temporal orientations, Nora argues that a radical uncertainty saturated imagined futures, disrupting institutionalized teleological historical interpretations of the past and catalyzed collective stockpiling of “any visible trace or material sign that might eventually testify to what we are or what we will have become” (p. 6).

At the same time, post-war decolonization and global civil rights movements animated by the memories of those historically barred from creating official history also contributed to the disruption of institutionalized historiography and the proliferation of postmodern memory cultures in the west (Lipsitz, 1990). Representing conceptual frameworks for reclaiming historiography from contexts created by dominant historical narratives, memories of the subaltern (Prakash, 1994) and counter-memories (Foucault, 1975/2011) emerged as emancipatory efforts of oppressed and marginalized groups seeking liberation in the present through rehabilitating historical memories previously silenced by public authorities (Nora, 2002). Subsequent social and cultural histories written during this time injected what Patrick Hutton (1993) has described as the “history/memory problem” into historiographical discourse (p. 155), spawning debates over the nature and validity of the constructedness of narrative and knowledge itself. As Nora (2002) argues, “the explosion of minority memories...profoundly altered the respective status and the reciprocal nature of history and memory” (p. 9). Stemming from this alteration, the notion of memory has become the central concept in cultural history (Confino, 1997), and in the process, generated perennial debates amongst critics representing different paradigms and political stances over the relationship between history, memory, and identity (A. Assmann, 2006; Kansteiner, 2002; Nora, 1989).

Hinging on the idea that memory plays a fundamental role in structuring identity across all levels of social and political formations (J. Assmann, 2011; Epstein, 2010), debates concerning history and memory oscillate amidst questions of verisimilitude, selection, and the political power operating to define “official” memory through historiographical practices instantiated by what Trouillot (1995) refers to as “a particular bundle of silences” (p. 27). Over the past century in the U.S., debates and public spectacles demonstrating such tensions of “whose history” will be included in the curriculum have played out fairly consistently across public school sites (Zimmerman, 2009). More recent conflicts over particular silences in the social studies/history curriculum are intertwined with the emergence of memory cultures and its concomitant critiques of the ideological nature of nationalist history curriculum (Loewen, 2008; Symcox, 2002). Although debates over exclusions and distortions traditionally constituting dominant historical narratives of the nation-state have resulted in new narratives of difference emerging in history textbooks and state standards, critical scholars identify the illusory nature of such efforts to include non-dominant historical memories in the curriculum and argue such moves “leave open to fiat whose history gets included and how” (Heilig, Brown & Brown, 2012, p. 421). Thus, as the politics of memory continue to play out on the well-worn stage of public school curriculum, we draw our attention to other sites of cultural pedagogy where the struggle for the interpretation and possession of society’s collective memory may potentially extend current research concerning critical memory, race, apologies and the teaching of slavery as *hard history* (Shuster, Costellow, & Estes, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws from both the historical lens of *cultural memory* (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995; Le Goff, 1992) and *critical race theory* (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Cultural memory is defined as the various stories and symbols that shape how one understands their past and present social worlds (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). In this sense, we maintain that historical memory is not neutral or innocent; it is ideologically subsumed within power and interests (Trouillot, 2000). Power enables the creators of memory to shape a national identity that becomes a fixed narrative over time. From this perspective, we argue that apologies are unique forms of memory because of the tangible connections between the past to the present.

We also draw from the work of *critical race theory* because of its deep analysis of the racial history of the American legal system. This scholarship seeks to deconstruct what critical race scholars call the *majoritarian narratives* of

American history. This is where histories are propped up to give the illusion of racial progress. In this sense, apologies in university, governmental and corporate spaces provide an overt illustration of what Derek Bell calls *interest convergence*. Bell (1980) argues that most of the legal history of equality in the U.S. was prompted by a desire to advance the interests of white elites. Legal scholars have maintained that cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) served mostly to shift the imagery of U.S. as a truly open democracy. In a similar sense, we found that apologies often were contextualized by a strong desire for institutions to shift their public personas, which often resulted in a kind of mimicry where the institutional discourse and practices of apologies were often replicated.

Apologies

Corporate Apologies

As state and local governments began to require businesses to disclose historical ties to slavery (e.g., California's Slavery Era Insurance Registry; Chicago's business, corporate and slavery era insurance ordinance), corporations acted to overcome these barriers to doing business. Further findings and the resulting publicity from researchers such as Deadria Farmer-Paellman necessitated a move from disclosure to apology, but within the bounds of corporate interests: "image protection, stockholder interests, and the bottom line" (Janssen, 2012, p. 24). Together, with an understanding of history that favors specific narratives, and one that separates the past and the present, corporate apologies for ties to slavery in the United States have largely followed a pattern that seeks "closure" (p. 26) rather than reconciliation, or "a dialogic process of coordination and negotiation among differing actors and social locations, a process of respecting and responding to the Other amid the shared project of relational healing" (Hatch, 2006, p. 190).

Take, for instance, New York Life, which complied with disclosure laws that required the corporation to disclose their ties to slavery, including the names of slaves and slaveholders insured with their predecessor, Nautilus. Although New York Life remains one of the only corporations to maintain their connection to slavery publicly (via their website), the content emphasizes not the actual history, but the brevity of the connection ("sold policies on the lives of slaves for a brief period between 1846-1848"), its current and past "support of the African American community," and slavery as a part of *U.S.* history, not necessarily their own: "New York Life has worked for years to shine a light on the worst of our nation's history so it is never repeated" (Acknowledging our past, 2017). Such an apology that seeks closure rather than exposure of wrong-doing and dialogue with affected communities often results in the offender's essentially "forgiv[ing] and

redeem[ing] itself” (Janssen, 2012, p. 30). Yet, as Yamazaki (2004) shows with nation-states, “if reconciliation and restoration of relationship are the objective... negotiation and dialogue would seem to be inherent to the process of achieving that understanding” (p. 170).

Retrospective apologies are offered generations after the wrong-doings were committed (Weyeneth, 2001), as corporate apologies for slavery do. Although these apologies generally do not specify a group beyond their rhetoric of supporting “diversity” or the African American community in some form,

it acknowledges that history matters: perpetrators and immediate victims may be gone, but their legacy continues to shape the present... History casts long shadows, whether the present wants it to or not, and the general retrospective apology seeks to reckon with these shades (p. 35)

The corporate apologies for slavery, however, tend to avoid a reckoning with corporate history and instead separates the present-day company from the past. In Janssen’s (2012) analysis of Aetna’s apologies, “past and present are sharply separated and the past becomes a singular episode from ‘about 1853 to 1860’ that is not representative of Aetna” (p. 27). Aetna’s spokesperson consistently refers to “the Aetna of today” (Goodman, 2000), while Bank of America and New York Life label those responsible as “our predecessors” (Acknowledging our past, 2017; Charlotte Business Journal, 2005). Similarly, both J.P Morgan/Chase and Lehman Brothers simply state that their current companies are “very different” (J.P. Morgan Chase, 2005) or “not the same company that it is today” (Gallun, 2005) than the ones that benefited from slavery. Janssen (2012) notes however, that not only do these apologies separate the past and the present, but as the past is “‘outweighed’ and sharply contrasted, past moral wrongs are conveniently locked into the ‘distant past,’ and the focus remains on the present character” (p. 27). Indeed, Aetna and New York Life attest to their “consistent” (Acknowledging our past, 2017; Goodman, 2000) work in promoting diversity or supporting the African American community. Wachovia and Bank of America make clear that in seeking to atone for their ties to slavery, they will add to work they are *already doing* to “promote” and “preserve” the history of African Americans (Charlotte Business Journal, 2005; Tillman, 2005). Despite the efforts these corporations currently make, by separating their past with their present apologies fails to reveal “the webs that entangle the present with the past and [to concede] the weight of accountability in human affairs” (Weyeneth, 2001, p. 35). In this failure, reconciliation or redress cannot take place.

Perhaps less obviously, the text of the apologies locates corporate ties to slavery firmly within the history of the United States. Slavery, as described by AIG,

JP Morgan/Chase, Bank of America and New York Life, was, in order, a “sad and grievous chapter in American History” (Cox, 2002); “tragically ingrained in American society” (JP Morgan Chase, 2005); a “shameful mark on our nation’s history” (Charlotte Business Journal, 2005); “interwoven with the imperfections of our nation’s history” (Acknowledging our past, 2017). Thus, responsibility is shifted to the United States, in general, or to a moment in history where such actions were common (e.g., New York Life: “Our research indicates that there were at least 60 other companies involved in the business at the time, some of which wrote greater numbers of policies during that period”). Yet, even with this transference of guilt, such public apologies have the power to force the present to confront the past: “acknowledgement of wrong-doing *puts the issue on record, formally and publicly* [emphasis added]. In this way, the apology becomes a part of the story” (Weyeneth, 2001, p. 32). The difficulty in applying this power of retrospective apologies to corporate apologies is that the formal and public records have almost all disappeared. New York Life is the only corporation that continues to make their acknowledgement publicly available. Among the others, JP Morgan/Chase alone responded to queries for research with a digital copy of their apology. Not only does the frequent erasure of apology change the story, but if one sees present-day injustice as connected to historical injustice, the disappearance of the apologies also forecloses dialogue and redress between the affected communities. The one corporation that offered the possibility of actual dialogue was New York Life, whose website about their ties to slavery included contact information for descendants, media, and clients; however, the extent to which New York Life executives are willing to dialogue openly about the company’s past must be questioned. Access to their archivist and to the archives themselves are limited, according to reports by *The New York Times* (Swarns, 2016).

Although those directly affected are gone, an important element of retrospective apologies is the possibility of “groups divided by past injustice, victims and perpetrators, [to] initiate talk about the past and work towards overcoming division and to jointly shape a better future” (Janssen, 2012, p. 20). This brings up a key point that the legacies of slavery, and the legacies of those legacies (such as Jim Crow, segregation, and redlining), continue to the present. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor notes, “the continuing pursuit of cheap and easily manipulated labor certainly did not end with slavery; thus, deep-seated ideas concerning the inferiority of Blacks were perpetuated with fervor” (Taylor, 2016, p. 24). As profits from such exploitation accrue, it is important to note that even if a corporation claims to have had limited profit from ties to slavery (e.g., New York Life: “The policies Nautilus sold on slaves’ lives were a very small part – less than 5% – of the premiums collected by Nautilus during the short time the policies were sold. Nautilus records indicate that it did not make money from this business”),

historian Dan Bouk, points out that during the period in which the less than 5% was collected, the company was able to invest and spend the profit (Swarns, 2016). Less direct profits were also gained in that insuring slaves helped New York Life gain a business presence in the South (Swarns, 2016).

Without recognition of such connections, little can be done to “shape a better future” for everyone because the refusal to acknowledge the legacies of historical injustice forecloses a refusal to dialogue, which shuts down the possibility of action and redress. Weyeneth (2001) points out, “the coupling of remorse with recognition of one’s responsibility distinguishes the apology from simple regret” (p. 17). Ultimately then, corporate apologies for their ties to slavery are perhaps better labeled as corporate regrets that clearly serve the interests of corporations.

Government Apologies

In 2007 the Virginia legislature, with bipartisan support, was finalizing language for the first formal state-sanctioned slave apology. When issued in February 2007, the resolution also included an apology to Native Americans for the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924 and its adoption of the *one-drop rule*. While not using the word *apology* in its formal language, the intent of the Virginia non-apology apology was, at a minimum, a recognition of past transgressions.

It also provided formal language that several states would consequently copy and build upon when issuing their own legislatively approved apologies. The Virginia apology would be followed closely by Maryland, North Carolina, Alabama, and Arkansas, who all offered apologies for slavery in 2007. Florida and New Jersey followed in 2008, Connecticut in 2009, and most recently Delaware in 2016. As of 2019, a total of nine states have offered official slavery apologies. Other states such as Nebraska, Missouri, and Mississippi have attempted but not yet passed slavery apology resolutions.

Apologies for slavery were initially positioned as a new hope to start a more widespread dialogue on the racial injustices of the past after discussions of reparations stalled in the early 2000s. A less controversial alternative, if you will, apologies seemed to have fewer tangible stakes at hand without a commitment of financial resources toward minority communities or programs aimed at racial reconciliation. Even so, the push for apologies was nonetheless met with opposition.

A major aspect to the apologies is around the words used in the slave apologies. Words in the apologies were chosen carefully and not without motive.

As noted by Yamazaki (2004), phrases are purposefully constructed and the words utilized in and phrases left out of the apologies help create a tone for each of the state apologies (Hatch, 2006). Henry Marsh III, the Virginia senator who authored the slave apology resolution, and a great-grandson of slaves, expressed pleasure that his state acted to pass a formal resolution. But, noted, “this [the resolution] is as close as we can get to an apology in Virginia” (Koch, 2007). His comment was directed at the state legislature and their desire to use the word *regret* in the apology instead of something that implies greater responsibility (i.e., apology). Even *atonement* and *contrition* were rejected for worry they might again ignite debates over reparations.

Many felt that tying the apologies to talks of reparations would sink support and ultimately be a non-starter for legislative passage as opponents would likely see them as nothing more than a movement toward race-based entitlements. Despite non-support for reparations, in general, the apologies were seen as a long overdue *first step* (Hatch, 2006). Supporters hoped it would move forward the dialogue on race relations through an acknowledgement of historical wrongs and racial precedent.

Another important context of the slave apologies is the use of repetitive phrases across the official apologies. While using the apology frameworks of other states likely provided valuable examples, states seemingly cut and pasted portions from other state apologies that seemed to fit the agenda for their own state’s apology. A consequence of the copying of phrases is the seeming novelty in issuing apologies (Trouillot, 2000).

States legislatures in New Jersey, Alabama, North Carolina, and Delaware apologized in their formal resolutions and further expressed *regret* for the role of their state in slavery. Other states however only offered words of contrition. Words of remorse, but less responsibility for actions, and never officially offering an apology. Virginia, Arkansas, Connecticut, Maryland, and Florida all expressed regret for their role in slavery. Florida specifically noted its role in “sanctioning and perpetuating” the practice (Florida Senate Concurrent Resolution 2390, 2008), while Maryland referred to its role in instituting and maintaining the system of slavery (Maryland Senate Joint Resolution 6, 2007).

The most common aspect of the apologies is that they offer varying degrees of historical description about slavery. Some states even issued exactly the same historical commentary. Virginia, New Jersey, and Alabama all noted that “during the course of the infamous slave trade, millions of Africans became involuntary immigrants to the New World, and the 1st African slaves in the North American

colonies were brought to Jamestown in 1619...Africans were captured and sold at auction as chattel, like inanimate property or animals” (Alabama House Joint Resolution 321, 2007; New Jersey Assembly Concurrent Resolution 270, 2008; Virginia House Joint Resolution 728, 2007). New Jersey and Alabama continued with “slavery has been documented as a worldwide practice since antiquity, dating back to 3500 BC in ancient Mesopotamia” (AL H. J. Res. 321, 2007; NJ Con. Res. 270, 2008).

Other states highlighted the notion of slavery as against fundamental American principles as they hoped to show the oppositional and historical space in which slavery operated and to express the belief that slavery was at odds with the ideals of the United States. North Carolina and Connecticut specifically noted that slavery “violated the precept that all persons are created equal and denied thousands of people liberty, the pursuit of happiness, the ability to benefit from their own work, and, in many cases, life itself...” (North Carolina Senate Joint Resolution 1557, 2007; Connecticut House Joint Resolution 1, 2009). Virginia similarly added that “the immoral institution of human slavery, policies and systems” were directly antithetical “with the fundamental principle of human equality and freedom...” of the United States (VA H. J. Res. 728, 2007).

All states acknowledged differently their complicity in the practice of slavery. Each state crafted formal statements that expressed regret with varying degrees of specificity. Florida waded in generalities by stating “the Council and its successors, did, for over four decades, construct a legal framework that perpetuated African slavery in one of its most brutal and dehumanizing forms...”, whereas Connecticut offered pointed historical examples, “in 1723, the Connecticut colony passed an act to prevent the ‘Disorder of Negro Servants and Slaves in the Night Session’....which was punishable with a whipping for the servant...emancipation bills were rejected...in 1777, 1779 and 1780...in 1818 Connecticut’s new constitution specifically denied the right of the African American population to vote...” (CT H. J. Res. 1, 2009; FL S. Con. Res. 2390, 2008). Maryland named “a native of Maryland, nurtured by the slave culture of our State, wrote the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision...” as an example of the ingrained culture of the state that supported the overall aims of slavery (MD S. J. Res. 6, 2007). Virginia claimed (as did Alabama) that “the ethos of the Africans was shattered, they were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage...” (AL H. J. Res. 321, 2007; VA H. J. Res. 728, 2007).

Each of the nine state apologies also offered calls to action, celebration, and remembrance. The commentaries offer reflections about how each state sees its role moving forward in race relations. In particular, Virginia called for honoring the

struggles of those who have worked tirelessly for civil rights within that state. Whereas, New Jersey and Alabama both identically iterated that “African Americans have found the struggle to overcome the bitter legacy of slavery long and arduous, and for many African Americans the scars left behind are unbearable, haunting their psyches and clouding their vision of the future and of America’s many positive attributes...” (AL H. J. Res. 321, 2007; NJ Con. Res. 270, 2008). Florida’s apology called for “healing and reconciliation” (FL S. Con. Res. 2390, 2008). Maryland instead expressed the need to “work for a more perfect union” (MD S. J. Res. 6, 2007) while North Carolina and Connecticut each believed their state needs to remove “the residual structures of racism that continue to exist in our state...” (CT H. J. Res. 1, 2009; NC S. J. Res. 1557, 2007).

In 2016, Delaware Governor Jack Markell, at the time of the passage of the resolution, iterated that “we affirm that we refuse to forget our past... We accept the responsibility of tearing down the barriers that face so many of our neighbors as a result of the abhorrent laws and practices carried out against African-Americans” (Moyer, 2016). Still, many states with legal, economic, and social ties to slavery have yet to issue a recognition of their involvement in American chattel slavery, much less a formal apology. In their 2008 slave apology, New Jersey offered the following on the need for substantive racial dialogue in the United States: “our nation acknowledges the crimes and persecution visited upon other peoples during WWII lest the world forget, yet the very mention of the broken promise of ‘40 acres and a mule’ to former slaves or of the existence of racism today evokes denial from many quarters of any responsibility for the centuries of legally sanctioned deprivation of African Americans on their endowed rights or for contemporary policies that perpetuate the existing state of affairs” (NJ Con. Res. 270, 2008). State slave apologies offer insight into the push and pull of political maneuvering. By their very existence, slave apologies offer more than opponents feel is necessary. And, to their supporters, apologies are merely an initial step toward racial reconciliation.

University Apologies

Universities are unique spaces for a public apology for slavery. University spaces are intended to create new knowledge. Students learn about the evolution of the universe, the science of computing, the history and method of art, the history of race and gender. University and college settings allow students to explore problems in depth and dispel any myths or false information about history, science, or a specific social phenomenon. In this sense, we can think of universities as counter-memory spaces. The intent of a quality university education is to help students explore problems that allow them to develop new memory. For example, to

understand that *race* is a social construct that has real material consequences can provide students a new way to make sense of racial inequality in society. From this standpoint, racial inequality is not just an outcome of different belief systems or genetic capacity, but is enclosed by real historical dynamics of power made possible by economic and educational gaps between white students and students of color.

Over the last four decades, however, universities have also become contentious ideological spaces over what knowledge and memory students should hold. In the 1990s, as more ethnic studies programs developed, debates ensued about what students should learn about American history and literature (Gates, 1992). These tensions around canonic and multicultural knowledge continued throughout most of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nancy Fraser (2000) referred to these tensions over inclusion as the politics of recognition. The politics of recognition centers on how people's histories and experiences are acknowledged and recognized.

It is for certain that the context of university apologies has remained enclosed within the politics of recognition. An essential question of students on campus is to reflect on the existential question of whether they belong. In recent years students have taken seriously this question of inclusion by challenging university leadership to rethink the iconography and historical legacy of their campuses. In each of the cases documented in this essay, apologies were prompted by public pressure. Researchers and activists typically made visible the forgotten histories of universities' place in American chattel slavery. At the University of Alabama, the faculty senate authored a letter to the leadership documenting the university's deep ties with slavery (Reminick, 2015). This apology was the first official documentation of the university's acknowledgement of its complicity in American slavery. At Yale however, student protests forced the university to reconsider the name of the dormitory halls named after Vice President John C. Calhoun, who took a strong stance in the mid-1800s to support slavery in the South. As Reminick (2015) reported:

This summer, law school students circulated an online petition equating the Calhoun College name with the Confederate flag. They have collected around 1,500 signatures demanding its removal. (p.2)

It is clear there seems to be a kind peer institutional pressure, where the widely public debates prompt universities to consider their past complicity with the history of slavery. The public nature of such accusations to progressive educational institutions being tied to slavery often results in a wide public outcry, resulting in

university presidents offering public reaction, followed by the creation of some of form of commission or task force.

In the context of elite public and private schools, the history of apologies starts in 2001, when a group of Yale university graduate students issued an independent report to challenge the university's close ties with slavery. This then prompted Brown University in 2003 to explore this history, which resulted in the assembling of a task force that was charged to produce a report concerning the university's role in the history of slavery (Belluck, 2006). Eventually, other elite public and private universities, such as Columbia, Harvard, University of Virginia, University of North Carolina, and Georgetown, all issued public apologies and/or assembled commissions to explore these issues.

In some instances, university apologies are given to an all-encompassing *African American community*, while in other cases, apologies are targeted to specific families linked to the universities' history (DeGioia, 2016). In some instances, institutions offered some form of *symbolic restitution* (Meyer, 2006), including the creation of monuments and the changing of names on buildings and the creation of a committee and/or the development of a clearinghouse or website that details the institutions' involvement in slavery.

What is clear among the university apologies for slavery is how they are consistently subsumed within interests of the universities' identity. University presidents, faculty governance councils, and administrations consistently note how these histories do not reflect well in the universities' legacy. However, universities issued apologies in two primary ways. The first being the more common, which is for universities to offer public demonstrations of contrition, where university presidents offer deeply expressed concerns about these histories. An example of this can be found in the words of Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust (2016):

Although we embrace and regularly celebrate the storied traditions of our nearly 400 year history, slavery is an aspect of Harvard's past that has rarely been acknowledged or invoked. The importance of slavery in early New England was long ignored even by historians, and the presence and contributions of people of African descent at Harvard have remained a largely untold story. But Harvard was directly complicit in America's system of racial bondage from the College's earliest days in the 17th century until slavery in Massachusetts ended in 1783, and Harvard continued to be indirectly involved through extensive financial and other ties to the slave South up to the time of emancipation. This is our history

and our legacy, one we must fully acknowledge and understand in order to truly move beyond the painful injustices at its core.

Here the Georgetown University President John J. DeGioia (2016) expressed a similar public address with an added note to the university's responsibility to this legacy:

There is a moral, as well as a practical, imperative that defines this moment—that shapes the responsibility we all share: how do we address now, in this moment, the enduring and persistent legacy of slavery? I believe the most appropriate ways for us to redress the participation of our predecessors in the institution of slavery is to address the manifestations of the legacy of slavery in our time.

The other example, mostly illustrated in the case of the University of Alabama, is for school leaders to say little to nothing publicly but then offer varied versions of institutionalized symbolic memory. The case of the University of Alabama is illustrative of a kind benign neglect, where silence was the means to make the debate dissipate. Clarke and Fine (2010) nicely summarize the apologetic process at the University of Alabama as ineffective at establishing a longterm discussion about this history that in the end was relegated to a few monuments of memory:

Insofar as the university has attempted to initiate a process of apology, it has been marginally more successful. The slave graves have been marked and commemorated in the “prominent fashion” described. This is as far as the university has come; on January 27, 2006, an editor of the university's newspaper advocated that the University of Alabama has “175 years of history to draw upon for inspiration, reflection, growth, and knowledge. It's time to start looking at it.” The failure of the university to initiate a process of apology is echoed by the university's failure to utilize the possibility of using itself as a site of remembrance. (p. 104)

The context of university apologies further illustrates the contentious nature over memory. In each case, the legacy of slavery presented an image problem for universities. Universities that wished to see themselves as democratic spaces of inclusion and cosmopolitanism had to confront a past that flew in the face of their images. What this means is that apologies on university campuses are enclosed in *a priori* ideas about democracy and reconciliation that make acts of contrition, whether speech or a memorial, as a necessary dimension to Western academic discourse and practice. In this sense, the theatrics and tensions of university apology discourse could be thought of as what Trouillot (2006) calls “abortive rituals,”

which he defines as a “regulated, stylized, routinized and repetitive performance” (p.184).

The intersection of memory and university identity converged, forcing universities to take on the apologetic process. Taking a critical race theory perspective, the university setting is illustrative of what can occur when interests converge around an equity concern. For the faculty, students, and community members that brought this to light, there was an overarching interest in making this history public and prompting the university to take some form of action in relation to these histories. For universities, it was to promptly fix an image that was entangled in the ugly history of American chattel slavery. This convergence of interests has helped to shape the debates and discussions around memory that have continued to ensue in university settings.

Discussion

While hope may have accompanied each emergence from silence, many apologies for slavery by corporations, states, and universities ultimately fall short as they do not acknowledge “the unity of historical time” (Nora, 2002, p. 6). It is of little surprise when, in the same way that young children are often forced by adults to apologize without actual feelings of remorse, most institutions in this study publicly acknowledged their ties to slavery only after exposure by researchers and activists, in an attempt to ensure their public images were not unduly harmed. Although some could have chosen silence, as many continue to do so, fear of what it means to take responsibility has shaped both their expressions and discourse and has limited possibilities for dialogue.

If an apology is driven by interest convergence, perhaps *regret* is a more proper term, specifically, regret that this relationship has come to light. As Bell (1980) has shown in the case of *Brown v. Board* and school segregation, when interest convergence is the foundation upon which a connection is built (e.g. U.S. image abroad in the Cold War and the fight for civil rights at home), the interests of those in power will continue to command priority. Thus, with apologies for slavery, what is in the interest of an institution based on profit (corporations), power (governments), and image (universities), is to “screen” (Arnold-de Simone, 2013, p. 9) the memories of how many of these institutions were built on the backs of those who were enslaved.

When memories of slavery bind “the present and the future to the past” (Nora, 2002, p. 6), some would argue that apologies seem insufficient without restitution, whether in the form of monetary reparation or ensuring that such

wrongdoings will no longer continue. Yet, when those directly involved are no longer present, apologies and restitution may seem to many to be irrelevant, a manifestation of a culture obsessed with political correctness. Social studies education bears some responsibility in this perception. When the past and present are held apart, and when history is taught without an understanding of history as *official memory*, nor official memory as constructed within struggles for power, history is no longer unfolding, but foreclosed (Lowe, 2015). Injustice in the present has no cause, and injustice in the past has no effect. Yet, the legacies of slavery, both the profit and the inhumanity, survive in the buildings, the bank accounts, the systems, and even the DNA (Baharian, Barakatt, Gignoux, Shringarpure, Errington, Blot, Bustamante, Kenny, Williams, Aldrich, and Gravel, 2016) of human and institutional descendants. We live within what some Protestant theologians refer to as “institutional concretions” (Wink, 1984, p. 107) of injustice. Social studies educators must be willing to challenge both dominant narratives of progress (Loewen, 2008; Epstein, 2010) and the reification of history as official and foreclosed and obscures memories and narratives that attest to the connections between past, present, and future. The debates surrounding apologies for slavery, their careful and studied crafting, expose cracks in the facade of “official history” that educators and students can widen. Once widened, considerations of power, ideology, and labor exploitation can come to the fore as the constructed nature of history as memory unravels.

The ways in which the institutions in this study remember their ties to slavery, their attempts to distance their present selves from the past, and the too common lapse into oblivion once the apologies are published seem to follow a simplified understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition of atonement, in which forgiveness and forgetting cannot be separated (Volf, 2007). What this version of atonement omits and what the institutions have themselves forgotten, however, is that until relationships are made right, “non-remembrance... is precisely an expression of unconcern for justice and abdication of moral responsibility” (Volf, 2007, para. 42). Institutions may justify their stances on silence, distance, and reparations with the passing of perpetrators and victims directly involved in historical U.S. slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. There is no relationship to make right, no justice to be restored, because what has happened has long since passed. Therefore, ongoing efforts in education and diversity, carefully worded apologies (sometimes copied), and removing traces of honor bestowed on supporters of slavery and the slave trade are adequate partners to the apology/regret expressed in public. What this misses entirely is that historical chattel slavery is “genealogically linked” (Waquant, 2002, para. 2) to ongoing issues of race, including exploitation, segregation, and mass incarceration.

In addition to the ways that institutions in this study directly profited from slavery and the slave trade, “institutional concretion” (Wink, 1984, p. 107) asserts an overall and inescapable complicity. To assume that one can apologize and then be done therefore, “is a [deliberate] forgetting that assumes that the matters of ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ have been taken care of... that perpetrators have been named, judged, and (hopefully) transformed, that victims are safe and their wounds healed (Volf, 1996, p. 100). Recent headlines and the proliferation of social media videos attest to the lived realities of Black Americans, who, regardless of ancestry, must function within hegemonically “deep-seated ideas concerning the inferiority of Blacks” (Taylor, 2016, p. 24). Not only inferiority with regards to labor needs within capitalism, but also their very humanity is often denied by those with power.

Given these concerns, when apologies for ties to slavery and the slave trade enter classrooms, we would urge teachers to move beyond narratives that would use these apologies as a way to bring closure to a “sad and grievous chapter in American History” (Cox, 2002). The apologies and specifically the debates surrounding them offer a potent glimpse into how power and ideology utilize, shape, and maintain collective memory. The zeal and dogmatism with which communities fight to uphold heritage as truth exposes the ease with which power can sustain and veil itself within ideas and institutions that appear neutral and timeless. Yet the fierce debates around slavery apologies, reconstruction narratives, and modern-day reparations that continue within institutions and the public articulate a history that is ongoing. Beyond the apologies themselves, therefore, educators might consider the controversy and the discourse surrounding the apologies as a continuation of the U.S. slavery narrative that too often ends in the classroom with the 14th Amendment. Apologies, then, might function in schools to center a past that unfolds into the present and the future in ways that matter dramatically for students and teachers who seek to understand and transform injustices that appear foreclosed in history.

Conclusion

Shortly after the end of the Serbian War, a student stood up at a seminar on historical atrocities, forgiveness, and reconciliation and suggested that *reconciliation cannot truly take place until the victims are willing to forget*. The troubling ways that such a notion can be and has been taken up were made evident in the ways that various institutions simultaneously apologized for and absolved themselves of connections to slavery and the slave trade. This tendency is perhaps unsurprising as the voices that are centered continue to be those who hold enormous power within the institutions represented, as well as within the fields those institutions represent. Even when institutions engage with communities in the U.S.

affected by the legacies of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, certain realities must be considered similar to the way in which General Romeo Dallaire, former Commander of the U.N. peacekeepers, accounted for the difference between the western reaction to the Serbian War and the genocide in Rwanda: Who counts? Who is considered a “total human”? (Dallaire, 2003).

Historical memory and heritage position the United States as a culmination of the Enlightenment ideals of equality, liberty, and freedom. In opposition to the hierarchies of Europe and the despotism of the Orient, “all men are created equal.” Those ideals, however, were born into a conception of humanity that has as its “liminal Other,” the Black body (Wynter, 2001, p. 60). We are left to wonder, therefore, if apologies for historical wrongs truly matter when underlying both the wrongs and the apologies is a continued definition of *human* that denies the humanity of raced bodies? Our hope is that in revealing this constructed collective memory that designates an entire community, historical and present, as *liminal*, we might begin the work of deconstructing and then remaking a more just society.

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