

THE MISEDUCATION OF AMERICAN YOUTH:
THE DETRIMENTS OF WHITEWASHING LITERATURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Section I. Introduction

For the entire history of American education, the gates to knowledge and power were kept closed from any minority, the key to which lies in teaching texts that students find accessible and relatively easy to understand. In the framework of American education lie the white, Anglosaxon forefathers who created institutions designed to benefit and propagate their ideas for generations to come. This framework still upholds American education. Its reflection lies in the pool of literature taught to secondary students throughout the country. Modern educational theory argues that students learn best when they are able to connect to instructed texts. The gap between the educational theory of the importance of student connection and the reality of the literature taught in American secondary schools begs for reexamination. While students are often blamed for the achievement gap, new insight examines how the system in place disenfranchises students from education.

An ever-emerging need for diversity in education, down to the literature that students are introduced to, is evident in the research provided in the following three sections; the first discusses the history of white-washing in education and includes a summary of the most recent seminal study on texts taught in the secondary American public school system. Compounding this is an analysis of the most recent seminal study on the texts taught in secondary classrooms, conducted by Applebee in the late 1980's and published in the 1990's. The second section of this work will analyze educational theory about student connections with texts and topics taught in classrooms and how seeing oneself in education enhances learning. The third and final section of this paper will synthesize the previous literature in order to argue for radical change to take place in the literature taught to secondary students and provide suggested methodology for doing so.

Section II. Texts Taught in American Schools

The 1990 study, “Literature in the Secondary School, Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States” by Arthur N. Applebee first describes the three traditional ideologies of literature education. Applebee first explains the 1950’s tradition with roots in Matthew Arnold’s research that focuses on establishing a common cultural knowledge for all students (Applebee 3). This theory is where we, in modern classrooms, draw the importance of introducing “great books” to students. The second tradition has a vocational emphasis, zeroing in on “practical reading” and ignoring novels for nonfiction texts. The third tradition, and the focus of this essay, is that of child-centered learning, in accordance with Applebee’s research, and its antithetical predecessors of Eastman and Hall (4). Applebee channels Dixon’s 1967 work on this ideology, “This tradition found its fullest expression in the Progressive movement in American education, and in later concern with personal growth” (4). The vast debate and contradictory claims of members of each camp in educational theory has created a stagnation in the development of textual variety within the secondary classroom. A thorough analysis of the content of this seminal study is a key foundation of the topics and proposed changes in the standards of literature education.

Applebee explains that the design of these studies “were designed to fill that gap to provide a comprehensive portrait of content and approaches in the teaching of literature in the high school years” (Applebee 6). Though this study covers multiple facets of English teaching, including methods of instruction, conditions of learning, teaching of writing, and school libraries, for the benefit of this essay, the focus is on the studies that analyze literary curriculum. The study

was conducted in the spring of 1988 by the National Survey of the Teaching of Literature and covered a random sample of 331 public schools across America, 88 schools that “had consistently produced winners in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Achievement Awards in Writing Program. The Achievement Awards program honors students rather than schools, on the basis of writing samples evaluated by state level panels” (10). The study also included 68 middle and secondary institutions that received the label of “Centers of Excellence,” a program started by NCTE in 1987. A random sample of 85 Catholic schools was taken, along with the final pool of 78 independent schools. The study conducted on the literary works themselves is a direct copy of Anderson’s study containing data collected in the spring of 1963 that mirrored the sample pool taken in the more recent 1988 study. The results of this study, specifically the statistics represented in Table 5.1 (Appendix 1) of the study, represent data that Applebee describes as having “very little variation” (Applebee 60).

The data presented in the diagram, collected from the aforementioned random poolings of schools, paints a picture of homogeneity within literature education. Applebee himself states that “recent attempts to broaden the curriculum seem to have had very little effect on the representation of women and minorities among the authors of required book-length texts” (Applebee 75). The only text on this compiled list written by a woman is *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. This text centers on the life of a black woman as she endures spousal abuse and separation from her sister and explores her sexuality. The combination of a female perspective and the perspective of a person of color is in polarity with the rest of the texts on the list, all of which center on white, predominantly male characters. However, variation is greater in classes not considered to be “college preparatory,” specifically those for Grade 7 and 8 students. These

classes were more likely to include more recent literature, as well as texts written by women and minorities, than their college preparatory counterparts. Applebee theorizes that this difference is an educator's effort to make texts more accessible for students to read and even enjoy. Table 5.2 (Appendix 2) lays out the disparities between grades and academic levels in the ethnography and genre of their authorship.

This table indicates the overwhelming supremacy of white male authors in the academic world of secondary education. This chart further explores the genres of texts taught in secondary classrooms. Even within the category of "National Tradition" the Western perspective dominates all but, at best, 1.8% of the literature taught. As mentioned above, the chart is from the 1963 original study. The replica of the study, performed in 1988 and mentioned above, shows minimal changes in the gender and race of authors taught across the board in secondary education, regardless of academic level or age group. Instead, changes took place in the genre of text taught, with novels overtaking plays even further than in the previous study. Furthermore, more of the texts taught were considered "modern" for the time, having been written in the past 60 years. Applebee speculates that, by and large, educators are afraid of changing curriculum and rely instead on tried-and-true classics provided in preexisting classroom anthologies. Table 5.3 (Appendix 3), featured below, showcases the changes in the more recent replica of the original study.

Even within the more than 20 year passage of time, white, male, Western authors still dominate secondary education, with the percentage of white authors growing from the previous study. The percentage of nonwestern texts taught in classrooms does grow on the whole from the 1963 study to the 1988 replication.

Type of text is not the only constant presented throughout this study. Applebee continues in his study to examine the foremost texts taught in secondary classrooms. This portion of the study goes beyond the demographic of instructed authors and instead looks at the across the board similarities between texts, and how the most popular texts in secondary education stayed static or changed. Applebee's studies pool from both the original 1963 and 1988 study respectively. As demonstrated in the table below (Table 5.4, Appendix 4), Applebee emphasizes that in the 1963 study, "Consistent with the summary data discussed previously, the top ten included only one title by a female author (Harper Lee) and none by members of minority groups" (Applebee 66).

The next table, from the 1988 study, divides the literature into two tracks, an upper and lower track, and demonstrates the differentiation in literature taught to the two tracks again in public, Catholic, and independent schools. Applebee names the main difference across the board being the removal of *Silas Marner* from the population of each list and names general upset and shift in opinion of the later 1960's that voiced the need to replace the text in favor of "better literature" (Applebee 72). The list of authors remains, by and large, white, male, and Anglosaxon, with, again, Harper Lee and *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the only text written by a woman, and no texts on any of these lists written by a minority or nonwestern author (Table 5.7, Appendix 4).

However, Applebee poses the question, and answers it, with a subsequent study on the disparity between the aforementioned pools of educational institutions with high levels of academic achievement and those with higher rates of diversity in more urban environments. Applebee writes of the study that "to investigate differences in offerings in different

communities, we compared the authors required in schools in urban centers (over 100,000 population), in schools with minority populations equaling 25 percent to 49 percent of the student body, and in schools with minority populations equaling 50 percent or more of the student body” (Applebee 72). Though there were no great differences between the quantity of authors in the previously investigated schools and the schools surveyed in this portion of the study, the two minority authors taught most in the previous schools, Lorraine Hansberry and Richard Wright, move up the rankings in these more minority-heavy schools. Applebee interprets this shift in popularity of common minority authors as teacher responsiveness to students’ needs, though he does note that the choices for integration of minority authorship in education still appear to be limited (73).

The reasoning behind limiting choices is in the perceived rigor of classic texts. Educators of all levels are of the opinion that classic texts are more rigorous for students than modern texts. Additionally, teachers worry that if their students are not learning the texts that their peers are, they will fall behind in standardized test scores. While Applebee clearly advocates for a response to student needs, educators are not of the belief that the best encouragement for student learning is to entertain their desire to engage with and relate to a text.

In summation of this portion of his research, Applebee states that, “Our examination of the selections chosen for study creates a picture of a curriculum dominated by familiar selections drawn primarily from a white, male, Anglo Saxon tradition” (Applebee 82). The texts taught across the board, in both academically achieving schools and a separate pool of schools with high populations of minority students, are most commonly drawn by teachers from provided anthologies, propagated with white narratives. Though this study, both in its original and

revamped form, was conducted during the mid and late 20th century, issues in racial divide and underrepresentation have not ceased within education. Issues with a lack of diverse literature and the necessity of change in curricula are evidenced further in the following sections.

III. Racial Inequalities in U.S. Education

Educators believe that racism in American schools is a product of the past. However, a multiplicity of recent studies present facets of education either intentionally or unintentionally overlooked by educators that allow for racial exclusion to continue to propagate in schools. With the inclusion of research and texts published during the 21st century, the realities of the racial divides are clarified as a modern issue, not simply a residual idea. Furthermore, this larger look at the institutional and systemic racism present in education is key to understanding the long range impact of the inclusion of racially diverse texts in secondary literature-centered classrooms. Articles examined in this section emphasize the need for educators and administrators to take an active role in fighting the racism within their institution, as well as detailing methods of discussing and subverting racism within both classes and in larger school systems. In examining two different studies on two different academic regions, one smaller school in North Carolina with a largely white student population and one an urban school district in the Midwest with a largely diverse student population, the prevailing racism within public education institutions in the U.S. is demonstrated. Additionally, an overwhelming lack of motivation on the part of educators to subvert racist narratives is demonstrated through many harmful attitudes.

In the journal article "Other People's Racism: Race, Rednecks, and Riots in a Southern High School" Jessica Halliday Hardie and Karolyn Tyson look at nine months of empirical

research performed at Cordington High school, a mid-sized school in North Carolina. The school enrolls around 1,000 students: about 80% white, over 10% black, and a growing 1% hispanic population. Hardie and Tyson emphasize the strong racial divide between students in schools. They found that, while teachers and administrators alike were oftentimes encouraging of dividing students racially, many turn a blind eye to the divide and chose to focus on how well students “got along” (Hardie and Tyson 92). The text describes educators’ reactions to race riots within the school as having to do with individual differences between students, stating that “in casual conversations, teachers noted that conflicts were due to individual differences and that students got along with one another on the whole” (93). Teachers were also cited to be “largely silent” (94) on issues regarding race, and, despite their silence, racial divides were prominent within the social groups at Cordington. Hardie and Tyson report that student groups were almost entirely segregated in social spaces, and that, in classrooms where students were able to choose their own seats, they divided themselves by race as well. The idea that racially-charged conflict is built on individual differences rather than racial bias is not a new one, as the study examines early in its introduction. A phenomena exists of educators and communities denying divisions among racial communities and instead assigning blame in conflict to a few rogue individuals. Hardie and Tyson cite other studies (Fine and Weis 2003; Schofield 1989) that show that “community voices are routinely silenced, and issues of race ignored, because teachers and school administrators see their roles as primarily academic” (Hardie and Tyson 86). The shrugging-off of the responsibilities of those in positions of authority within a school district to circumvent racism in an institution is not unique to the dynamic in Cordington, or schools in the South. The allegedly apolitical idea of “not seeing color” fills schools across the country.

Converse to the demographic of Cordington, the school utilized in the qualitative study performed and explored in the article “African Americans in Schools: Tiptoeing Around Racism” by Carol Rozansky-Lloyd is an urban school district in the Midwest where over 45,000 students are enrolled in K-12, and African American students represent the largest minority group at 32.1% (3). Working with the use of informants, teachers, the U.S. senator who brought the issue of racism within the school district to light, and students themselves, Rozansky-Lloyd found racism to be a recurring topic in her interviews. She describes that:

Some (instances of racism) are blatant, such as when teachers talked about counselors who would not consider black students' classroom success but would only look at standardized test scores, or when teachers accused colleagues of having lower expectations of black students than they had of white students. But what about high school teachers blaming elementary teachers, suggesting that the project should not have included the high schools until students were ready for high school curricula? As one administrator told me, "You don't see institutional racism happening. It's like a cancer and it's difficult to indicate to people that they are ill. (Rozansky-Lloyd 4)

This takes the idea of alleged color-blindness past simply excusing outward displays of racial tensions, as was evidenced in the Cordington study performed by Hardie and Tyson. Instead, this study looks at the ways in which teacher practices actively disadvantage students of color. Rozansky-Lloyd names these ideas as educational racism and details specific categories in which thoughts or actions can fall. A specific and repeated complaint of secondary teachers that pertains most closely to the topic in this paper is the idea that “the district needs to retain students who have not mastered grade-level curricula; then I can do my job effectively” (Rozansky-Lloyd

4). This idea inherently puts the blame on students, on the individual for their failure, much in the way that the Hardie and Tyson study blamed specific individuals for conflict. In removing the idea that systemic pressures play into the way that students think and react to pressures, whether academic or social, educators entirely negate the outside world that plays into what happens within their classrooms. This concept also blames the district as a whole for not retaining students who are underperforming and therefore not at a level to perform in secondary education. Educators with this mindset are willing to put the blame on others and unwilling to undo the damages done to students that walk into their classrooms.

While the ideas surrounding retention may seem to lack racial bias, the educational gap points to an educator's inability to acknowledge bias within themselves and the educational world as a whole. If one is not willing to educate at all levels, how can one be able to see bias within themselves, how can they grow? It is the fixed mindset that prevents teachers from acknowledging that this line of thinking disenfranchises students with fewer opportunities, learning disabilities, or those that the educational system has, up to that point, left behind. While educators are not the sole purveyors of academic equality within their students' lives, to negate their impact on students entirely does a disservice to their role within education. Oftentimes, students do not interact directly with administrators or those on school boards, but they do interact with their teachers every day that they are in class. If an educator refuses to work with and for the betterment of a student's learning, they are, consciously or not, inhibiting that student from receiving an education.

Students are not clueless to these biases. In the text "Race, Racism, and Multiraciality in American Education" multiracial high school student Ayako Christopher speaks to the

omnipresence of racial bias in society, stating, “If your great grandparents think that black people are stupid and ignorant, they’re going to teach their kids that. And their kids are going to teach their kids that and it just continues on. Unless you’re actively trying to reverse that, you’re going to grow up to be just like your parents” (Knaus 424). Overt racism, described here, is deeply connected to the institutional beliefs proliferated throughout U.S. history and manifests itself in the lives of students to this day (426). This student encounters those who accept the racial divides within the country as the status quo and knows that it takes radical, internal change to combat a system that predates modernity.

This view is not unique to the student perspective. Rozansky-Lloyd sums up her article by stating that

viewing blacks as inferior is part of our history. Educational racism is nothing new. But we live in a time in which we often behave as if that racism does not exist. When we still have teachers who do not expect their black students to succeed, when counselors do not encourage these students to take challenging courses, when we segregate through tracking, and when teachers abdicate their responsibility for all students' education until students' previous teachers ensure mastery, then we exclude black students from high-quality education. (Rozansky-Lloyd 6)

In denying that racism exists, educators are complicit in a system that denies students the opportunity to learn and grow based solely on the color of their skin. Corollary to this is the need to address biases within teachers, and Rozansky-Lloyd goes on to cite how that is ignored with the focus on test scores in order to reflect students’ learning. When the focus is on on-paper achievement and the system does no additional work to circumvent the initial disadvantages that

students of color encounter within and outside of the school's walls, students are prevented from reaching a standard they do not have the tools to meet. So long as, specifically in this study, African American students are kept out of the gates to education, and the government supports systems that discriminate against those in poverty, they will be kept from success at a greater rate than their white counterparts.

Racism within educational institutions can be rectified, or, at least, efforts can be made to dispel racist behaviors and make headway towards equality. The study by Hardie and Tyson argues that discussions surrounding race and tensions can prevent further physical problems (Hardie and Tyson 98). Race is an inescapable part of everyday life, and to negate its presence and impact is to limit the growth of our schools towards a better and more equitable educational system. Rozansky-Lloyd concludes her article with sentiments surrounding her own whiteness, questioning whether or not, in her academic experiences, she had seen and ignored racist practices. The only way, in her opinion, that society can grow is to, as educators, look to help students that are struggling rather than blaming them for their own shortcomings (Rozansky-Lloyd 7). To take both of these approaches into consideration is to look to rectify the racism that prevails in American public education today and to look towards the importance of inclusion. Literature in the classroom, as established in the second section of this essay, excludes people of color. Creating inclusive practices in education within relationships, and content, is to provide them with more tools to use to grow as students.

IV. The Importance of Representation

A myriad of new educational research points to the benefits and necessity of discussing race and racially diverse texts within the classroom. In this section, the aim is to analyze the

discrepancies in representation of minority populations within formal academic settings, from the inherent beliefs society carries into the classroom to the ways in which minorities are presented in textbooks. The culmination of this section will offer and discuss the values of solutions offered by field experts. Responsibility for enacting change is largely on educators is emphasized in the text “Racial Crisis in American Education” edited by Robert L. Green. It states in the introduction that “we must search for ways to reform the present educational system as well as focus on pupil behavioral change. Much of the dysfunctional educational behavior that we observe within minority school populations is related to the educational environment in which they are placed” (Green et al 15). Published in 1969, this text highlights problems that still plague modern public schools in America. Throughout this section of this essay, both the problems with representation and educational methods of rectification are examined thoroughly in the hopes that progress will be made in the inclusion and representation of minority students.

Perceptions of race and relations between races are confusing for students. The text *Equity in Schools and Society*, edited by Judy M. Isek-Barnes and Njoki Nathani Wane, includes discussion surrounding the taboo nature of race-centered discussions. They write that “When asked to reflect on their earliest race-related memories and the feelings associated with them, both White students and students of color often report feelings of confusion, anxiety, and/or fear” (Isek-Barnes and Wane 117). While students of color often relay instances of name calling or social ostracization, white students too felt uncomfortable with discussions of race, as from a young age they were discouraged from asking questions surrounding racial disparities (117). Adults are oftentimes uncomfortable receiving and answering racially-charged questions, even when they come from a curious child, not a knowledgeable or vicious source. Adult discomfort

with the topic of race stems from two sources: their own lack of knowledge on the subject and the societal idea that race is a taboo topic and therefore to be avoided with children. This apparent discomfort reinforces the idea in children that race is a taboo topic. The text *Racial Crisis in American Education* edited by Robert L. Green claims that adults in education can make a difference in these attitudes, as the introduction to the text emphasizes:

It is stated that we must search for ways to reform the present education system as well as focus on pupil behavioral change. Much of the dysfunctional educational behavior that we observe within minority school populations is related to the educational environment in which they are placed. (Green 15)

Through educational reform, Green believes that the uneasiness that coincides with racially-based educational conflict and disparity can be reduced, if not eliminated. Green's text emphasizes that, while educators easily slip the blame for lapses in behavior or a lack of academic excellence onto the students, it is the curriculum and behaviors of educators themselves that inhibit student growth. When students are placed in an environment that is not designed to care for them or help them to succeed, educators are asking students to swim upstream in order to meet the threshold set for academic achievement, a threshold that is more easily met for white students in the majority population, for whom the system was designed. It must be on those in positions of power within the academic world to make the changes necessary for the growth and development of minority students.

In conjunction with the evidence of Green's text, Christopher Knaus' "Race, Racism, and Multiraciality in American Education" centers on interviews with various secondary students and their teachers on their perceptions of race, and specifically how they define race and how it plays

a part in their classroom. With a variety of perspectives, from those that see the usage of race as inherently racist and question whether race could, instead, be used as an identity-affirming measure, to those who think that perceiving race entirely is outdated, and that there are just different ethnicities, Knaus' text shows little hard and fast evidence about universal perceptions of race. However, the overarching theme in each response was the belief that race is used in society at large, and in the classroom specifically, is "used to classify people based on monoracial stereotypes" (Knaus 424). The text elaborates that racial identity within the classroom has less to do with a person's cultural background or heritage, and more with the class' perceptions and pre-existing stereotypes surrounding the race that an individual presents. Student identities were shaped not just by their own ideas about racial identity, but by those of their peers as well (425). Students see racial division in the world around them, and it invariably creeps into their classroom cultures.

Much research exists on how to ease racial tensions in education. Educational programs implemented and described in *Racial Crisis in American Education* edited by Robert L. Green, from the 1960's, when desegregated education was in its infancy, are described in this text as integral to the education of minority students, especially those in urban areas. The expansion of education and support for students of color, and conversations surrounding their inclusion, strengthen an educator's ability to teach students of diverse backgrounds. However, cultural and societal beliefs hold educators back from fully implementing equity within their classrooms and in the lives of their students.

A contributing factor to this attitude of discomfort is what contributing author in *Equity in Schools and Society* Beverly Daniel Tatum describes as the "myth of

meritocracy”(Isek-Barnes and Wane 118). Tatum introduces this concept as she claims that student resistance is also “rooted in students’ belief that the United States is just a society, a meritocracy where individual efforts are fairly rewarded” (118). Tatum’s students are in post-secondary education, a collegiate course centering around race relations, and yet they have little understanding or exposure to systemic racism within the United States. The belief that “all men are created equal” and the reality that not all men are treated as such soils students’ perceptions of the country they live in, and the conflicting ideas create inner turmoil. The compounding detriment of both the universal ambivalence to racial disparity and the discouragement of communication surrounding it lead students to grow cemented in their beliefs that race is not a contributing factor to the quality of one's education or relationship with school at large, though in Tatum’s analysis, there is a universal assumption that “the context of U.S. society, the system of advantage clearly operates to benefit Whites as a group” (114). This overt privilege denies the perception that equity already exists in schools and calls for radical change to ensure that equity be found within education.

The first step in ensuring equity for students is internal. Green writes in *Racial Crisis in America* of the importance for educators to acknowledge that comprehensive description of students of color, specifically Black students, within the texts presented in a classroom is necessary, and lists healthy racial attitudes, school responsibility for developing such attitudes and “positive intergroup relations” (Green 169). The influence of textbooks on racial attitudes, and the importance of student exposure to racial tensions as the reasons for such beliefs. The text describes how educators more often than not pull teaching materials from textbooks or anthologies. A 1967 study referenced by Green claims that a child will “either commit to

memory or attempt to absorb at least 32,000 textbook pages during his elementary and high school years” (173). This claim, in correlation with Applebee’s study on the author types and traits of texts most commonly taught in secondary schools (Appendix 1 and 2), points to overwhelmingly White exposure. In requiring students to absorb tens of thousands of pages of white authorship and stories, educators and curriculum perpetuate unhealthy ideas surrounding racial identity and perception.

A 1949 study, “Intergroup Relations in Teaching Materials,” discussed within the text *Racial Crisis in America*, delves into the mistreatment of Black characters in the literature taught in the classroom. It has been found that there is an “obvious lack of any serious discussion of the Negro’s current struggles and changing status” (Green 174). Written just over a decade after the seminal *Brown V. Board of Education* Supreme court decision that began the desegregation of American schools, the text cites a need for change in the presentation of Black characters, going on to describe how most minority characters in textbooks have low-paying jobs and occupy low socio-economic statuses in comparison to their white counterparts. This divide in literature impacts students’ perceptions of themselves and their place in society outside of school. Though educators can attempt to be fair or unbiased, the literature that they choose to include in their curriculum still speaks a biased message. There is research that suggests that the literature taught through textbooks does in fact impact a student’s self image. Another study explored in *Racial Crisis in American Education*, performed in 1952 by Trager and Yarrow, “indicates that curriculum experiences influence the racial attitudes of students” (173). However, these influences work on both sides of the issue: students exposed to culturally diverse and inclusive literature were shown to gain positive racial attitudes through their experiences with the

curriculum. Conversely, Trager and Yarrow found that students exposed to literature with strong themes of ethnocentrism expressed decreased positive racial attitudes (173). The literature students are exposed to plays a key role in forming their perceptions.

V. Solutions to Racial Inequity in the Classroom

Racial inequity and misrepresentation in the classroom does not have to be the permanent state of education. In the texts utilized above that describe the problem, authors, editors, and researchers offer broad prescribed solutions for implementation in districts as a whole and specific, classroom-centered methods for teachers to utilize. Healing the system that disenfranchises racial minority students, specifically through the literature taught in the classroom, is a task that cannot be put on teachers alone. Communities must demand change in curriculum to best serve their students, administrators must understand the need for radical change in curriculum, and teachers must be willing to grow past the racial prejudices upheld in the literature taught within the classroom.

Non-literary solutions offered in Isek-Barnes and Wane's text "Equity in Schools and Society" emphasize how creating a safe classroom climate centers on establishing ground rules centered on mutual respect and teacher-student confidentiality when appropriate. Anxiety, especially surrounding racial inequity, will still exist in a classroom, but their studies showed that students were overall more comfortable and willing to share and that students began using nonracial identifiers and building personal relationships with one another through their classwork (Isek-Barnes and Wane 137). Individually, teachers can make a difference in the mentalities of their students and the racial attitudes practiced within their classrooms by modelling respect and expecting the same of their students. Classroom activities that focus on self-generated knowledge

can also mold student perceptions of race. In asking students to read texts that challenge their points of view, students will have the chance to change their preconceived notions on their own, without being explicitly told to do so. Giving students non academic opportunities to broaden their horizons and experience a variety of cultures provides the same chance for a mental workout. Furthermore, students need to be empowered to name the problems that they see. Free writing time, writing prompts that can be confidential, and giving students space to process challenging material can help them to grow as they face internal struggles (138). Especially in older students, challenging ideas that they hold true can create undue tension in the classroom; these more covert methods allow educators to push students to introspection without making it a course requirement. From open-ended journal assignments utilized as bell-ringers to reflective writing at home, giving students the opportunity to air their thoughts pushes them to think critically about their own beliefs.

There are, however, practical steps for creating texts with robust racial representation, as Green, in the text “Racial Crisis in American Education,” writes that commissioning educators to write textbooks and offers them a chance to create positive racial attitudes. This solution allows the whole district to become involved in promoting anti-racist practices. Giving each school, department, or classroom a chance to voice the needs of their students allows schools to create texts that benefit and grow their communities. Green also cites the inherent advantage of the publishers, as they would be assured that their texts would be purchased (Green 179). Furthermore, this project incorporates a myriad of individuals, from writers and illustrators to content experts, in order to build community within the school. Green writes of less peaceful means for change as well, citing the use of boycotts to “demand accurate, quality text materials”

(180). Teachers that demand change in a public way welcome the opportunity to get the community on their side and force a change. While this is not the first, most ideal solution proposed, Green emphasizes in the text how necessary change is; educators must advocate for their students of color, and to do so publicly brings the issue to the community at large, not just within the walls of a school.

Green challenges educators to not seek out a scapegoat to the “immense challenge” (182) of eradicating racism in the textbooks taught within the classroom. Green writes that “they [educators] must confront the fact that the image of blacks in textbooks accurately reflects the educators’ perceptions and attitudes towards blacks” (182). Green also highlights the opportunity allotted to educators to prove their leadership prowess, as handling an often silenced topic such as depictions of race within the classroom with tact is fraught with chances for error. This does not negate the importance of and great need for change. It is imperative that educators face the dilemma in front of them, first fighting their own racial biases and then tackling the mountain of racist literature in the classroom in order to paint a more truthful, more equitable image of people of color within the literature classroom, and within education as a whole.

VI. Conclusion

The detriment to education caused by the whitewashing of literature within the classroom is evidenced through the extensive research dating back to the mid-twentieth century. At the dawn of desegregation of American schools, scholars and educators commented on the need to paint a holistic picture of people of color within the anthologies utilized in the classroom (Green 169). The research performed by Applebee in each of his studies, performed in the mid-1960’s and again in the late 1980’s, presents complete ideas on the types of texts utilized within

classrooms and their near-complete white, male, Anglosaxon authorship; the evidence presented argues the need for a universal overhaul in the literary curriculum of American secondary schools (Table 5.3 Appendix 2). Applebee further emphasized the universality of many of the texts taught, painting literary education as devoid of specialization (Applebee 72). This lack of diversity does students no favors, and in fact hinders their ability to discuss racial issues. As students watch the adults in their lives shy away from the complex and oftentimes controversial topic of race, they themselves become uncomfortable with the topic (Isek-Barnes and Wane 117). American educators must break from the mold of their preconceived ideas about the superiority of white literary classics and instead embrace literature that is accessible and meaningful for all of the students within a classroom.

As presented in studies both in rural and urban settings, racial tensions within secondary schools are not a thing of the past; they plague education today (Hardie and Tyson, Rozansky-Lloyd). In order to solve the problems within schools, they must first be acknowledged. There is healing available to schools, administrators, and educators who are willing to subvert tradition in favor of seemingly radical ideas— introducing new literature into classrooms, addressing racial inequity within schools and society at large, and not shying away from tough conversations. Educating students using diverse texts that express a range of different experiences, through gender, race, religion, or any other cultural differentiator, can help to alleviate the ignored tensions formed within secondary schools. As students grow to understand that perspectives exist outside of their own experiences, there is an opportunity for students to grow in their empathy for one another. Conversations about race remove the stigma that race is a bad word, or an antiquated concept, since, in reality, our students will encounter topics of race

every day. Texts written by minority authors will help students who feel disconnected with the education system as a whole to latch onto larger concepts or learning previously only available to their white peers. Making the changes in curriculum and methodology described throughout this work creates not only a better education for students of color but will universally improve the quality of education.

Changing the curriculum is just one of the steps that educators can take in order to ease the racial divide in academic achievement. Though texts utilized in the classroom is the center of this paper, educator attitudes towards literature are equally important. Diverse literature can be taught in a classroom, but without the effort from educators to value literature of non-white, non-male authors, students will not find value in those texts either. Applebee theorizes that teachers' hesitation to expand from traditional texts stems from an innate discomfort with the unknown (Applebee 75). However, educators must hold themselves accountable to branching out from the status quo in literary education in order to best reach all of their students. Openness to expanding academic curriculum, and the willingness to advocate for change within education are the foundational steps towards more inclusive and universally beneficial education.

Advocating for change in order to benefit student learning may feel like climbing uphill. Against all odds, educators in power must believe in an educational system that universally benefits students, though it breaks traditional tropes in literary education. Research and concise plans that keep educational rigor at the forefront of the curriculum boost the logical and ethical appeals of embracing change. When educators work to circumvent the generations of harm done by the whitewashing of American literature in secondary schools, there is hope for a more equitable future for education.

Appendix 1

Table 5.1

Characteristics of Authors and Selections, Required Book-Length Works

	Grades 9-12		
	Public Schools	Catholic Schools	Independent Schools
Author			
Male	85.9	84.3	87.8
White	98.7	97.6	97.5
National Tradition			
North America	58.3	50.9	49.2
United Kingdom	33.0	35.9	36.5
Europe	7.6	10.8	12.0
Other	1.1	2.4	2.3
Type			
Novels	64.7	65.8	58.1
Plays	25.5	24.5	27.9
Nonfiction	7.0	5.7	6.8
Other	2.8	4.0	7.2

Appendix 2

Table 5.3

Changes Since 1963 in Characteristics of Required Book-Length Works^a

	Public (7-12)		Catholic (9-12)		Independent (9-12)	
	1963	1988	1963	1988	1963	1988
Author						
Male	84.6	82.8	85.5	85.3	90.4	89.5
White	100.0	98.1	99.6	98.0	100.0	97.5
National Tradition						
North America	40.3	61.9	38.2	49.0	35.3	46.7
United Kingdom	55.0	29.2	54.7	37.5	52.3	39.3
Europe	4.7	8.0	6.4	11.4	11.2	12.3
Other	.0	.9	.7	2.1	1.2	1.7
Type						
Novel	54.8	68.5	55.7	66.0	50.8	56.9
Plays	26.2	22.0	27.6	25.2	33.8	29.9
Nonfiction	15.7	7.0	10.5	5.4	7.4	6.3
Other	3.3	2.5	6.2	3.4	8.0	6.9

^a Based on titles required in 5% or more of schools.

Table 5.4

Most Popular Titles of Book-Length Works, Grades 9–12

	Public Schools (<i>n</i> =322)	Catholic Schools (<i>n</i> =80)	Independent Schools (<i>n</i> =86)
Romeo and Juliet	84%	Huckleberry Finn	
Macbeth	81	Scarlet Letter	74% *
Huckleberry Finn	70	Macbeth	66
Julius Caesar	70	To Kill a Mockingbird	56
To Kill a Mockingbird	69	Great Gatsby	52
Scarlet Letter	62	Romeo and Juliet	51
Of Mice and Men	56	Hamlet	49
Hamlet	55	Of Mice and Men	47
Great Gatsby	54	Julius Caesar	42 *
Lord of the Flies	54	Lord of the Flies	39
			34

* Percentage significantly different from public school sample, *p* < .05.

Table 5.7
Most Popular Titles of Book-Length Works, Grades 9-12 by Track

		Title and Percent of Schools		
		Public Schools	Catholic Schools	Independent Schools
Upper track				
<i>(n=229)</i>				
Romeo and Juliet	44%	<i>(n=76)</i> Macbeth	53%	<i>(n=37)</i> Hamlet
Macbeth	44	Scarlet Letter	51	Odyssey
Huckleberry Finn	38	Huckleberry Finn	49	Macbeth
To Kill a Mockingbird	35	Hamlet	49	Huckleberry Finn
Julius Caesar	34	Great Gatsby	47	Scarlet Letter
Hamlet	34	To Kill a Mockingbird	47	Great Gatsby
Scarlet Letter	34	Romeo and Juliet	38	To Kill a Mockingbird
Great Gatsby	31	The Crucible	38	Tale of Two Cities
Lord of the Flies	31	Oedipus Rex	37	Romeo and Juliet
The Crucible	28	Of Mice and Men	32	Grapes of Wrath
		Julius Caesar	32	Heart of Darkness
		Grapes of Wrath	32	
Lower track				
<i>(n=173)</i>				
Of Mice and Men	25%	<i>(n=43)</i> Of Mice and Men	33%	<i>(n=14)</i> The Pearl
The Outsiders	23	Julius Caesar	28	Of Mice and Men
The Pearl	21	The Pearl	26	Romeo and Juliet
Romeo and Juliet	17	Macbeth	23	Huckleberry Finn
Macbeth	17	Romeo and Juliet	23	Lord of the Flies
The Pigman	14	Animal Farm	23	Catcher in the Rye
To Kill a Mockingbird	13	Huckleberry Finn	21	
Julius Caesar	13	Old Man and the Sea	19	
Call of the Wild	13	To Kill a Mockingbird	19	
Diary of a Young Girl	12	Catcher in the Rye	14	
		The Outsiders	14	

* Percentage significantly different from public school sample, $p < .05$.

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