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Living Proof: Transnational Black Youth Theorizing Racism, Justice, and Education

Abstract

Based on eighteen months of ethnographic research in a high school E.L.L. classroom, this study contributes to the fields of new literacies studies and critical pedagogy by showing how transnational Black youth theorize and negotiate intersections of racism, justice, and education. Drawing on a multidimensional approach for understanding how racism is reproduced and resisted across various domains of power (Collins, 2009), I show on how two young men from Haiti theorize the U.N. and INGO occupation of post-earthquake Haiti; a disjuncture between how Africa and Haiti are (mis)known in the U.S. and students' lived realities in their respective countries of origin; and finally, students' analysis of structural racism in the U.S. through a Justice for Trayvon unit I co-taught from March-May 2012, when Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, and Stand Your Ground became household names. I conclude by suggesting that we move toward a global l.a.w.s. (lessons against white supremacies) framework for critical pedagogy. Such an approach draws on centering counter-narratives and thinking through the notion of de-colonial love to reframe everyday classroom praxis. Throughout this dissertation I argue that culturally informed, antiracist pedagogies must begin with students' theoretical work and experiential knowledge. Such an approach transforms classrooms into spaces for students to not only interrogate racism but also create (counter)texts that represent their subjectivities as young Black people in the 21st century.

Degree Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group

Education

First Advisor

Shaun Harper

Keywords

Critical Literacy, Critical Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, Multimodal Pedagogy, Transnational Studies, Trayvon Martin

Subject Categories

African American Studies | Education | Teacher Education and Professional Development

**LIVING PROOF: TRANSNATIONAL BLACK YOUTH THEORIZING RACISM,
JUSTICE, AND EDUCATION**

Chike Jamal Brett McLoyd

A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2014

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Garlen Capita and Chenzira Capita McLoyd, my loving wife and son who have stood (and crawled!) by me with patience throughout this dissertation process and beyond. You two are truly the loves of my life and seeing you both at the beginning and end of every day means my life is book-ended with love. I am truly blessed.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the McLoyds, Joneses, Capitas, and Courvoisiers who call me kin. The roots and routes of our family take us from Africa to Haiti, to the United States and back to Africa. I am blessed to part of this incredible cycle of family. To Caulbert and Martha Brett Jones, and Ben and Ruth Brett Quarles- I am the Third Generation. To Sylvia, Lander, Sheila, Tiga, Tomo, Shani, Keli, Will, Willie, Marie Denise, Wilna, T.J. and Taka- I love you all.

Finally, to Trayvon Martin, his family, the supporters of the Justice for Trayvon movement, and all who continue to fight for global human rights- your work inspires me. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my pleasure to acknowledge my dissertation committee, Drs. Harper, Hall, and Hill for the support and feedback over the years. Kathy you believed in me from Day One, thank you! Shaun I am grateful for the time and energy you put into seeing me through this process and for introducing me to an in-depth appreciation of Critical Race Theory in education. Marc, I can't thank you enough for your insightful feedback and stepping in during a time of need.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Betsy Rymes and the entire research team. Without your support this project would not have been possible. I especially want to thank Krystal Smalls, Catrice Barrett, and Sofia Chaparro. Krystal and Catrice, I have leaned on your brilliance throughout this project. Sofia, I am eternally grateful for the Trayvon Martin video. It is one of my proudest moments as a teacher and to have it on film means the world to me.

To Mr. D and all the students I had the pleasure of knowing throughout this research process, I cannot thank you enough. You granted me access to your worlds and for this generosity I am so grateful.

To the entire Africana Studies family, thank you for the collegial support and good times over the last few years. Dr. Camille Charles, thank you for believing in me as a teacher and a scholar. And I am especially grateful to have been part of Drs. Deb Thomas, John Jackson, Herman Beavers, and Camille Charles' Africana Seminar, 2008-2009. To the whole class- It was stone grove. (Yeah!)

ABSTRACT

LIVING PROOF: TRANSNATIONAL BLACK YOUTH THEORIZING RACISM, JUSTICE, AND EDUCATION

Chike Jamal Brett McLoyd

Shaun R. Harper

Based on eighteen months of ethnographic research in a high school E.L.L. classroom, this study contributes to the fields of new literacies studies and critical pedagogy by showing how transnational Black youth theorize and negotiate intersections of racism, justice, and education. Drawing on a multidimensional approach for understanding how racism is reproduced and resisted across various domains of power (Collins, 2009), I show on how two young men from Haiti theorize the U.N. and INGO occupation of post-earthquake Haiti; a disjuncture between how Africa and Haiti are (mis)known in the U.S. and students' lived realities in their respective countries of origin; and finally, students' analysis of structural racism in the U.S. through a Justice for Trayvon unit I co-taught from March-May 2012, when Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, and Stand Your Ground became household names. I conclude by suggesting that we move toward a global l.a.w.s. (lessons against white supremacies) framework for critical pedagogy. Such an approach draws on centering counter-narratives and thinking through the notion of de-colonial love to reframe everyday classroom praxis. Throughout this dissertation I argue that culturally informed, antiracist pedagogies must begin with students' theoretical work and experiential knowledge. Such an approach transforms classrooms into spaces for students to not only interrogate racism but also create (counter)texts that represent

their subjectivities as young Black people in the 21st century.

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Chapter One

Introduction

To address an under-researched aspect of the Black educational experience in the United States, this dissertation examines how a cohort of young people from Haiti and various countries in sub-Saharan Africa, recently arrived to the U.S., theorize and negotiate intersections of racism, justice and education. Throughout this study I focus on their critical literacy practices (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and critical textual production (Morrell, 2008), which I define as their collective abilities to theorize and name the various forms of racism that affect how they read the world and are (mis)read in the world, as well as the counter-texts they produce and circulate that demand new readings of global Black personhood.

Believing in youth as social theorists in their own right, I focus my analysis on the explanatory power students give to racism on both macro- and micro-scales, and the strategies they employ to resist it. By social theorists in their own right, I do not mean that young peoples' theorizing is disconnected from what they are taught and learn from parents, schools, researchers, media outlets, and each other. Rather, I work from the position that their discourses, sense-making strategies, and textual production evidence critical social theory as much as the discourses, sense-making strategies, and textual production of any other person who we might find in the theoretical framework of a dissertation in education. Thus, while I put their theorizing in conversation with a host of critical theorists, including Patricia Hill Collins, Edward Said, V.Y. Mudimbe, Chela Sandoval, Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, I do not imagine a hierarchal relationship in which the theory work of established scholars should "drive the

bus”, with young people along for the ride as co-signing or dissenting voices. In their stories, we hear post-development theorists who recall Escobar’s (1995) critique of the international development enterprise; postcolonial theorists who point out the distortions of Africa and Haiti embedded in mass media and school-level discourses; and critical race theorists who insist that racism is the global problem of the 21st century. As will become clear, the life stories and theoretical work of the young people in this study also demand that we rethink these various theoretical stances. Reading their stories as theoretical work, I argue, bridges these parallel theoretical stances that are rarely put into conversation and offers educators a chance to explore and develop pedagogies that work through a politically informed articulation of love (Freire, 2007; Sandoval, 2000) to rethink antiracist pedagogy for a global age.

I argue this belief in youth as both theory and knowledge producers is especially important to consider in the era of Web 2.0 technology, in which young people no longer need academic interlocutors to circulate their voices to broader audiences. By creating and distributing audio-visual discourses on their own terms, many young people are doing the type of work that academic researchers once imagined as their own domain. In this sense, we are living in an era that ethnographer John Jackson described as Fear of an Ethnographic Planet¹: As populations across the globe gain access to technologies that allow them to circulate and control their respective messages and representations, the

¹ Dr. Jackson used the term “Fear of an Ethnographic planet” during a plenary session at the 33rd annual Ethnography Forum at the University of Pennsylvania in February 2012. I believe my interpretation of the term is semi-faithful to his meaning!

“expert” can no longer control the message or the discourse as securely as she once could.

In terms of what this means for transnational Black youth, we need to look no further than the recent *Kony2012* moment to evidence this new reality. The now infamous short film *Kony2012*, produced by Invisible Children, Inc., went thoroughly viral in March of 2012 and drew the world’s attention to the brutal activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army in central Africa. Spurred on by celebrities including Oprah Winfrey and Justin Bieber, *Kony2012* garnered about 80 million YouTube views in less than two months, prompting responses from the White House and other international power brokers. In the midst of this hysteria, Sanyu, a Ugandan American young woman, posted a rejoinder in which she declared, “Basically, *Kony2012* is a bunch on bullshit”². After informing her audience about her life experiences in Uganda and the U.S., which offered a far different portrait of life in Uganda, she asked us to turn our collective attention and action to Syria, a prescient comment given the events that have taken place in that country since her post. Whenever one searches for *Kony2012* on YouTube or Vimeo, her critique is easily accessible. Indeed, her critique’s nearly 5 million YouTube views at the time of this writing demonstrate how counter-narratives such as hers hardly require academic champions to reach global audiences. I suggest one role of an afrodiasporic educational researcher is to archive and analyze such counter-discourses for the purpose of informing a broader educational community about the pedagogical potential of these relatively new global voices.

² Her critique is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D073Ese25Y>

Statement of the Problem

Conversations and practices around race, education, and national belonging are embedded in the fabric of American society. As Kelley argues, some of the earliest critiques of American democracy centered on intersections of race and education. Unlike the so-called “Fathers of American Democracy”, the earliest Black architects of Black education, including, among others, Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois, viewed education for *all* Americans as a basic right, and in doing so “displayed a broader vision of democracy than the original framers of the Constitution” (Kelley, p. xii; in Watkins, 2001). In this sense, “the Negro question is at the very heart of American history and American educational history” (Watkins, 2001, p. 6).

Yet, to what extent do contemporary studies in the field of education focusing on Black youth assume an African American identity of the young people whose lives are in focus, omitting explorations of how educational spaces are key sites for Black migrant youth negotiating race and racism in America? As Pabst (2006) points out, Blackness, unqualified, is often coded as American, and perhaps “the US monopoly on both blackness and racism is itself a racist plot” (Trouillot, 1995; quoted in Pabst, p. 115), since nation-centric conversations problematize racism as a national phenomenon rather than a global(izing) force. While many black people living in the U.S. are thoroughly invested in transnational activities (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001), the dominance of the African American sign has led U.S.-based educational researchers down the well-established path that does not necessarily reflect the lived experiences or theorizing of transnational Black youth.

Since the 1990s, coinciding with the rise of critical race analyses in education (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995) the most recent iterations of Black migrations to the U.S. have destabilized the meanings of Blackness in America, while reaffirming the psychological and material costs of racism (Hintzen & Rahier, 2003). Yet, it appears that what Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) describe as a “methodological nationalism” is at work in how critical race theorists (and researchers employing other theories) have conceptualized and researched the lived worlds of Black students. By this I mean many Black students currently schooled in the United States have lived experiences with race and racism that remain under-studied because researchers, while recognizing the heterogeneity of America’s Black population in other ways, have generally conflated “Black” with an African American or Black American identity. In this way, we might view “Black” as working as a masking category, obscuring the epistemologies of young people from Africa and the Caribbean who are present in American classrooms. I argue that focusing on their lived experiences negotiating particular forms of anti-Black racism transforms “Black” into an illuminating category that can be used to highlight the global machinations of white supremacies in the early 21st century.

The demographics of American schools and America’s Black population call for new approaches to studying the fact of Blackness in school settings. Haskins and Tienda (2011) estimate that 23% of school-aged children in the U.S. are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Given that migration and racism are woven into the fabric of American society, the lives of this generation of immigrants are affected by racial hierarchies (Holdaway & Alba, 2009). However, what Carbado (2005) describes as compartmentalism, “the application of particular racial paradigms (such as immigration)

to understand the racial experiences of particular racial groups (such as Latinas/os)” (p. 653), seems to be well at work in much of the literature pertaining to the experiences of migrant youth, with few studies specifically focusing on Black youth from Africa and the Caribbean living in the United States.

The number of people from Africa and the Caribbean living in the United States has grown exponentially since 1980, bringing unprecedented ethnic and national diversity to America’s black population. In 1980 an estimated 816,000 black immigrants were residing in the U.S., representing just 1% of black people in America. The number increased by roughly 400% between 1980-2009, with an estimated 3.3 million now living in the U.S., representing approximately 9% of America’s total black population (Thomas, 2012). In addition, approximately 813,000 black children born in the U.S. have at least one foreign-born parent (Hernandez, 2012). This growing presence has unsettled and destabilized meanings of blackness in the United States while reaffirming the psychological and material costs of racism (Hintzen & Rahier, 2003). Perhaps more than ever before, the master status of race masks a host of cultural, (trans)national, (co)ethnic, and gendered experiences that inform black subjectivities in 21st century America.

As a primary port of entry, American schools are sites where migrant students learn standard academic material along with the ideological and sociocultural landscapes of the American communities in which they reside (Forman, 2004; Abu El-Haj, 2007, 2010). Although approximately 2.5 million black people from Africa and the Caribbean have legally migrated to the United States since the mid-1980s, the experiences of these students in U.S. schools remains under-researched. For example, few qualitative studies explore the specific strategies that youth of the “New African Diaspora” employ to make

sense of the dominant American ideologies and (mis)conceptions of Africa that frame their transition into American schools (notable exceptions for secondary education include Forman, 2004; Traore, 2004, 2006; Clark, 2009; Ray & Roxas, 2011; and Smalls, 2011. For higher education, see Bryce-LaPorte, 1972; Jackson & Cochran, 2003; Torres, 2009; and Awokoya, 2012). While a number of studies (most notably Portes & Zhou, 1993; and Waters, 1994, 1999) focus on youth from the Caribbean (Jamaica and Haiti in particular), these studies have been criticized for failing to adequately address the complexity of racism in the U.S. (Pierre, 2004).

These migrations are occurring as media learning takes on increased relevance in the lives of young people (Hill & Vasudevan, 2008). A growing body of research documents the increasing centrality of new media technology in the lives of youth, asking how forms of literacy that emerge from media engagement can inform schooling practices by integrating out-of-school literacies into school settings (Hull & Schultz 2002; Hull, 2003; Mahiri, 2011). This reality has led to a digital turn in literacy research and while this line of inquiry has certainly led to new conceptualizations of literacy, in-depth analyses of race and racism has until recently remained largely absent from this literature. For example, Hull's (2003) influential piece on youth culture and digital media does not mention racism (see also Hell & Nelson, 2005), while other influential pieces only make passing reference to racism as a factor in the life of its main informant (Hull & Katz, 2006). Further, substantial reviews of the literature in this field by Sefton-Green (2006) and Mills (2010) do not mention race or racism at all. While this absence of analyses of the structural and interpersonal machinations of race and racism has been addressed (see Morrell, 2008; Mahiri, 2011), this work still focuses on racism as

exclusively an American problematic in the lives of the young people who are the focus of these studies (for an exception see Morrell, et. al., 2013). I believe my focus on transnational Black youth offers a necessary addition to this literature.

I believe my focus on the explanatory power students give to race and racism as they negotiate their social worlds “back home” (i.e., Haiti and various African countries) and in the United States addresses these gaps and shortcomings in the research. A second contribution is my focus on digital cultural production as a means to challenge (mis)representations of Africa and Haiti that dominate mainstream “mass media” (see Keim, 2009 for Africa; Potter, 2009; and Farmer, 1994 for Haiti). New media technologies offer a space for black immigrants in the U.S. to challenge these dominant narratives, (mis)conceptions, and structures of knowledge production about Africa and Afro-diasporic people (Nzwegu, 2009). As Patricia Hill Collins argues, “Media learning is a space beyond school-based learning. New technologies are the currency of youth, and a critical education requires media literacy that prepares youth to be critical consumers of media as well as cultural creators” (2009, p. x). My study contributes to this emerging body of literature by focusing on how transnational black youth use digital technologies to produce and circulate “multimodal counternarratives” (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010) about African and Haitian personhood that challenge “commonsense” knowledge about Africa and Haiti.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to document, describe, and analyze the critical literacy practices of a particular cohort of transnational Black youth. Throughout I focus on the explanatory power given to race and racism by the students in this study. I

show how focusing on their critical readings of the world along with the digital cultural production of this cohort can inform critical pedagogies. Building on the work of Freire and Macedo (1987), throughout this study I use the term critical literacy to refer to social practices hinging on the ability to appropriate, critique, disrupt, and reframe a particular set of dominant ideologies, practices, and media images that frame the relationships between Africa, the Caribbean, the United States. Importantly, critical literacy begins from students' worldviews and includes "the use of the technologies of print and other media communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). Throughout I demonstrate how the young people in this study engage in this type of critical work. I believe my specific contribution to critical literacy research is my focus on how transnational subjectivities can inform how Black migrant youth theorize racism from perspectives that demand a research stance that transcends national boundaries. At the same time, my focus on cultural production demonstrates how the young people in this study produce and circulate counter-texts across multiple domains.

My focus on cultural production shows how transnational Black youth in this study are reworking and co-creating the global archive of Black subjectivities in the early 21st century. I do this by situating students' in school and out-of-school storytelling work within what Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (2010) describe as "a corpus of intellectual thinking that exposes and presents counter-narratives to the popular discourse on contemporary Africa" (2010, p. 20) as well as Haiti. These discursive practices (including conversations, diatribes, autobiographical narratives, journal entries, rap lyrics, iMovie projects, and a blog site) often work as counter-narratives that challenge

American (mis)conceptions informed by popular discourse.

This research seeks to address an important moment in American history. Arguably, at no time in American history has its black population been more nationally, ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse. This diversity comes from the migration of close to 3 million Black people from Africa, the Caribbean, and South America to the United States since the mid-1980s (Hintzen & Rahier, 2003). These changing demographics coupled with pedagogies that center digital technologies open new possibilities for teaching and learning *coeval Africa*³, as well as a better understanding of how the stalled reconstruction of post-earthquake Haiti, for example, affect students' sense of global (racial) justice. By proposing students and teachers can in dialogic fashion articulate such issues in ways that challenge dominant and deficit discourses and produce far more humanizing texts than corporate media and standardized curricula could ever offer, I hope this research can be used by students and teachers for the co-construction of pedagogies that address the new dynamics of black subjectivities in 21st century America.

Most importantly, the murder of Trayvon Benjamin Martin in February 2012 and George Zimmerman's acquittal in July 2013 remind us that, as De La Soul said in 1996, *The Stakes is High*. Questions about racial representation, racism, and how we are collectively trained to read and write criminality onto the Black body aren't mere

³ Coeval Africa refers to the age-old perception of Africa as always already behind the West. The refusal to view Africa on coeval terms leads to the perpetuation of savage Africa, violent Africa, undeveloped Africa, etc. Fabian's *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object (2002)* details the specific ways in which anthropological depictions of Africa deny the possibility of coevalness. I use the term here to refer to how teachers might be able to teach and learn contemporary Africa, rather than the stock images of Africa frozen in time, which I will explain in the chapters that follow.

academic musings. Educational research must address the lived experiences of Black youth and seriously consider “teachable moments” such as the Justice for Trayvon movement and how classrooms might be reworked as spaces to retrain our visions of Blackness through curricularizing such international movements for racial justice.

In many ways, the students in my study represent new articulations of Black personhood. Their lives offer insights into how race and racism continue to frame notions of American justice as it’s commonly imagined within and outside classroom spaces, while their social position as “newly minted Blacks” (Taiwo, 2003) offers a unique view of contemporary processes of racialization in the United States and abroad. Their critiques of dominant media discourses on Africa and Haiti, in the form of rich, complex counter-narratives of Africa and African personhood, add to what is now recognized as the popular media’s role in demonizing blackness.

Research Questions

To address an under-researched area in our collective knowledge about the black experience in the United States, my study poses the following research questions:

- How can the explanatory power transnational Black youth give to racism inform educational theory and practice?
- How can teachers effectively integrate out-of-school literacy practices into everyday antiracist and culturally responsive classroom practice?
- How can educators make use of digital technologies to better understand the social worlds and lived experiences of transnational youth?
- What are the pedagogical affordances of curricularizing “teachable moments” such as the murder of Trayvon Martin?

Significance of the Study

In 2013 it is commonplace for social scientists to recognize race as a social construction, and many studies in education acknowledge schools as crucial sites for “race-making” (Lewis, 2003), or the multiple ways in which racial identifications are inscribed, contested, and subverted in school settings (Pollock, 2004; Olsen, 1997; Lee, 2005). Yet, as Knowles (2010) argues, the turn to studies of race and processes of identification rather than racism as a theoretical and material reality has led to an overproduction of scholarship of race and identity at the expense of grounded empirical studies of racism and antiracist practices. In a similar vein Harper’s (2012) meta-analysis of research journals demonstrates how this move toward “race without racism” currently dominates educational research, including scholars who draw on Critical Race Theory! While the content of this study certainly touches on identity, my main focus is unapologetically racism. As I hope to make clear, a study on racism as opposed to race or racialization is important for new ways of thinking through antiracist curricula that interrogate racism on global scales and as an intersectional reality that operates across multiple domains of power (Collins, 2009).

According to Gardner (2004), today’s global landscape has transformed the skills that constitute definitions of an educated person in the 21st century. Our lives continue to be linked to social processes (such as migration), and a changing media and technological landscape, calling for skills that outstrip what most educational institutions currently provide. The challenge for education now involves developing "the cognitive skills, interpersonal sensibilities, and cultural sophistication of children and youth whose

lives will be both engaged in local contexts and responsive to larger transnational processes" (Suarez Orozco & Qin Hilliard, 2004, p. 3).

To be educated in the global era requires knowledge of other cultures and traditions, the fostering of tolerance and appreciation across racial, linguistic, national, and cultural boundaries "as a means to interacting civilly and productively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds- both within one's own society and across the planet" (Gardner, 2004, p. 77). It is in this context that Luke (2004; cited in Lam, 2006) has argued for a reconceptualization of agency and learning as the development of "intercultural capital": knowledge and skills that allow youth to negotiate understanding across multiple lines of difference that mark social life in the early 21st century. Intercultural capital involves "the capacity to engage in acts of knowledge, power and exchange across time/space divides and social geographies, across diverse communities, populations and epistemic stances" (Luke, 2004, p. 1429; quoted in Lam, 2006, p. 229). As Lam (2006) points out, "This formulation of capital or human capacity reorients our notion of power from particular stabilized cultural practices that confer distinction and status on individuals to an agentive form of power that enables one to mediate across cultural and societal differences in pursuit of equitable relations, common purposes, and mutual understanding" (p. 229).

Understanding the lives of transnational Black youth and the changing dynamics of black subjectivities can facilitate the intercultural capital necessary for global citizenship, as their experiences demonstrate how America's newest black inhabitants experience life in the United States. This offers a new perspective on concepts such as community funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992), community cultural wealth

(Yosso, 2005), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000), and teaching “everyday antiracism” (Pollack, 2008). This research shows that educators need to simultaneously look beyond national borders and into local communities in order to understand the pedagogical potential of Black subjectivities in 21st century America.

Personal Stakes: Africa, Haiti, Trayvon, and Me

Africa and America: What is one to the Other?

My name is Diaspora. Actually it’s Chike. My parents named me Chike, even though neither of them had set foot on the African continent nor can articulate anything beyond a rudimentary understanding of the Biafra independence movement that inspired them to name me. Yet, like many Black Americans born in the nexus of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, my “authentic” African name evidences the diasporic revolutionary consciousness that has since been a staple of Black identifications within and across national boundaries. Perhaps my parents knew that blessing and saddling me with an unfamiliar name in America would force me to explain to my peers a bit of the Igbo language (Chi, meaning one’s spirit; and Ke, meaning , strong or powerful) or spur in me a curiosity to later research Biafra as my initial foray into African studies. Perhaps they knew that they were nurturing a budding intellectual curiosity that would later lead me to teach in Africa and make several journeys to the continent thereafter. Yet, they couldn’t possibly predict the reiterations of transatlantic conversations, in form or content, that I found were taking place in the early 21st century. Take, for example, the lyrics of MC Stomy, a young man from Pita, Guinea:

They assassinated him on purpose,
Condemned him without judgment
But on judgment day, all will be clear

I still ask myself why they killed Amadou Diallo

He was a victim of his race, of his courage
He was a righteous man, but no.
His death was treason
The police who were supposed to protect him, killed him.

It isn't a surprise to see them arrest, imprison, deport,
Torture, kill real innocent black people.
Why kill the children of my country?
Appeasement is their favorite way to mask the truth.

They came here to ask for calm. They gave money, all to hide the truth
Everyone knows Amadou Diallo was murdered by the cowardly American police.
The prayers, the tears change nothing.
Amadou Diallo, rest in peace, Amen.

MC Stomy, Pita Guinea, 2004 (Translated from to Stomy to Karamuku to Chike; Chike to Karamuku to Stomy)

Ten years after I participated in the translation of Stomy's lyrics, I return to this text as the founding artifact of this project. We might read Stomy's lyrics as a 21st century response to Countee Cullen's well known query, "What is Africa to me?"⁴. Harlem Renaissance era social theorists such as Cullen used Africa as a site to reflect on the Black experience in America, yet if we rework Cullen's question and ask, What is America to Stomy?, we get a sense of the transatlantic understandings of American racial violence, or the violence of American racialization, that Black diasporic bodies encounter in the U.S. A brief textual analysis of Stomy's lyrics highlights the types of critical texts that I will analyze throughout this project. When Amadou Diallo was assassinated by the "cowardly American police" in 1999, the world took notice. Unarmed and shot 41 times by New York City police officers who were eventually acquitted of any wrongdoing,

⁴ This well-known line is from Cullen's poem "Heritage", available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/171329>

Diallo's murder sparked transatlantic outrage. The transatlantic outrage of the moment is evident in Stomy's text, particularly his articulation of the murderous function of the State. The police, allegedly protectors, emerge as murderers. In this sense, Stomy's thinking about the State might be compared to Foucault's, who famously argued that racism relies on state-sponsored anchorage points to function. In his words, "Racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the state functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the state" (Foucault, 2003, p. 234). Indeed, society's racial hierarchy must be defended. Yet for Stomy, society's defense also entails arresting, imprisoning, deporting and killing innocent Black bodies, a line of inquiry taken up and confirmed by Veney (2009) five years after Stomy informed me about the post-911 climate for Black immigrants in the United States. Thus, we might view Stomy as a critical social theorist, whose poignant critiques of American policing work as rejoinders to the all-too-common reformulations of "American Dream" narratives that undergird the dominant academic discourse on Black migration (Pierre, 2004).

My goal here in this project is to shift the ethnographic gaze to an under-theorized and under-researched cohort- transnational Black youth from Africa and Haiti, recently arrived to the U.S. to understand how their narratives, often similar in tone and substance to Stomy's, can be used as the backbone for critical pedagogical work.

Who is Travon Martin to me?

If the murder of Amadou Diallo is one imaginary bookend for my thinking through this project, the murder of Trayvon Benjamin Martin represents the other. Like millions of people across the globe, I was deeply disturbed by the murder of Trayvon

Martin and even more troubled and outraged by George Zimmerman's acquittal. Being old enough to remember Yusef Hawkins, Bernard Goetz, Lashida Hawkins, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, and more recently Oscar Grant, I am aware of how such moments of spectacular inter-racial violence can attract a national audience; yet, the structural conditions that produced the murder remain incredibly resilient. In other words, white supremacy rebalances itself. For personal reasons, using the classroom as a space to unpack and discuss the issues surrounding Trayvon's murder was important, but for pedagogical reasons, I believe it was crucial as well. I maintain a belief in the classroom as a site in which present and future power imbalances can be redressed on macro- and micro-scales. As those of us who attended or watched the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom can attest, Trayvon Martin has emerged as an international symbol for the persistence of structural racism, as well as a catalyst for political organization to dismantle it. As the students' incredible analysis of the murder presented in chapter five makes clear, it is difficult to underestimate what is at stake as we continue to grapple with Trayvon's murder, Zimmerman's acquittal, and what this continues to mean for American democracy.

Stand Up for Haiti

My wife is Haitian-born, Miami-raised, and many of her family members still reside in both locations. Hearing her stories of the discursive violence she and her siblings negotiated in school settings in Miami in the 1980s at the height of (mis)information regarding Haiti's connection to the emerging AIDS epidemic is shockingly similar to the misconceptions and ignorance that students from Haiti and sub-Saharan Africa are subjected to in 2014. Thus, in many ways this research is an attempt

to help educators break these cycles of discursive and physical violence. Spending time with her family also taught me what transnationalism was in practice before I heard the term in academic literature. Her parents came to the U.S. in the mid-1970s but never lost contact with Haiti or stopped participating in Haitian life, just like the social theorists whose life stories are the backbone of the theory of transnationalism (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001).

Like the entire Haitian diaspora, we were personally affected by the tragic earthquake in Haiti in 2010. We happened to be in Miami on the first Sunday after the earthquake and attended church with my wife's parents. Standing in the back of the church (all the pews were full) listening to how peoples' lives were affected was an experience too moving to put into words. Aside from participating in local relief efforts and urging friends and family to "stand up for Haiti", we watched my mother-in-law and her sisters cry tears of joy when one of their sisters was pulled from the rubble five days after the earthquake, miraculously surviving in a bank vault until she was rescued. In the last three years, cousins and other relatives have shared stories of surviving the earthquake, moving to the United States, and the ways they envision Haiti's future. It is through these conversations that my sense of urgency and necessity of tracking the experiences of Haitian youth in American schools was crystallized. Hearing Pierre and Diop (two students in this study whom I introduce in the chapters that follow) discuss the politics of rebuilding Haiti and how they imagine Haiti's future, therefore, was also important political work that I attempt to represent in this study.

For these personal, political, and philosophical reasons, it is especially important that my work be useful and practical so that teachers and students can draw on this

research. I try to show how teachers can frame justice and engage conversations about race and racism in ways that center students lived experiences, speak to multiple triumphs and miscarriages, without glorifying our work or killing hope with cynicism.

Recognizing the countless “native born” Black Americans and Black immigrants (my family consists of both) work tirelessly to reconcile racism and democracy vis-à-vis education, I try to offer potential sketches of a “pedagogy of hope” to show how centering the critical literacy practices of first-generation transnational black youth opens new spaces for antiracist work and global justice.

Organization of the Dissertation

In chapter two I review and synthesize literature pertaining to black migration to the United States and critical literacy and introduce the theoretical framework that guides this study. In chapter three I outline my research design, including the rationale for ethnographic methods of data collection, my focus on counternarratives, and the utility of drawing Critical Race Ethnography (CRE) in this study. I conclude by discussing Westerville⁵ in the social geography of the Philadelphia metropolitan area and my role as a participant observer immersed in an English Language Learner (ELL) classroom at Westerville High (WHS). In chapters four and five present that data. In these two chapters I have attempted to present an arc of critical literacy, beginning in Haiti with students’ “reading the world” of the U.N. and INGO occupation of their home country, and continuing in the United States, with their understandings of and experiences with racism on American soil. What unites these two data chapters is my analytical focus on

⁵ All names, including the school and participants, are pseudonyms.

the explanatory power students give to race and racism, across national boundaries and modalities, as they theorize about and negotiate their lives in Africa or Haiti, and the United States. Chapter four begins with a focus on the disjuncture between the global agenda of “stabilizing” Haiti and two young men’s narratives about the realities of the U.N. occupation and the emerging “NGO Republic”. I then shift my focus to students’ lives in the United States and how they theorize and negotiate a “racial grammar” (Bonilla Silva, 2012) composed of media meta-narratives and school-level discourses about Africa and Haiti that inform how they are (mis)read by peers and teachers alike. Along with Diop and Pierre, I introduce Miriam, Binta, and other young people from various countries in sub-Saharan Africa. I conclude chapter four by showing how the “multimodal counternarratives” (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010; see also Vasudevan, 2006) students produce in response to these subhumanizing discourses represent new ground for dismantling what Mudimbe described as “the colonial library” (1994). Chapter five is a classroom-level case study of a Justice for Trayvon movement that emerged in March, 2012. The data comes from a unit I co-authored and co-taught. Through an exploration of this murder, students theorize and articulate “Justice for Trayvon(s)” as a global imperative hinging on our collective efforts, strategies and abilities to end racism (or not) and forgive racists (or not). I begin this chapter with students’ initial thoughts on Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman, then I analyze the power of the visual narratives that circulated. The chapter concludes by asking how students theorize love and forgiveness within the context of the permanence of global racism and the State’s inability and unwillingness to protect Black life. My concluding chapter situates my findings and suggests that curriculum practices constructed around the notion of global

l.a.w.s. (lessons against white supremacies) is one possible space for a decolonizing, culturally responsive, antiracist praxis in education. My notion of global l.a.w.s. employs the dialectics of love and anger, (long at the heart of critical pedagogy) and Sandoval's (2000) call for pedagogies of differential consciousness that work through a hermeneutics of love, or set of practices and procedures that seek to decolonize the social imagination through the practitioner's commitment to the equal distribution of power, commitment to deconstruction of supremacies, and insistence on emancipation.

Definitions

Pedagogy: By pedagogy I mean the teaching methods and curricular content and design, as well as the processes through which “teachers and students negotiate and produce knowledge, identities, and social relations” (Wissman, 2008, p. 18). This definition is similar to McLaren (1998 p. 160; cited in Hill, 2005) who views pedagogy as “an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimization of particular forms of social life”

Racism: A system of power, privilege, and hierarchy, embedded in individual thinking and institutional practices, in which punishment and reward are distributed based on phenotypical characteristics, ethnicity, and culture. Racism typically grants white people disproportionate access to resources that are not fully afforded to people of color (Marable and Jones, 2008)

Transnational Black Youth: transnational black youth refers to the young people in this study who came to the United States from various countries in Africa and the Caribbean. Transnational refers to the fact that these young people have “a foot planted in each world”, or maintain close contacts with friends, relatives, and larger social practices “back home”. For instance, one young man in this study used digital technologies to make beats and exchange sound files of beats and lyrics to create hip-hop music that speaks to life in Haiti and the United States, as well as the space in between occupied by these young people. I also recognize that the arbitrary division of Africa into “sub-Saharan” and “Northern” is certainly problematic, as are the racial and ethnic connotations that underlie these divisions (Mamdani, 2010; Osondu, 2010). Youth in this study come from various countries in West and East Africa, all south of the Sahara desert. Of course, there are racial connotations here; invoking globally circulating racial categories, all of the youth in this study identify as black.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this chapter I review literature reflecting current debates and tensions within the field of black migration studies. The first section is a demographic overview of post-1965 black migrants, with a focus globalization and processes of violence and liminalization as part and parcel of racialization in the U.S. The second section addresses tensions between racism as a structural reality and literature that suggests ethnic identification is a personal choice. I then review literature specifically pertaining to black immigrant youth in school settings and the review by asking about the role of race in critical pedagogy. I conclude this chapter by introducing my theoretical framework that guides this study.

Globalization and the “Structural Adjustment Diaspora”

Globalization has been described as the social science master narrative of this era (Arojomand, 2004), the central thematic for social theory (Rosenberg, 2000), and the dominant ideology of our times (Trouillot, 2003). In this section I ask how the pillars of globalization frame contemporary Black migrations to the United States. Zeleza (2009) uses the “Structural Adjustment Diaspora” to refer to contemporary migrations from Africa to North America as part and parcel of economic policies known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), a common symbol for fundamental injustices of neoliberal social austerity measures that swept across the continent beginning in 1981. I borrow Zeleza’s term to historicize this era of migrations from Africa and the Caribbean, with a

particular emphasis on how questions of justice emerge as indispensable in understandings of Black migrations to the U.S. in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Put simply, globalization is what happens when “the movement of people, goods, and ideas among countries and regions accelerates” (Suarez Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 1). In this era more than ever before, the argument goes, the world is profoundly more interconnected because of new global technologies, worldwide mass media, and a more affordable, extensive, and accelerated international transportation system.

Analyses tend to focus on transformation in the political-economic and cultural domains and revolve around what Suarez-Orozco (2001) refers to as the three pillars of globalization: 1) “post-national” forms of production and distribution of goods and services that rely on global capital flows and distributions of labor; 2) information, communication and media technologies that place a premium on knowledge intensive work; and 3) growing levels of world- wide migration and cultural productions that challenge values in both sending and receiving countries (see also Suarez-Orozco & Qin Hilliard, 2004).

What does the “globalized” world look like? Appadurai’s notion of “scapes” (1990, 2000) and Castells’ (2000) articulation of “the networked society”, two often-cited, undisputable staples of globalization theory, offer in-depth perspectives on how global interconnectedness is both imagined and structured. Both theorists explore how flows of capital and labor, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and migration and cultural production render this era of globalization unique from past eras of global interconnection. Appadurai’s primary concern is the new global cultural economy brought about by tensions between cultural homogenization and cultural

heterogenization. Appadurai's metaphor of "flows" details the movement of money, people, and ideas across the globe, marked by relations of disjuncture, meaning "the paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies" (2000, p. 5). Appadurai proposes exploring these disjunctures by looking at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flow, or "scapes". Building on Benedict Anderson's (1981) notion of imagined communities, Appadurai proposes five "scapes" are the building blocks of an imagined world, defined as "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (1990, p. 297). Ethnoscapes refers to the landscape of people who constitute the shifting world in which we live, specifically traveling bodies, "moving groups and individuals", including tourists, refugees, immigrants, and exiles. These traveling people affect the politics of nations to an unprecedented degree; in this way they might serve as destabilizing factors to national subject-building projects. Technoscapes refers to the global configuration of technology and the fact that technology moves, and the economy of technology moves people. Technoscapes draw attention to the "high-speed connections connecting previously distant territories" (Maira & Soep, 2004, p. xvi) and speaks to the "increasingly complex relationships among money flows, political possibilities, and the availability of unskilled and high skilled labor" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 297-298). Financescapes refer to the movement of money, which is now more mysterious, rapid, unstable, and difficult to landscape than ever before. Importantly, the global relationship among ethnoscapes, technoscapes and financescapes is deeply disjunctive and unpredictable, leading to an

unstable relationship among people (especially migrants and indigenous populations), jobs, and capital flows. Mediascapes and ideoscapes represent a closely related landscape of images and ideas that circulate globally. Mediascapes include television, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and billboard images that reflect a certain lifestyle, which, according to Appadurai (1990), shapes how we imagine ourselves in a larger global community. Most important, claims Appadurai, mediascapes provide a complex repertoire of images, narratives, and ethnoscapescapes to viewers around the world, in which fact, fantasy, news stories, commercials, and narratives of “others” become blurred past the point of distinction. Ideoscapes are often politically oriented images that reflect ideologies of states, as well as the counter-ideologies of movements seeking state power. These ideoscapes often incorporate the Enlightenment language of freedom, rights, sovereignty, and democracy. These “master-narratives of enlightenment” take on local meaning as they circulate throughout the globe, creating “terminological kaleidoscopes” that, while drawing on universal terms, rely on local contexts to produce their desired effects. Current global cultural flows occur “*in and through the growing disjunctures among ethnoscapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, mediascapescapes, and ideoscapescapes*” (1990, p. 301, emphasis in original) and the speed, volume, and scale of flows are now so great that these disjunctures have become central to the politics of global culture.

For Castells (2000), informationalism is the dominant paradigm that shapes the overall social structure of society. The newest development in the capitalist mode of production, informationalism refers to a new technological paradigm based on information technologies circulated through the globalization of ICTs, which have created a material infrastructure for the formation of a global economy, similar to

railways and national markets in 19th century. The result is a “networked society”, a view of the world as one comprehensive interconnected totality ruled by the logic of informationalism that penetrates all spheres of life. For Castells (2000), power now operates through the “space of flows” through which information travels: circuits of electronic exchanges. This space, according to Castells (2000) is both borderless and timeless, but importantly, “nodes” and “hubs” emerge as specific physical places where capital, knowledge and information accumulate; thus, nodes and hubs dominate the space of flows. Through patterned segregation, even in “nodes” of informational capitalism, such as major cities in the United States where capital and knowledge tend to accumulate, are not equally accessible. Crucially, this network hierarchy continually adapts and adjusts to its competitive, information-driven environment. As a result, some places are “switched off”, while other are created, incorporated and upgraded, which creates a highly unstable spatial configuration of power. In the networks of the global economy, only segments of economic structures, countries and regions and populations are linked, and they are linked in proportion to their particular position in the international division of labor (Burbles & Torres, 2004). Other sectors, (especially sub-Saharan Africa) are disconnected and marginalized; they represent an emerging “Fourth World”, even more excluded from the flows and networks of information that dominate this era of capitalism.

It is this notion of the so-called Fourth World of exclusion where globalization becomes especially racialized and issues of justice take center stage. Is exclusion the appropriate frame for thinking about Africa’s place in a globalized world? Or, rather, are historical and contemporary inclusions precisely why “globalization” tends to re-inscribe racialized hierarchies built on centuries of fundamental economic and political injustice?

According to Trouillot (2003), globalization scholarship often suffers from a “contemporary arrogance, which overplays the uniqueness of our times,” and “may blind us to the dimensions of what happened before we were born” (p. 29). Drawing on this skepticism of globalization as a novel phenomenon, analyses from Africa and the Caribbean tend to focus on histories of globalizing processes in order to situate this era of globalization within a history of global connections, disconnections, integrations, and exclusions (see for example, Ferguson, 2006; Trouillot, 2003; Clarke & Thomas, 2006). Writing from Kenya, Ntarangwi (2009) understands globalization as a term that captures the historical and contemporary process of “contact and even conquest across geographical, cultural, and political boundaries in which people, ideas, goods and capital circulate over an expanded terrain and period” (p. 2). This approach acknowledges “accelerated flows or intensified connections- across national and other boundaries- of commodities, peoples, symbols, technology, images, information, and capital, as well as disconnections, exclusions, marginalization, and disposition” (p. 2). From this perspective, globalization cannot be novelized. Rather, the politics and processes of global interconnectedness require an understanding of how Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe became “globalized” with the advent of the transatlantic slave trade, which drew the world into the geographies of capitalism, legalism, transportation, communication, violence, and racism; in short, the doggedly persistent racialized global structure is, apparently here to stay and anything called globalization must be understood through the lens of racism (Coatsworth, 2004; McGrew, 2007; Rugumamu, 2005; Offiong, 2005; Kieh, 2006; Rodney, 1972). In this sense, perhaps Briggs (2003, p. 1) is correct that “globalization” works as little more than a placeholder, “a word with no exact

meaning that we use in our contested efforts to describe the successors to development and colonialism”, global structures of power and hierarchy with racialized pasts and presents. While Briggs may be correct that historical analyses might point to more continuity than change, particularly when it comes to questions of political economy and global hierarchies, the civil rights movements for social justice and human rights in the U.S., especially legal changes initiated in the mid-20th century, might offer a space to understand how fundamental the notion of justice is for understanding black migrations to the U.S. in the contemporary era.

Contemporary Black Migration to the U.S.: Who’s Helping Whom?

Large-scale Caribbean immigration to the United States dates back to the end of Spanish-American War in 1898 (Thomas, 2012). However social scientists’ interest in black immigration, with rare exceptions (Reid, 1936; Halter, 1993), is tied to trends in U.S. immigration law beginning in 1965. Veney (2009) credits the Civil Rights Movement’s focus on global justice and the elimination of *de jure* race-based discrimination in the U.S. for the passage of the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, which partially abolished the national-origins quota systems that had rendered immigration a largely white, European phenomenon⁶. Hart-Cellar drastically shifted the racial and cultural composition of the United States by opening the possibility for

⁶ Quota systems assigned an immigrant quota of 3 percent from the country of birth of foreign-born people residing in the United States. These systems favored Europe and restricted immigration from the Caribbean to “literate, skilled white-collar workers” (James, 2002) and effectively foreclosed opportunities for large-scale emigration from Africa (Veney, 2009; Asseneh, 2010). To be clear: I am not championing current immigration laws.

documented, large-scale black migration mainly from the Caribbean and South America⁷. It's focus on family reunification meant these black people from could send for family members "back home"; it also allowed for an additional 20,000 immigrants per year from each country in the Western hemisphere.

While black people from the Caribbean thickened roots in the U.S. and routes across borders throughout the 1970s, African immigrants did not establish the same presences and processes en masse until 1980, when the Congressional Black Caucus played a key role in lobbying the Reagan administration to include Ethiopian refugees in the Refugee Act of 1980. This was the first time African refugees were included in U.S. refugee policy, despite the waves of post-colonial violence (some of which was initiated by the U.S.) and poverty that plagued Africa throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Later, in 1986 the Caucus lobbied for the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which provided amnesty for undocumented immigrants in the U.S., allowing for increased visibility and legal status of black immigrant populations. An estimated 39,000 African immigrants, most living clandestinely after students and tourist visas expired, attained legal residency following the passage of the IRCA (Kanadu-Agyemong & Takyi, 2006), establishing the groundwork for the first large scale, continuous immigration of sub-Saharan Africans to the U.S. since the Middle Passage.⁸

⁷ Hart Cellar allowed 20,000 documented immigrants from each country in the Western hemisphere to migrate to the U.S. each year. Coupled with family reunification policies and proximity to the U.S., this meant an exponential increase in Caribbean and South American migration. Of course black people traveling is nothing new, and Hart Cellar also allowed legal migration from other continents that have led to cultural and racial shifts.

⁸ Halter (1998) details the history of Cape Verdean immigrants to Massachusetts from 1860-1940. Approximately 20,000 Cape Verdeans migrated during this period. I do not include them in this brief analysis because they do not seem to have established the same patterns of chain migration that other African emigrants have, in terms of establishing a contemporary pattern of chain migration.

Finally, the 1990 Immigration Act introduced a diversity visa program for countries with under-representation in the immigration pool. This has provided increased opportunities for immigration from Africa, particularly those with technical and managerial skills (Lobo, 2001). The 1990 Act also allows immigrants to bring their families, thus ensuring that African families will continue to migrate to the U.S. in the foreseeable future. Since 1990, approximately 20,000 African immigrants have migrated annually (Kanadu-Agyemong & Takyi, 2006).

While “black” as a social category and identification has never been completely knowable and stable, this well-known triad of immigration laws is partially responsible for the ever-more complex iterations of blackness that mark American life in the early 21st century. For example, the newness of the African immigrant population is striking: Forty percent of African-born black people arrived in the U.S. between 2000-2005, and approximately 75% have arrived since 1990 (Kent, 2007). In addition, approximately 400,000 American-born Black children have at least one African-born parent. Like other large American metropolitan areas, Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs have experienced a tremendous growth in its African population. Africom, a Philadelphia-based non-profit advocacy organization, estimates that the region is now home to over 100,000 African immigrants, an increase of approximately 220% since 1990 (Diouf, 2007). Overall, these demographic changes in America’s African population lead Roberts (2005) to conclude that since 1990, more Africans have arrived from Africa to the United States than arrives during the entire Middle Passage.

Contrary to popular belief, the bulk of African immigration is due not to poverty, nor are most of African immigrants refugees. Instead, it is due mostly to the lack of

professional-level jobs in Africa. In fact, African immigrants are the most highly educated population in the United States. Over 49% have a bachelor's or advanced degrees, compared to 23% of native-born Americans (Diouf, 2007). It is estimated that 40% of Africa's professional class reside in Europe or North America, with the United States as the biggest beneficiary of the transfer of human resources out of Africa; 20% of Africa's international migrants who reside outside of Africa live in the United States (Zezeza, 2009).

From a human capital perspective, the "diversity" lotteries, family reunification policies, and economic circumstances across sub-Saharan Africa and much of the Caribbean have been an incredible benefit to the United States. Historically, Caribbean immigrants have tended to come to the U.S. with substantial levels of human capital, and legal immigration from the Caribbean to the U.S. has always favored the most educated Caribbean professionals and therefore the United States (Pierre, 2004; James, 2002). Contemporary immigration dynamics have led to what Shaw-Taylor (2007) describes as "developmental role reversals" (p. 8). In the Caribbean and especially Africa, professionals educated "at home" at the expense of African and Caribbean governments, now work and reside in the United States. In this sense, Africa and the Caribbean are subsidizing the U.S. economy. Further, remittances from professionals sent back to Africa and the Caribbean far outstrip American foreign aid to these regions (Kaba, 2009). Thus, while mainstream media narratives often frame the United States as benevolent in relations with Africa and the Caribbean, an analysis of these facts prompts Diouf (2007) to ask, "Who's helping whom?"

Negotiating Race and Racism in the United States

Little do the Amadou Diallos of the world know that the black man in America bears the curse of Cain, and that in America they, too, are considered black men, not Fulanis, Mandingos, or Wolofs. In America, no taxi will stop to pick them up; putting a price on their heads elects politicians; and the police will hunt them down... They cut Amadou Diallo down like a black American [and] there is a lesson for all of us to learn (Diawara, 2005, p. ix).

Diawara (2005) reminds us that the sojourn from Africa to the United States often involves coming to an understanding of the deadly power of American racism. In this section I explore the context of reception for black immigrants, touching on physical and symbolic violence, the post-September 11th culture of deportation, and the continuance of degrading media representations. From the ritual acts violence-- such as the murder of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in 1999 or the sodomizing of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima in 1997, *both committed by the New York Police Department*--, to acts of symbolic violence-- detention and deportation, increased police surveillance, less pay for the same work, and degrading media scripts-- negotiating the injustice of racism emerges as a key theme in literature addressing the black migrant American experience.

Racism, violence, and “inclusive exclusion”

Racialization has emerged as a key for studies on the processes of how racial identities and meanings are constructed (Barot & Bird, 2001). Drawing attention to processes leads to attention on power dynamics, or the “ideologies, images, and institutional formations that hold race in place” (Madison, 2010, p. 86). This means that physical appearances of what people may look like in racial terms, how we enact and react to these appearances- classify and identity them- becomes a legal, political, social and historical reality. Such a focus leads an understanding of how racism, like race, is

socially and politically constructed, and according to Schuster (2010) studies of migration provide empirical examples of this construction process. Engaging the global production of race through migration also reconnects race theory with the politics of negotiating race in everyday experiences (Knowles, 2010).

Bonilla Silva (1997) defines racialization as “structural processes through which people become raced and placed within a racial hierarchy” (p. 475). For migrants whose phenotype fits the description, raced and placed means negotiating anti-black racism in the United States.

Incidents such as the murder of Amadou Diallo and assault of Abner Louima, according to Rowe (2004), demonstrate that ongoing abuse of black and brown bodies is the unspoken subtext of the white body politic—“a set of discursive and material practices designed to keep Black people, native born and migrant alike, in a particular social location: a largely indentured population whose labor sustains the nation, but whose voices, needs, and basic human rights must be subordinated to the needs of U.S. capitalism” (p. 128). According to Rowe, the national body is defined through tropes of whiteness and white bodies, marking Black and Brown bodies as deviations from this norm and targets of violence. Importantly, this violence is discursive as well as physical. Haitian immigrants, for example, faced the ultimate stigma in the early 1980s, when they were officially listed on the “4-H” club of AIDS transmission: hepatitis, homosexuals, hemophiliacs and Haitians.

Because whiteness “operates through a series of inversions in which its unmarked character allows it to objectively direct and frame the national gaze, the color of violence becomes inverted in the process” (Rowe, 2004, p. 130). Using the case of Haitian

migrant Abner Louima as a case study, Rowe shows the importance of rehabilitating the concept of the policing through the positioning of the offending officer as a bad apple in a good system, rather than seeing the event as representative of larger and more systemic forms of violence that mark the American experience.

Importantly, one need not be an American citizen to racially belong to America; to become an American citizen is often to cross the border into, not outside of, racial inequality. Like Rowe, Carbado (2005) views racism as formative of (not simply oppositional to) American democracy. As such, becoming black American is more about being racialized than acquiring a particular citizenship status, and it is “precisely through racism that our American racial identities come onto being” (2005, p. 631). The processes of racialization include police harassment, incidents of violence, and defining oneself through and against the African American racialized experience. Through what he terms “inclusive exclusion”, Carbado demonstrates how Black migrants become racialized through simultaneous inclusion in one American experience (e.g. police harassment), and excluded from another (e.g. police protection). Referring to such acts as “racial naturalization”, a terms that conveys the racial liminality into which Black migrants are indoctrinated, Carbado argues that, like their African American peers, they must live “outside and inside the borders of the American body, *not quite not American*” (2005, p. 639, emphasis added). Naturalization, then, is not simply a formal legal process that produces citizenship, but rather a social process that produces American racial identities.

In his on-going longitudinal study of African and Caribbean migration to the United States, Arthur (2009) investigates how “border crossings” into American racial inequality define the contours of black migrants’ relationship with the justice system. His

findings reveal the contours of class, gender and age, pointing out the importance of intersections of class, race, gender, and age in perceptions of American justice system. In his study, a majority of the Black migrant men view the justice system as discriminatory and designed to enforce those normative standards that pertain to white hegemony and control over minorities and underrepresented, powerless groups in America.

In terms of income, Arthur (2009) found that the most supportive of the criminal justice system were those earning above \$60,000 per year, who, incidentally, had less contact with police than Black migrants earning less. He found that those earning below \$30,000 annually were the least supportive of the justice system. Fifty-eight percent reported being treated like criminals even when involved in no crime, and this demographic reported much higher feelings of “guilt by association” and over-surveillance in their communities.

While gender and income were significant factors, Arthur (2009) found the biggest split in perceptions of criminal justice and policing was between youth and adults. Youths, across the board, reported mutual feelings of hostility toward police officers, stemming from the presumption of guilt before innocence. Like their native-born peers, Black immigrant youth report over-surveillance and offenses such as “driving while black” as a common occurrence.

Veney (2009) explores the culture of surveillance within the context of America’s post-September 11th culture of detainment, in which both legal immigrants and legal permanent residents can be detained and deported, above and beyond being jailed, when convicted of minor offenses, by asking how immigration policy affects the lives of black migrants. New detention measures imposed after September 11th, 2001 allowed

mandatory, indefinite detention in which people were removed from family and housed alongside criminals without the right to a lawyer or public arraignment, no knowledge of what they were accused of, or what evidence was being used against them. According to Veney (2009), the passage of harsher and stricter immigration legislation coincided with a federal cutback in the provision of social services. Increasingly desperate for revenue streams, the detention of immigrants, permanent residents, and refugees has emerged as a money-generating operation for local jails and prison corporations. Through the selling of empty beds in county jails to Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), local municipalities are reaping a small fortune. While the media conditions Americans to associate the culture of detention with Middle Eastern men, a disproportionate number of African and Caribbean immigrants are detained and deported for committing certain misdemeanors. In fact, Veney (2009) argues that black immigrants from the Caribbean (particularly Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti) are deported at higher rates than others, including Middle Eastern (and “Middle Eastern looking” men) with 70% being deported for alleged criminal offenses that have nothing to do with terrorism.

Unjust media and scholarly representations

Pierre, (2004) describes the well-known “culture of poverty” thesis regarding so-called African American cultural inferiority as having nine lives, a reference to its incredible ability of this view to reinvent and reanimate itself across time and space. It seems that derogatory and stereotypical depictions African and Caribbean cultures have the same ability. Though Africa and African-descended people have been integral to America’s historical development and an essential ingredient in the making of American public culture (Gibson & Bond, 2002), knowledge about the complex reality of life in

Africa is still sorely lacking (Keim, 2009). This is consequential, as shared meaning (or a “common language”) is integral to the workings of culture (Hall, 2003). In Hall’s words, shared meanings “organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (p. 3). Following this logic, our “common language” about Africa and Haiti will have real effects on how African and Haitian people are treated.

Such genealogies of (mis)representations of Africa were famously identified by Mudimbe (1994):

Exploiting travelers’ and explorers’ writings, at the end of the 19th century a ‘colonial library’ begins to take shape. It represents a body of knowledge constructed with the explicit purpose of faithfully translating and deciphering the African object. Indeed, it fulfilled a political project in which, supposedly, the object unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could, finally, domesticate it. Certainly the depth as well as the ambition of the colonial library disseminates the concept of deviation as the best symbol of the idea of Africa (p. xii).

Mudimbe rightfully identified deviation⁹ as the exemplary representation of Africa and the “colonial library” as a body of knowledge through which deviation (in its multiple forms) is articulated. Along with the work of Mudimbe and others, Said’s classic study, *Orientalism*, (1978) offers a well-known analytical framework for interpreting what is at stake in popular and academic representations of Africa and Haiti. Orientalism refers to the Western practice of marginalizing and subjugating the Middle East by controlling its representation and constructing a supposedly inferior identity for the region, which serves as is an integral part of European imaginative and material

⁹ For a detailed account of how deviation and intimacy work alongside and depend on each other in how “the West” relates to Africa (and Africa and Europe understand themselves), see also Mbembe, 2001.

civilization and culture. Orientalism, according to Said, “expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, [and] doctrines” (1978, p.2). It is through such practices that European culture gains its strength and identity.

In a similar spirit, Mudimbe (1988) coined the term “Africanism” as a form of Orientalism that critiques the positivist Western discourse of the African world. Mudimbe’s analysis details how Europe’s intense period of colonization of the African continent required the manipulation of visual and textual representations to justify colonial schemes. As Mudimbe (1988) makes clear, “the colonizing structure” imposed on African societies--governing bureaucracies, media technologies, churches, schools, and systems of forced labor—produced and relied on a dichotomizing system, building “paradigmatic oppositions” such as traditional versus modern; savage versus civilized, into everyday understandings of Europe and Africa. The colonizing structure, therefore, relied on representing Africa and Africans as fundamentally different, ridden with crises, and constantly in need of outside intervention. As such, Mudimbe (1988) views visual and textual representation as foundational to colonial structures.

Mudimbe’s “colonizing structure” lives in academic and popular discourses, truncated representations of Africa, a collection of images and texts that extend the “colonial library” into contemporary modes of communication. Described by Zeleza as “the Africa of Western derision, a caricature constructed from European epistemic fantasies deeply entrenched in Europe’s social imaginary of its ultimate and most intimate other” (2010, p. 77), the colonial library continues to draw on various writings and visual representations to mark Africa as everything the West is not (Mbembe, 2001).

Importantly, Said flagged the rise of the media as a place where “standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of 19th century academic and imaginative demonology” (1978, p. 26). Drawing on the work of media scholars, the notion of “frames” has become a central aspect in analyzing the importance of media representations of Africa and Haiti in the American public sphere as the central site for the perpetuation of the colonial library. Frames, according to Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (2010) are “textual structures that shape how we see, what we see, and how we process our visions” (p. 17). Americans gain knowledge of life of Africa from popular media sources that distort the reality of everyday life. Rather than focus on how most Africans actually live their daily lives, media representations obsessively focus on images of “atavism and absence” (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010).

Atavism refers to “a return to or recovery of qualities that have been carried in the blood from generation to generation...it suggests raw, violent, chaotic, and ‘primitive’ emotions; the return to what black people were supposed to be like deep down” (Dyer, 1981, cited in Hall, 2003, p. 255). Such depictions that mark Africa and Africans as violent and in need of outside intervention, or in other ways subhuman, savage, and the progenitors various plagues. Analyses of news sources (Myers, Klak, & Koehl, 1996; Schraeder & Endless, 1998; Campbell, 1997) popular media such as film and television (Keim, 2009; Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010), the Internet (Ogunyemi, 2011), and source of H.I.V/A.I.D.S, to name just one example from virology, turn up numerous examples if this line of thinking about Africa, as well as Haiti (Potter, 2009; Farmer, 1994). This obsessive focus on the presence of disaster, war, famine, and disease also frames Africa and Haiti as absent of humanity, reason, and “civilization”. In short, it is

through these depictions that Africa and Haiti are painted as everything the West is not (Mbembe, 2001; Farmer, 1994).

Do the manifestations of racism described in this section put a damper on the quest for the American dream? How do Black migrants cope with the persistence of racism in an era defined by *de facto* racism? The next section explores the specific strategies employed by Black migrants to cope with the injustice of American racism.

Ethnic Narratives, Hybrid Identities

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s migrations theorists turned the research gaze on Black migration from the Caribbean and Africa. Steeped in the sociological tradition of assimilation into American economic, political and social systems, this literature drew on the work of the Chicago school. Much of this literature drew on and assumed problematic visions of urban black America in ways that reinforce racism by focusing on race (Pierre, 2003). The bulk of this literature drew clear and sharp distinctions between African Americans (native born) and Foreign-born or migrant black people, using the concepts of ethnicity and culture to make such distinctions.

Portes and Zhou's (1993) classic study of "segmented assimilation and the new second generation" is a well-known and groundbreaking moment in assimilation literature. Instead of the "straight-line" path of assimilation into America's middle class system of values and economic opportunities that dominated thinking about previous eras of (European) immigration, Portes and Zhou (1993) present immigrant youth as torn between a culture clash of two opposing systems of ideas and values, that of their parents and that of their peers. Using Haitian youth in Miami as an exemplar of "segmented assimilation", they argue that youth can either remain loyal to the culture of their parents

and face being ostracized by their (Black) American peers, or they can adapt the “adversarial stance toward the white mainstream that is common among inner-city minority youths” (p. 81), at the expense of remaining loyal to parental aspirations for their futures. The latter includes “the devaluation of education as a vehicle for advancement of all black youths, a message that directly contradicts the immigrant parents’ expectations” (p. 81). In this sense, therefore, assimilation is not into the values and norms of “mainstream culture”, but rather into “the values and norms of the inner city” (p. 81). The authors believe adapting to the values and norms of the native born “inner city” African American communities in which many second-generation youth are raised is in fact a step away from social and economic mobility. On the other hand, youth who resist these processes of “downward” assimilation and retain the solidarity, mutual support, and cultural values of their ethnic communities may have a better chance for economic and educational mobility. Portes and Zhou (1993) outline three forms of adaptation. One represents “parallel integration into the white middle class”; a second leads to “permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass”; and a third blends economic advancement with “deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity” (p. 82). Further, there are three features of social contexts encountered by immigrant youth that create vulnerability to downward assimilation: color, location, and absence of mobility ladders. Importantly, it is location of immigrant youth (i.e. proximity to native born minorities) that exposes them to “the adversarial subculture developed by marginalized native youths” (p. 83).

While the notion of “segmented assimilation” is now a (contested) cornerstone of migration studies, Portes and Zhou, perhaps, set the groundwork for the ethnic narratives

that accompany discussions of black migration, which tend to under-theorize (though not ignore) racism and rehash highly problematic perceptions of African American youth. After reading Portes and Zhou one could easily conclude that upward or downward assimilation (while conditioned by other factors) boils down to choosing between two opposing cultural values. Of course, what is troublesome is the implicit assumptions about “inner city” cultural values around education.

Portes and Zhou (1993) are certainly not alone in exploring the tensions of ethnicity within black migration experiences. The work of Mary Waters (1994, 1999), for example, has been influential in documenting how Black immigrants negotiate racialization in the United States, specifically, the ways in which Black immigrants position themselves in America’s racial landscape vis-à-vis native-born Black Americans. Waters’ research (1994, 1999) focuses on intersections of ethnicity and race, revealing that second generation Caribbean youth generally choose one of three general racial and ethnic identity types or typologies: identifying as Americans, identifying as ethnic Americans with some distancing from Black Americans, or maintaining an immigrant identity (1994). The “ethnic response” describes teens who generally distance themselves from black Americans and agree with what their parents say about Black Americans (“They don’t care about education”, “They don’t work hard”, etc.), to emphasize cultural difference and psychological distance. Youth in this category maintain a “Jamaican” or “Haitian” identity label to distinguish themselves from their Black American peers. The “American-identified second generation”, according to Waters, don’t stress immigrant or ethnic status but instead identify and embrace “Black American” as an identity category. This response, according to Waters, results in parents

fearing their children becoming black American, thus adapting the infamous “oppositional culture” stance toward educational achievement. “Immigrant identified teens”, on the other hand, don’t feel a need to choose between parents’ ethnicity and American identity. Instead thinking of identity as “co-ethnic”, they often construct identities such as “Caribbean-American” or “Jamaican-American” to describe attachments and identification with both “home” and American cultures.

The “choice” of identity is influenced by racial discrimination. Waters stresses the impact of discrimination in the lives of immigrant youth and the connection between racial socialization and their reaction to American society. She writes, “the ways in which these youngsters experience and react to racial discrimination influences the type of racial/ethnic identity they develop” (Waters, 1994, p. 802). The youth who identified as Black American were more likely to distance themselves from their Caribbean parents’ views, while the youth who identified as Caribbean/ethnic (“Caribbean” or “Jamaican”, for example) were more likely to share their parents’ stereotypical views of black Americans and view themselves and their ethnic group as superior to Black Americans. These youth were also more likely to be middle class. The American identifying youth, on the other hand, were more likely to be poor, indicating that social location is influential in “identity choice”.

In later work, Waters (1999) explored in more detail the experiences of Black immigrants. Waters argues that Black immigrants from the Caribbean come to the U.S. with a particular identity, culture, and worldview different from European immigrants of the past and African Americans of the present. According to Waters (1999) two aspects initially help Caribbean immigrants “succeed” in the U.S.: as immigrants they have a

“different attitude” toward work, employment and American society that Native-born Black Americans, attributes which employers find favorable. Secondly, immigrants’ unique understanding and expectations of race relations allow them to interact with American racial structures in a successful way. According to Waters (1999), their “low anticipation of sour race relations” (p. 6) allows them to have better interpersonal interactions with white Americans than many native-born Blacks Americans. This, Waters conclude that “ a combination of high ambitions, friendly relations with whites and strong militancy in encountering perceived racial difference in labor market leads to better outcomes for west Indians than native-born Blacks” (1999, p. 6).

While Waters claims she makes efforts to avoid criticizing African American culture (1999, p. 8), many theorists who identify as members of the African Diaspora take issue with Waters’ depiction of ethnic and national identity. Pessar (2003), for example argues that immigration scholars like Waters “err when they develop models of identity and incorporation based on overly-simple and static typologies” (p. 26). Such models fail to capture the “dynamism, hybridity and multiplicity” (p. 26) characterizing new immigrants’ identities and affiliations. Pessar, like Charles (1990), cites research on Haitian immigrants in New York that reveals that they have organized collectively under the banner of Haitians, Haitian American, Black, African American, Afro-Caribbean and Pan-African, depending on the time and the nature of the circumstances (see also Awokoya, 2012, p. 276 for a similar criticism regarding second generation Nigerian immigrants).

Pierre mounts a more damning critique, arguing most academic representations of post-1965 Black immigrants employ the concept of ethnicity in ways that reinforce

“racialist myths of Black (American) cultural inferiority” (2004, p. 141). Pierre claims that the discursive creation and use of Black immigrant ethnic and cultural distinctiveness reinforces “culture of poverty” discourses and in fact serves to reaffirm rather than challenge America’s existing racial order. Citing Hsu (1996), Pierre argues that contemporary race and racialist discourses work through a “rehabilitative concept of ethnicity” (2004, p. 143), meaning that the concept of ethnicity operates to reinforce rather than challenge nationalist hegemonic discourses. Arguing that the concept of ethnicity and ethnicity theory are made up of cultural narratives, Pierre demonstrates that researchers employ ethnicity to situate immigrants within the “ideological framework of the nation” (2004, p. 143).

As such, contemporary discourses of “Black ethnicity” perpetuate racism. She argues that we are “witnessing a body of research theory that denies the relevance of race while continuously recoding biological notions of race as ‘culture’” (2004, p. 151). In particular, Pierre takes issue with Mary Waters’ (and many others) theorizing of “ethnicity as choice” for Black immigrants and their over-emphasis on conflict between native-born and foreign-born Blacks. She also cites many ways in which contemporary theorists rearticulate “culture of poverty” stances. In contrast to these theorists, Pierre calls for grounded theories of Black distinctiveness that center power relations and racial subjugation rather than choice as the framework for reading contemporary immigration and ethnic identification. Pierre (2004) aims to shift discussions of race and migration from a focus intra-racial relationships that center attention to power. Researchers must be attentive to the ways which various Black groups experience race and, in response, create racial meanings for themselves. Yet, she argues, when social scientists do not ground

theorizing in “analyses of the power relations inherent in structures of domination” (2004, p. 162) we become complicit in a “culturalist racism” that ultimately works to strengthen the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Despite these critiques, the “ethnic response” has been foundational to interpreting how African immigrants negotiate racialization. The primary focus on identity, as opposed to intersections of identity and structural racism, is emblematic of much if the literature on “The New African Diaspora”. Kusow (2006), for example, asks “how do African-born Black immigrants from societies where skin color does not represent an important category of social understanding negotiate identities in situations where skin color is the primary category of social differentiation?” (2006, p. 537).

Kusow argues, “one understudied but critical area is the increasing diversity within the Black population of North America and its potential to transform the meaning of blackness from skin color categories to a culturally and nationality-based ones” (2006, p. 534). According to Kusow (2006), African migration marks a new sociological moment in which Black immigrants bring their homeland’s racial and cultural identities to America, which are not always in line with those employed in this country. Thus, categories like African American no longer have the analytical accuracy they once had to capture the reality of America’s Black population. Borrowing Waters’ typologies, Kusow (2006) focuses on the disjuncture between how one set of black immigrants (Somalis) understands blackness in their homelands and how it is defined in North America.

His findings “reveal the problematics of racial categories and confirm the situational nature of racial identities” (Kusow, 2006, 534). Citing Bhabba (1994) and

Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, Kusow argues that North America's racial reality is moving beyond the Black-White dichotomy to a situation of multiple and hybrid identity categories. Kusow claims that African-born black immigrants embody a radically different classification system and identity categories than those available in North America: while blackness is a meaningful identification category for American society, it does not necessarily carry a similar meaning for contemporary African immigrants. Once we understand that African immigrants are in the process of reinterpreting American racial classification systems to reflect their own, a whole new approach to understanding the situational nature of blackness becomes possible.

His research supports the emerging view that Black immigrants tend to identify more with culture and nationality than skin color, arguing that race is a "context-based variable that clearly shows how the way in which race is understood in Somalia is radically different from how it is viewed in North America" (p. 537). In order to grasp the development, maintenance and consequences of racial formations among largely nonwhite and post-1965 immigrants in North America, Kusow argues that "we need to see race as a set of definitions that exist within a particular social structure; in order to understand the meaning of race, one has to understand the conditions and historic processes that give racial categories their meaning" (2006, p. 546).

Certainly, documenting how African immigrants negotiate processes of racialization reveals a complexity of strategies, allegiances, and frustrations that result from navigating America's racial boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Yet, has the analytical attention given to the fluidity of racial and ethnic categorization drawn attention away from questions of structural racism? Kusow (2006), for example, ignores

structural racism altogether and only makes passing reference to racism in his study. This may be due to what Olaniyan (2003) describes as the resentment many African immigrants feel toward the reductive tendencies of “racial branding” in America’s race-obsessed social context that demands racial identification, if not conscription. These processes reduce complex, multidimensional human identities through a lazy shorthand that renders one “nothing but black” (Taiwo, 2003, p. 35).

Noguera (2003) critiques what he views as a sense of ambivalence in Black immigrants. He argues that the machinations of racism in 21st century America require all Black immigrants to “join the fight” against racism, no matter how reductive or annoying some may find their racialized identity. Pierre makes a similar argument and demonstrates that many African immigrants join the enduring African American and Afro-Caribbean “strategic essentialist” use of “Black” to gain access to political power, social mobility, and economic opportunity, as well as forge productive relationships with African American communities (Pierre, 2004).

And of course, like African Americans and other historically oppressed populations, African immigrants tactfully circumvent the racial status quo “through participation in diffuse and alternative politics in other areas of struggle” (Hintzen & Rahier, 2003, p. 3). This view de-centers racial allegiance as the only form of protest and calls attention to intersections of gender, class, nationality, immigrant status, and sexuality, all political struggles in which “black” immigrants are regularly engaged.

Race, Nation, Schooling: Black Migrant Youth in School Settings

As a primary port of entry for transnational youth, American schools are sites where migrant students learn standard academic material along with the ideological and

socio-cultural landscapes of the American communities in which they reside (Abu El-Haj, 2007, 2010; Forman, 2006). In Olneck's (1997) words, "Immigrants do not enter into undifferentiated American schools. They enter into specific schools whose immediate contexts, histories, memories, and commitments shape their organization and practices" (quoted in Forman, 2005, p. 6). Analyses of schooling processes offer "ground up" views of citizenship, and nation formation (Abu El-Haj, 2010), demonstrating the specific ways in which ideological projects coupled with complex local histories and everyday schooling practices produce boundaries of belonging and exclusion. This intersection of schooling, ideology and national identity shows how "America" is constructed as an imagined community. Such a conception of America references the ways that nations are ideologically constructed and reconstructed through educational discourses and practices that set the boundaries of belonging that are negotiated over time in relation to different groups of people (Abu El Haj, 2010; Hall, 2004).

Forman (2005), for example, argues that public schools attempt to build and reaffirm the nation through "suturing practices", referring to the ways in which schools attempt to fuse African immigrant students to larger civic and national communities through the mobilization of discourses that underscore how fortunate immigrant youth are to be in the U.S., while blatantly and subtly degrading students' countries of origin. Such practices, according to Forman, restrict rather than expand our visions of nation and humanity. Among secondary school educators in the U.S., Forman claims, "'nation' is discursively structured within a relatively monolithic vision of humanity. Immigrant and refugee youths are regularly denied adequate opportunities in schools to collaborate meaningfully in the redefinition and reinvention of 'the nation'"(2005, p. 10). Like

Anderson (1981), Forman highlights how media discourses are key sites of nation-building. For Anderson (1981), print media was the key site for imagining the nation. And while this remains true, other media sources such as television and the Internet have emerged as sites where racial images, particularly of blackness, serve as sites where the nation is imagined, and racial rankings are coded into everyday messages of inclusion and exclusion.

Educational settings, like all American institutions, should be understood as a key site for processes of racialization. In Lewis's (2003) words, "Schools are arguably one of the central institutions involved in the drawing and redrawing of racial lines" (p. 4). For adolescents in the United States, schools are important sites where processes of "Americanization" and racialization occur, often simultaneously. Forman (2005) also stresses the role of schooling in creating and enforcing racial and national identities. He writes, "where immigrant populations are involved, dominant national discourses are aggressively mobilized and overlaid with convergent discourses of racial difference that produce negative structuring effects" (p. 8). This leads to an immediate paradox for African immigrant students. While dominant American racial ideologies of colorblindness are mobilized in everyday schooling practices and public discourses, processes of racialization in these same spaces call these very ideologies into question.

American schools are places where opportunity is distributed along racial lines and identities are formed in racial terms. In the process, adults and youth in school settings, "in a striking 'institutional choreography', actually '*make* each other racial'" (Pollack, 2004, p. 45). In her study of a racially and ethnically diverse high school, Pollack (2004) foregrounds race, arguing that since the founding of the United States,

“our recurring debates over how race does and should matter in the United States have routinely circled back to American schools” (p. 14). She goes on to claim that, “School race talk...is thus one key version of American race talk” (p. 14).

For Pollack, race is evident on two fronts. First, the way people talk (discourse) is instrumental in race-making processes. Second, race is evident in practices such as dress, friendship circles, and after-school activities. Pollack’s examination highlights different patterns of “race talk”: “At different moments, speakers contested the use of racial labels, they used racial labels matter-of-factly, or they suppressed them altogether” (p. 8). She goes on to argue that these patterns differ across contexts and populations, and importantly notes that teachers most “actively suppress race labels when they were discussing inequitable patterns potentially implicating themselves” (p. 9). As such, remaining “colormute” can be seen as an act of self-preservation with implications for student-equity.

Pollack claims that adults did not invoke racial labels in conversations about racial disparities in academic tracks or discipline, two areas in which African American students are under- and over-represented, respectively. As such, Pollack shows how racial identities determine student outcomes, even in school environments where appears to be openly discussed.

Olsen (1997) argues that becoming American involves a process of “becoming racialized into our highly structured social order, where one’s position is determined by skin color” (Olsen, 1997, p. 11). Olsen posits, “In the process of ‘Americanizing’ newcomers, all of us engage in a massive struggle over the values of this nation, the meaning of diversity, the content of our race and language relations, and our visions of

fairness, democracy, and inclusion” (p. 9). Olsen characterizes the long history of schools being sites of “Americanizing” newcomers as “a history of enthusiasm for ‘Americanizing’ white ethnic immigrants, while sorting children of lower classes, foreign cultures and tongues, and darker skins into contained and marginalized programs with fewer resources and less access” (p. 27). At school, being “American” is enacted through language use, clothes, musical tastes and norms about heterosexual dating and gender identities. Olsen found that for the “newcomer students”, a crucial part of the Americanization process is being “socialized into the racial categories and processes of racial formation that underlie our national patterns” (p. 107). At this high school, students in the English as Second Language program are physically separate from the rest of the school for half of the day and even the classes they take in the same building as the rest of the school are segregated. While this segregation allows the students some degree of shelter and support, it also “institutionalizes fragmentation and separation of realms and provides only a weak structure of support for them in negotiating the process of becoming ‘American’” (p. 226).

While the work of Pollack and Olsen presents key insights into race, migration, and ethnicity at work in school settings, neither study includes the experiences of Black migrant youth. Suarez-Orozco asks, “How do phenotypically- but alas not culturally- Black immigrants respond over time and across generations to the ever-charged folk racial binary in the American urban setting? Will new immigrants break binary logic of American racial regime (2001, p. 356)? According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), colorblind ideologies, legally sanctioned after World War II, have caused a shift from expressing racist feelings in a biological language of genetic inferiority (“Black people are

intellectually inferior to white people”, for example) to cultural notions of inferior values (“Latinos just don’t value education”). It is this type of “colorblind racism”, manifested in damaging cultural assumptions (Bonilla Silva, 2006; Collins, 2009), which African immigrant students often confront in school settings. Roy and Roxas (2011), for example, demonstrate that teachers implicitly convey deficit perspectives in explaining the adjustment problems experienced by Somali immigrant youth as they transition into American schools. Teachers call into question family and community values, claiming Somali communities do not value education, rather than examining the practices of the school itself that impede learning. Roy and Roxas (2011) interpret these beliefs as microaggressions, defined as “unconscious discursive practices by the majority that perpetuate stereotypes and wound marginalized individuals or groups” (p. 522), and argue that teachers beliefs created missed opportunities for learning and undermine the pluralist intentions of American education.

While Ibrahim (1999) describes African immigrant students “embracing” Black a social identity and stresses their desire to learn Black English as a political stance that situates them within Canada’s racial order but in many ways against its racist schooling policies, others point out the problems and tensions within this “embrace”. One irony of racialization for African immigrant students is that being racialized as Black is often concomitant with tense, disrespectful, violent relationships with their African American peers.

While Jackson (2007) and Pierre (2007) are correct to point out that stories of tension and violence between native-born and immigrant Black people seem to fascinate researchers and journalists more than “mundane” cooperation, friendship, and

intermarriage, evidence from school settings points out the physical and symbolic violence to which African students are subjected in American schools (Traore, 2005; Clark, 2009; Smalls, 2011).

Traore (2005) and Clark (2009) trace the problem to education systems, arguing that, in Traore's words, "the colonial mentality [in education systems] that degraded Africa and Africans for hundreds of years" (2005, p. 348) continues to thrive in American schools. Their African American peers taunt African students as "savages from the jungle". Such negative stereotypes, perpetuated by the media, the school, and home environments fuel antagonism and separate African and African American students (Traore, 2005).

Smalls' (2011) study is situated within the work of Traore (2005) and Ibrahim (1999). Smalls' focus is on how we might conceive of race making as a linguistic practice and makes an argument for what we might think of a different form of violence prevention. While acknowledging the discursive violence present in the way that linguistic practices position African students as "subhuman", she points out the ingenious ways in which students appropriate hip hop language and identification practices to "flip the script" on would-be tormentors, and in doing so create new models of Black personhood that draw on transnational identification, (Black) American popular culture and multiple language practices.

Critical Literacies Praxis

Literacy, in the broadest sense, can be viewed as "a myriad of discursive forms and cultural competencies that construct and make available the various relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world" (Giroux, 1987, p. 10). In many

ways Giroux's definition speaks to a movement in literacy praxis that seeks to look beyond encoding and decoding strategies and explore the relationships between the reader, the text and context. We might think of meaning-making processes as the key to such sociocultural approaches to literacy, which decenter the cognitive processes of literacy in favor of analyses of literacy as strategy for situating oneself and community within larger social contexts (Mahiri, 2011). That is, thinking about "reading" beyond the ability to decode a particular text; much more important is one's ability to use literacy as a means to access and understand one's power to comprehend and change one's existence.

Of course I'm trying to provide an understanding of critical literacy, whose explicit aim is a critique of dominant ideologies, cultures, economies, institutions and political systems that partially shape our interaction with the world (Luke, 2012). As Luke and others have made clear, it is a critique of dominance that defines critical literacy, as well as using literacy as a means to become aware of the power and potential of transformative action. Thus, we might define "being literate" as being "present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, 2004, p. 249). The emphasis on agency, or the ability to act in and on the world, is at the heart of definitions of literacy as social critique. In this sense, critical literacy can be understood as both a narrative for agency and a method of social critique (Giroux, 1987).

To put it simply, literacy emerges as part and parcel of the ongoing struggle for liberation from oppressive social structures, and to credit Freire, Giroux, or any other late 20th century social theorist for "inventing" this comprehension of literacy is to dismiss the

sociocultural history of literacy in and of the African diaspora (see Anderson, 1988). We might think of the multitudes of unnamed slaves who risked their lives to attain literacy as the original critical literacy theorists because through reading their world, they understood the transformative power of reading the word. To borrow from Freire and Macedo:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world...this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world...we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or *rewriting* it, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. This dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 35)

Of course, oppressed communities have long recognized these processes as key to liberation and we might think of our era of liberation struggle as intimately related to the cyclical work of literacy as a practice of freedom articulated by Freire and Macedo. Yet, if we reframe this discourse to ask about young people as social theorists in their own right, what processes and spaces take center stage? If we think of spoken and written words as “flows from our reading of the world” that evidence our potential and actual abilities to critically read the world in order to transform it, we must interrogate the spaces where these processes occur. In other words, and to speak more directly to this dissertation, where are young people receiving their information about the world? Where and how are they producing texts that critique and challenge these messages about the world and their place in it? Luke’s definition of critical literacy takes into account the new technological landscape in his definition of critical literacy as “the use of the technologies of print and other media communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (p. 5).

Luke's words highlight approaches to critical literacy that include the expansion of education beyond canonical and literary texts to include works of popular culture and the broad range of "mediascapes" that contain ideologies that partially shape how we view ourselves and the world. This is the terrain of New Literacy theorists. Taking into account both social context and cultural diversity, researchers under this umbrella challenge teachers to consider how static definitions of literacy as well as classroom text marginalize non-dominant students (Morrell, 2002). From this perspective, all students are literate and the task of the pedagogue is to broaden her definitions of what counts as literate to accommodate the literacy skills students bring to the classroom (New London Group, 1996).

Mahiri (1998), for example, explored the connections between urban youth literacy practices and popular culture. His study suggested that critically engaging popular culture in classroom settings made classroom learning more relevant and connected to the learners in his study. Alveramnn, Hagood, and Moon (1999) demonstrated that students read popular cultural texts more critically and with more wisdom than researchers once assumed. Their intervention into literacy studies demonstrated the necessity for educators to draw on popular culture texts, since students' reading and writing both in and out of school draws on various genres and discourses of popular culture.

Morrell's (2002) work is instructive in this area. His early forays into explorations of popular culture as a site for classroom-based literacy work centered Hip-Hop texts (including lyrics and videos), popular films (such as *the Godfather*), and television (particularly the Democratic National Convention in 2000) as key sites for

students' readings of "the world and the word" that can be used as a springboard for reimagining what counts as text in a classroom setting. Such an approach not only brings students' literacy work into the classroom; it also allows teachers' to help forge students' identities as critically literate citizens.

This New Literacies Studies (NLS) perspective understands our age as one in which young people participate in popular culture in various spaces, including in print and online, and interpret and compose texts in a wide variety of fascinating new ways (Vasudevan & Hill, 2008). Myers (2006) describes new literacies as "evolving social practices that coalesce new digital tools along with old symbolic tools to achieve key motivating purposes for engagement in the literacy practices" (p. 62). As I have demonstrated above, NLS includes not only technical tools but also "a different mindset that emphasizes cultural and social relations that stem from valuing participation, collaboration, dispersion, and distributed expertise of literacy practices" (Hagood, 2009, p. 1). Though researchers have been doing this work in out-of-school spaces for more than a decade (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Hull, 2003; Hull & Nelson, 2005), understandings of how an NLS stance can inform classroom work are now emerging (Mahiri, 2011; Miller & McVee, 2012; Avila & Pandya, 2013). Recognizing the need to investigate the digital world of young people, including not only consumption but also production of texts, this line of research centers what Avila and Pandya (2013) call critical digital literacies. This work looks particularly at the digital landscapes of young people as new ground for better understanding their processes of production and consumption in the media age. According to Avila and Pandya (2013) critical literacies praxis has two underlying goals, "to investigate manifestations of power relations in texts, and to design,

and in some cases redesign, texts in ways that serve other, less powerful interests” (p. 2). From this view, critical literacies provide young people with the skills and tools they need (or already have) “to address social and educational inequalities and assist us in continuing to read the world, a world that is increasingly digital” (p. 2).

Clearly, the digital world has emerged as a site for classroom-based practice. This line of educational praxis seeks to bring critical readings of the (digital) world into students’ lives through critical pedagogy, defined by Shore (1992) as

Habits of thought, reading , writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (p. 129)

This comprehensive definition shows how critical pedagogy considers schooling in relation to a host of interlocking and overlapping systems of domination. Despite its influence in numerous fields, the overarching goal of liberation from oppressive social structures remains the focus of critical pedagogy. In this vein, Carlson and Dimitriadis argue for pedagogies that offer “new counternarratives of public education and public life that give new meaning to the democratic language of freedom, equity, social justice, and community” (2003, p. 3). What unites these definitions is the focus on education as a means to empower learners to “reclaim” what is lost through oppressive educational structures.

An offshoot of critical literacy studies, critical media literacy teaches “skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and

messages generated by media texts” (Kellner and Share, 2005, p. 372). Critical media literacy scholars argue that media is the predominant language of youth today, which means students must learn to develop critical literacy skills to read a broad range of media sources.

In many ways, critical media pedagogies (see Morrell et. al., 2013) can be seen as a culminating moment in research at the nexus of critical literacy, critical media literacy, and critical pedagogy. These approaches to classroom work aim to explicitly teach young people how to critique dominant media discourses as well as produce and circulate media texts that reflect both their lived worlds and their agency as young people invested in transforming the world. Morrell convincingly argues that

Critical literacy instruction needs to be fundamentally concerned with the consumption and production and distribution of texts; counter-texts that not only name the workings of power, but critical texts that serve as the manifestation of an alternate reality or not-yet-realized present that only enters into the imagination through the interaction with new and authentically liberating words that are created by writers as cultural workers. Critical pedagogues have necessarily focused on the critical consumption of dominant texts, but [I argue] for a change in focus from consumption to production- Critical Textual Production (CTP). Moving from a model of consumption to production in critical literacy instruction necessarily requires a synthesis or at least a meaningful dialogue between discourses of critical pedagogy and of rhetoric and composition as critical educators and writing instructors consider how it is that we teach students to construct texts that serve as counter-narratives to these dominant texts that they have gained the ability to deconstruct (2008, p. 115)

Morrell’s words recall Hull (2003) and Goodman (2003), both of whom centered media production as This approach to literacy as media critique can be especially useful for analyzing racialized and racist media discourses (Yosso, 2002). Merging Freirean critical consciousness with Critical Race Theory, Yosso (2002) analyzes the “visual deficit discourses” present in popular media representations of Latina/o youth,

particularly in relation to academic achievement, to argue for the centrality of critical race media literacy as a tool to build the critical reading skills necessary to allow students to challenge such media discourses.

Moving critical media literacy beyond reading and recognizing the dominant ideologies present in media scripts, scholars focus on the production of digital narratives that allow students to create and circulate media counternarratives (Hull, 2003; Goodman, 2003). The production process allows for source analysis, storytelling, and the “repurposing” of images and texts to tell a unique story that stresses “authorial agency” (Hull, 2003). In the process, students move beyond the realm of informed consumption, and into the field of critical production. It is this sense of agency that reconnects critical media literacy to its liberator roots in Freirean pedagogy.

In this literature review I have tried to point out the macro-level processes and micro-level realities of contemporary Black migration to the U.S., as well as the pedagogical strategies that offer new ways of understanding their experiences. In the next section I describe my “theoretical bricolage” that guides this study.

My Theoretical Bricolage

Theoretical bricoleurs, according to Denzin and Lincoln, “work through and between multiple theoretical paradigms” (quoted in Rogers, 2012, p. 6). Given that racism operates differently across continents and contexts, how best to analyze or interpret the explanatory power transnational black youth in the U.S. give to racism as they theorize and negotiate their social worlds across borders? In order to answer this question, I looked closely at my data many times and determined that, to conceive of and present

youth as social theorists in their own right, I had to account for the instances when their theorizing outstripped any singular theoretical framework. This approach to theorizing racism in education is similar to those advocated by Leonardo (2013) and Collins (2009). Therefore, I draw theoretical insight from critical race theories (CRT and postcolonial studies), transnational studies, and cultural studies.

According to Gordon (1995), “critical theory seeks to understand the origins and operation of repressive social structures. Critical theory is the critique of domination. It seeks to focus on a word becoming less free, to cast doubt on claims of technological scientific rationality, and then to imply that present configurations do not have to be as they are” (p. 190). Critical theorists attempt to discover why oppressive structures exist and offer criticisms of their effects for the purpose of proposing the ways in which society can be transformed. In this sense, critical theory is not simply a critique of social structures. It is also an analysis of power relations: what constitutes power? Who holds power? How is power utilized to benefit those already on power? (Jennings & Lynn, 2005)?

Critical race theorists argue that critical theory’s insistence on class as the preeminent analytical focus does not adequately explain or confront the problem of racism. The canonical texts of critical theory in education (Freire, 2007; Althusser, 1971; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977), though certainly not identical in their analysis of class in education, failed to systematically and/or comprehensively address racism. Althusser (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) focused on the correspondence between education and the reproduction of class relations (see also Anyon, 1980), with Bowles and Gintis explicitly viewing race relations as secondary to class relations. Willis’s

theory of resistance focused on the agentive aspects of class reproduction, arguing that the lads disqualified themselves from the credential game through their “choice” to laugh off schooling in favor of working class jobs post-graduation. Freire’s “colorblind” reading of oppression seems especially ironic considering the Brazilian peasant class so central to Freire’s work might be categorized as Black (see Leonardo, 2013, p. 23).

As Leonardo points out, “that race becomes the stepchild of class may be considered a conceptual form of White supremacy at the level of theory” (2013, p. 24). It is precisely this theoretical space that CRT addresses. Since Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) published their groundbreaking article, CRT has emerged as the dominant theoretical frame for analyzing racism in education. For critical race theorists, questions about power and education are read through race, or to be more precise, racism as a system of educational power and privilege. CRT’s central premise is that “structured racial oppression is an educational reality” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 14), and analyses bend toward tracking “racial realism”, or analyzing educational stakeholders’ lived experiences as racialized bodies. This is not to suggest that CRT does not engage racism and its intersections with gender, sexual preference, class, migration status, and so on. Indeed, these intersections of race and other identity categories are a central tenant of CRT (see Crenshaw, 1991). Racism, however, emerges as the central social condition through which power and privilege are accessed and denied.

Within the field of education, CRT has been defined as “an interdisciplinary attempt to approach educational problems and questions from the perspectives of Women and Men of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 1998). Critical race theorists analyze educational sites to demonstrate how racism is endemic and ingrained in American life and

emphasize that schooling plays an important role in hegemony, but also exists as an entity that can be used to help dismantle this same hegemony.

CRT has been influential in American and, to a lesser extent, European, Australian, and South African educational contexts. However, “third world” scholars tend to draw on postcolonial theory to describe many of the same processes of how racial hierarchies are made and maintained through various educational structures and practices as well as media representations and other popular discourses. Given that, in many ways, both CRT and postcolonial studies seek to describe similar social processes through which racial, ethnic, national, and gendered differences are lived (though through discrete genealogies). In this study I draw on both CRT and postcolonial studies to examine how race and racism as lived experiences look like in different contexts.

In light of Ladson Billings’ (2006) call for the “second generation” of CRT scholarship to become more international in focus, I argue that adding a transnational and postcolonial dimension to the CRT framework is necessary to address the experiences and meanings of race and racism in the lives of the youth in this study. In order to center their negotiations of racism and education in general, it is necessary to move beyond an American centered framework and consider other factors, like transnational subjectivities.

In Bhabba’s (1994) words, “Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the conquest for political and social authority” (p. 171). Like CRT, postcolonial theory draws on critical theory to interpret how Western discourses have constructed the marginalized Other in colonized postcolonized areas such as many countries in Africa and the Caribbean. Much like

CRT, postcolonial theorists insist on racializing the language and practice of critical theory, or insisting on critical theory as an antiracist project. For this study, I draw on the postcolonial tradition of analyzing how and why Africa and Haiti (mis)represented for the purposes of neocolonial or neoimperial control. As will become clear in the data chapters of this dissertation, students' articulations of the neocolonial aspects of "rebuilding" projects in Haiti, as well as the (mis)representations of Africa in mainstream media represent precisely this type of postcolonial theorizing.

Much like postcolonial studies, cultural studies insists on interrogating racial representation. For cultural theorists, the language of representation goes beyond the spoken word to include texts, gestures, glances, and images. This tapestry of languages is understood as the fabric of meaning (Hall, 2003). Thus, we might think of representation "the production of meaning through language" (p. 16), or languages that we all read and interpret to understand ourselves and each other. It is through the language that we read, describe, categorize, and rank the people in our social worlds. In particular, in the "mass media" we find dominant representational paradigms that contain various worldviews and ideologies (or languages, in Hall's terms) that shape how we are "known". For Hall, cultural meaning is established through difference. For example, racial identities work through their relational properties, so that Blackness and Whiteness are not autonomous but rather interdependent and complementary categories. As Hall makes clear, "Representations are not incidental to reality or imperfect renderings of it. They constitute that reality as they offer racial subjects a way into it" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 115).

Thus, cultural theorists view race as a field of representation, "where power is defined as the ability to control its intelligibility" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 116). If racial

representations and discourses require upkeep and reproduction in order to sustain their meaning and power, the classroom emerges as a site where such work occurs. This will become clear in the data chapters that follow, in which students use the classroom as a space to produce and circulate a counter-discourse of African and Haitian personhood, and challenge teachers' and researchers' attempts to make Trayvon Martin intelligible.

Transnational Studies as a research paradigm developed from an understanding of the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. The myth of the disconnected immigrant was debunked by Caribbean transnationals who resided in the U.S. but maintained incredibly close contacts with their birth countries (Glick Schiller and Founon, 2001). As a result, research focusing on international migration has relied on the notion of transnationalism to understand how people forge and sustain cross-border and global connections in the process of migration. The philosophical foundation of Transnational Studies (TS) begins with the “metaphysical assumption that social worlds are lives are inherently transnational” (Khagram and Levitt, 2007, p. 2). From this perspective, transnational dynamics are rules rather than assumptions. They argue that TS calls for researchers to create research designs and methodologies that generate “new types of data, evidence, and observations that more accurately and rigorously capture transnational realities” (p. 2), which I do in this study. The theoretical foundation of transnational studies “formulates explanations and crafts interpretations that parallel, complement, supplement, or are integrated into theoretical existing frameworks” (p. 4). The transnational perspective, therefore, creates space to imagine and practice social change and transformation by disavowing the assumption that most social processes are bounded and bordered (Glick Schiller and Founon, 2001).

In addition, transnational research asks how the identities of individuals and groups of people are negotiated within the social worlds that span more than one place (Lam, 2006). Increasingly, people are exposed to cultural values, social expectations, and patterns of human interaction that are not confined to a single socioeconomic and political system.

The ways in which media and migration have created complex transnational social fields leads researchers to propose a view of society that goes beyond the view that takes "rootedness and incorporation in the nation-state as the norm and social identities and practices enacted across state boundaries as out of the ordinary" (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1007). Because of the shifting boundaries of social life caused by global cultural flows and migration, Lam (2006) calls on educational researchers to ask new questions about forms of participation and learning among migrant student populations. According to Lam (2006) such questions would ultimately involve "how we understand and value the cross-border connections, perspectives, and cultural, economic, and linguistic resources that immigrant students may develop and contribute as part of society in an interdependent world" (p. 226).

Again, this bricolage of racial theorization is necessary into order to understand the complex social worlds and frames of reference of the young people in this study. As will become clear, their experiences navigating life as young Black people in the United States certainly reminds us that racism is, perhaps, everywhere all the time, and that their counterstories (a staple of CRT I will explain later) call attention to epistemologies that are often ignored. As global Black citizens, their experiences with racism demand that we look beyond the "theoretical nationalism" of CRT, while their critiques of global

governing organizations such as the U.N. and INGOs recall the tenants of postcolonial theory. At the same time, their work as cultural consumers and producers of media texts ask us to consider the power of racial representations. Finally, the various ways in which their ways of knowing can be defined as transnational calls for an understanding of antiracist practice that takes these subjectivities into account.

In this chapter I reviewed the literature that is relevant to this study, focusing on globalization as a significant factor in shaping recent black migration, as well as the challenges these migrants face in the U.S. I then introduced my theoretical framework. In the next chapter, I introduce my research methods and research context.

Chapter Three

Research Plan

In the preceding chapters I argued that, despite a steadily increasing visible presence in the United States, the knowledge, voices, and experiences of transnational black youth remain under-represented in education research. Literature pertaining to “transnational blackness” (Marable and Jones, 2008) demonstrates how black migration has destabilized the meaning of blackness in the United States, while reaffirming the psychological and material costs of racism (Hintzen and Rahier, 2003). This led me to the following overarching research question: How can the explanatory power given to race and racism by transnational black youth inform educational theory and practice?

What follows is a description of the research methodology and data collection methods that guided my inquiry. I begin by discussing my research design, and then offer a description of my research site and methods of data collection and analysis.

Research Design: A Transnational Critical Race Inquiry

Critical researchers share a set of value orientations and epistemological commitments (Carspecken, 1996). On the one hand, critical theorists find contemporary society to be subtly or overtly oppressive and view research as a crucial part of overall liberation projects. The focus tends to be on unequal social structures, power, culture, and human agency as key to understanding and changing dynamic oppressive situations. Critical research also involves critical epistemology, or an exploration of the power dynamics essential to understanding whose knowledge counts and whose is discounted (Carspecken, 1996). From this perspective, ways of researching, theorizing, and understanding social relations require a commitment to exploring “the power-knowledge

nexus out of which truths emerge” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 9). Facts, therefore, are never neutral; social science is never objective. Instead, truths are always embedded within power relations that privilege some voices while marginalizing or silencing others.

This value orientation and epistemological standpoint has a long history in critical race inquiries, which draw on a long tradition of “racial vindication” scholarship that developed in response to the ways black people are depicted in scholarship and public discourse (Mahon, 2008). The racial vindication stance emerged as a reaction to “racist assertions that Africans are degraded savages, that Africans and African Americans have no culture, that Blacks are inherently inferior, and that miscegenation is degenerative to whites and white culture” (Harrison & Harrison, 1980; quoted in Mahon, 2008, p. 117). These projects were in many ways about overturning the meanings associated with blackness and argued for “the validity of black culture while developing a socially and economically critique of the power relations that marginalized black people” (Mahon, 2008, p. 117). Such a stance challenges the false, flawed and degrading theoretical propositions that have historically guided the study of black people (among others) in public and academic spaces and demands alternative representations of Africa and Africans.

Critical race inquiries are traditionally concerned with racially-focused power relationships and serve as a tool for examining how race and racism influence people’s particular circumstances. The racial lens applied to critical inquiry means that race often emerges at the forefront of investigating the interpretations participants make of experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

The transnational paradigm begins with the metaphysical assumption that social

worlds and lives are inherently transnational (Khagram & Levitt, 2007). This research stance requires “an epistemological lens or way of researching, theorizing, and understanding social relations that allows analysts to uncover and explain the transnational dynamics in which bounded and bordered entities are embedded and by which the latter are constituted” (Khagram & Levitt, 2007, p. 2). Transnational approaches complement conventional theories by identifying and analyzing previously obscured kinds of phenomena and dynamics. While critical race inquiries in education have certainly called attention to the continuing significance of race in virtually all educational settings, I believe a transnational approach to critical race inquiries is necessary to reflect the specific ways in which an analysis of black migration might reframe our understanding of racialization processes in educational settings. Put simply, this research demonstrates that black immigrant students offer ways of knowing and understanding social relations that require integrating a transnational perspective into critical race inquiries in education. Critical race inquiries point out the material, structural and discursive forms of racism and racial privilege in U.S. society. Combining these theoretical approaches provided the theoretical framework that accounts for the “changing same” of the dynamics of black subjectivity with an account of how America’s newest black subjects negotiate long-existing racial hierarchies.

Critical Race Ethnography from a Transnational Perspective

Ethnography allows researchers to study a particular context in depth and to explore how people understand, explain and produce what happens in that context. This approach involves the ethnographer participating in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and

collecting data to shed light on issues that guide the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003). While the technical aspects of “doing” ethnography involve selecting people to interview, transcribing interviews, taking field notes and so forth, as an “intellectual effort,” it allows researchers to obtain a “thick description” of a particular context (Geertz, 2000, p. 6). Geertz (2000) argues that the “aim” of an ethnographic research project is “to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts” and the goal is to “support broad assertions...by engaging...with complex specifics” (p. 28).

What distinguishes ethnographic research from other methods of qualitative inquiry is the commitment to analyzing culture or parts of culture from the point of view of cultural insiders. This allows ethnographers to generate and build theories of culture- or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave- situated in local time and space (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

In this post-structural moment, ethnographers understand that language and speech create experience, and therefore the meaning of subjects’ words and experiences are always in motion. Thus, ethnographic research can never be a final word or definite accurate description on what is meant or said. Research artifacts such as a dissertation (and the data that comprises it) are only textual representations of different experiences (Denzin, 1997). Thus, according to Denzin, the language of ethnography has moved from authoritative and timeless to “personal, emotional, biographically specific, and minimalist in its use of theoretical terms” (quoted in Morrell, 2008, p. 10). This requires me to not run from my position. Better to stand and face it and be clear that my subjectivity is entangled in the texts I present.

Morrell (2008) goes on to explain that since no method or status of the researcher

has the power to confer authority onto a text; “the authority must emerge from the text itself” (p. 11). The reader, therefore, confers authority onto a text. I will quote Morrell at length to explain how I as an ethnographer can construct narratives fully invested with my own emotional, fallible position. Drawing on Geertz (2000), Morrell explains, Ethnographers can eschew claims to impartiality, distance, or objectivity that interfere with the telling of the only narrative they have ownership of: that of their own relationship to the stories they present; stories that they ideally present with all of their honesty, with all of the facts they can remember or reclaim, with wit, with creativity, and with passion. They simply tell the stories the best they can and, in telling honest, accurate, and compelling stories, add to collective conversations and play a small role in illuminating the human condition in a time of interfacing and border crossing in which such illuminations are badly needed (2008, p. 10)

As a critical ethnographer, therefore, I bring my critical value orientation and epistemology to ethnographic research. Critical ethnography, according to Madison (2012), begins with an “ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within the particular *lived* domain” (p. 5). Such an approach attempts to disrupt the status quo by questioning received wisdom and unsettling assumptions by highlighting relations of power (Jones, 2010).

For all the reasons I have tried to articulate for the last 80 pages, this leads me to Critical Race Ethnography (CRE), an approach to ethnographic research that builds on critical ethnography and critical race theory by applying ethnographic methods to analyze the day-to-day production of racial difference and meanings in school settings. In particular CRE is an approach to ethnography that explores intersections of race, time, justice, and education (Duncan, 2005), all of which are central to this study. Specifically, Duncan (2005) argues that allochronic discourses justify material inequality in American education. Allochronism refers to the practice of seeing one population as chronically

“behind” another. He argues that perceptions of black youth (i.e., African American; see Duncan, 2002, 2005) as criminal and less intelligent than their white counterparts are a current manifestation of historical discourses that link Africa and African-descended people to notions of backwardness or *less than* their white counterparts. This discourse justifies the allochronic material conditions of many schools with large populations of black students. He points to outdated textbooks, computers, and science equipment as proof.

While this study is not about unequal material conditions (in fact, in many ways it’s the opposite), the spirit of CRE provided valuable insight. Given that images of atavism and absence frame the way students from Africa and Haiti are perceived and treated by students and peers alike, questions of time and justice emerge as central. In addition, since the youth in this study are racialized as black and self-identify as black, African, or Haitian, their experiences in the U.S. reveal the machinations of 21st century anti-Black racism, while their theorizing about their lives in Africa and Haiti shows racism as a global phenomenon. As this dissertation will show, the students in my study continually battled to be perceived as fully human, as occupants of the same present time, not from a primitive past.

A Classroom-Level Case Study

Dressman and McCarthy (2011) convincingly argue that one of the greatest epistemological strengths of case study research is its “capacity to interrupt stereotypical assumptions about groups of students and settings, thus refining the normative findings of experimental and formative research (and accounting for the many exceptional cases that are often not reported in such studies) as well as suggesting new relationships among

important social factors” (p. 213). These authors go on to explain how theory and method can strengthen each other. While the ethnographic research design gave me an understanding of how a particular “culture-sharing group” (transnational black youth) negotiated race and racism in an American high school, the majority of research was conducted in one classroom. While the data presented in this study certainly transcend how knowledge and understanding are constructed in one classroom, in many ways my relationships with the students were forged in one classroom. In this sense, I view Mr. D’s classroom as the “bounded system” (i.e., the setting and context; see Creswell, 2007) where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork made and sustained the relationships necessary to carry out this study.

Case study research allows researchers to focus on an issue or set of issues and explore them in-depth in one setting (Creswell, 2007). Given my interest in understanding how transnational black youth can reframe what entails culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2000), the processes I explore in this study called for an in-depth focus in one classroom, in which the teacher was committed to engaging this type of pedagogical challenge, and in many ways was already putting it into practice. In the next section, I show how Mr. D’s emphasis on curriculum as a racial text provided the context to carry out a case study approach.

Research Context

Westerville Township

In November 2010 the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction of Westerville School District (WSD) characterized WSD as follows:

Twenty years ago the demographics [of WSD] were easy to describe...white,

middle-class homeowners. A key descriptor for the community was “stable” and it was used to preface almost every comment made about the community and its citizens. Today Westerville, through its students, presents a very different picture. A picture of an ever-changing and increasingly diverse population: 42% African American, 39% White, 14% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Hispanic. Some of our schools experience annual mobility rates that approach 40% and the new descriptors ‘unstable and transient.’ (Smith, 2010)

As these comments indicate, the changing demographics of Westerville High mirror a larger anxiety about the changing demographics in Westerville over the last twenty years. Due its geographical location and changing social characteristics, Westerville is a metaphorical and literal border town that separates the city of Philadelphia from its suburban townships. This perception of Westerville carries over to representations of the Township in public discourse. As one local food critic writes,

Most people—sane rational people who don’t regularly slap on the metaphoric pith helmet to go spelunking through alien neighborhoods for roast duck and tacos on a Saturday night—basically think of two things when they think of Westerville: the Hi-Point Theater, and crime. Both are there, it’s true...For one last hit of foreign latitudes grab some wheels (steal them if you have to; it is Westerville, after all), and head down to Juan’s Taco Take-out. (Westerville County Times, March 15th, 2012)

This sketch of a crime-ridden, “alien” city situates Westerville within the geo-social context of suburban Philadelphia. By describing Westerville as laden with “alien” neighborhoods serving up authentic Asian and Mexican cuisine, he seems intent on giving readers a sense of the otherworldly, dangerous, exotic (not to mention cheap and authentic) world that can be accessed by crossing into Westerville.

Given the demographics of Westerville in comparison to its neighboring suburban townships, the food bloggers use of “alien” has particular meaning. The Philadelphia metropolitan area has been described as a reemerging gateway in reference to the region’s revival as a destination for immigrating populations from across the globe

(Singer, Vitiello, Katz, & Park, 2008). Over 500,000 foreign-born people now call the region home. The demographics of the region have shifted recently and rapidly, as 60% of this population has arrived in the United States since 1990. Compared to its neighboring suburban townships, Westerville is home to many that some describe as “alien”. As a Federally-designated refugee resettlement area, many of the Delaware Valley’s 33,000 officially recognized refugees who have arrived since the mid-1980s have settled in Westerville, with refugees from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, and more recently Liberia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Haiti, and Sudan adding to the Township’s new diversity. Apart from its refugee population, its relatively low cost of living and large size make it a more affordable and urban option than other townships in the area. Taken together, these factors have partly contributed to Westerville’s changing demographics. In the last twenty years, Westerville’s immigrant population has grown to an estimated 15-20% of its total population of approximately 85,000 (Singer, Vitiello, Katz, & Park, 2008).

An incident at a varsity basketball game at Westerville High in December 2009 demonstrates that, along with being perceived as “alien” territory, Westerville’s history of a large, relatively poor, white population serves as another way the Township is ranked in the region. *The Westerville Times* describes banter between students at Westerville and a nearby rival, Upper Greenhill High. During the game, chants such as “Merry Christmas” by Upper Greenhill students and responses like “Happy Chanukah” from Westerville students referenced the long-standing perceptions of religious affiliations in the two townships. When Upper Greenhill students chanted “SAT Scores!!” and “Dirtyville!!” a small group of teenagers, allegedly from Westerville High, responded,

yelling “Warm up the ovens” and, “We’ll write you letters when you’re in Auschwitz”. This event is noteworthy, as the media coverage and editorial responses revealed a popular perception about Westerville students as ignorant “white trash” in relation to some of the other suburban townships in the region. In the days that followed the principal of Westerville High issued a written and public apology to Upper Greenfield and promised that workshops would follow. In local and national news outlets, the incident was largely and rightfully framed as the kind of hate speech that snaps us from the ether of everyday discursive violence. It demanded public apology. Yet, can chants of “Dirtyville” and “SAT scores” be understood as the micro-aggressive hate speech that is more commonly used to frame Others?

While Upper Greenhill students may have hurled “Dirtyville!!” in reference to debris, it seems more likely an insulting attempt to rank Westerville’s population in well-known hierarchies of humanity. Overall, Westerville is 56.6% White, 27.5% Black, 11.1% Asian, and 4.5% Latino. Over nine percent of the population lives below the poverty line. There is enough research literature to support that “Dirty” is a pejorative used to rank and marginalize Black residents, Native Americans, working class white people, and people (especially Black and Brown people) born outside the United States. In relation to Upper Greenhill and some other large suburban townships, Westerville is certainly “the other side of the tracks”, and it seems possible that “Dirtyville” refers to a combination of race, class and immigration. Westerville’s median household income of \$41,489 dollars is well below the adjacent counties, and about half of Upper Greenhill (\$86, 373).

The student census poverty rate of the WSD is just over 18%. Forty-four percent of

the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. In comparison, Greenhill's student census poverty rate and free and reduced eligible populations are 4.5%, and 6.8% respectively, and Greenhill is one of the state's top-funded districts. WSD also has a much higher minority population than adjacent townships. Nearly 59% of WSD's students are minorities (42% African American; 4% Hispanic; 13% Asian). In comparison, Greenhill township's total minority student populations is just under 20%. There is also a perception in the region that Westerville's white population is largely "white trash". This sentiment is captured in the "Dirtyville" chant, as well as references to Westerville in numerous media sources. In urbandictionary.com, for example, the entries for Westerville read as follows:

The biggest dump other then (sic) the city of Philly that has gone down hill due to assholes, hookers, low lives, bums, drugies (sic) and the dealers...a town full of whores, cheap hookers, drugs, beer, assholes, dickfaces...it is called Dirtyville because its full of scum, and roughly 2 of 3 girls are pregnant. Only about 5% of the Westerville population take showers on a regular basis, and all these facts lead to the nickname (urbandictionary.com).

Combined with Westerville's immigrant population, it becomes clearer how "Dirtyville" can be understood as a reminder of Westerville's "place" in suburban Philadelphia.

Westerville School District (WSD)

Over the past 20 years, the Westerville School District has grown from 7,500 to 12,150 students, making it the largest school system in its county and the fourth largest in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This growth is mainly due to the Township's changing demographics: WSD is amazingly diverse. Its 12,000 students attending its 14 schools come from over 70 different countries and speak over 80 languages. The district

educates over 700 English Language Learners from 73 countries of origin who speak 79 languages, with the top five languages today being Spanish, Bengali, Vietnamese, Punjabi, and Chinese (Smith, 2010).

The change in its student population has altered the way the district imagines itself. Says Brenda Keller, director of student psychological services “we fancied ourselves a suburban school district” until the demographic changes in the school district led to a host of schooling issues which the district felt ill-equipped to handle (NPR, March, 2012).

WSD’s per pupil spending of \$10,885 is 11% lower than the state average and almost identical to the city of Philadelphia (\$10,828). In comparison, Upper Greenhill’s \$21,100 per pupil spending is 72% above the state average and first in the state.

Westerville High School

Westerville High School (WHS) is one of the largest high schools in Pennsylvania. It has approximately 3,800 students, with the Black and White student populations at approximately 1,500 students each. Latino/a, Asian, and Native American students account for the remaining 800 students. Thirty-five percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics). The racial categorization masks WHS’s ethnic and national diversity. Like the District, WHS serves an incredibly diverse student population. It has fifty-five recognized nationalities and one of the largest ESL programs in the state (National Center for Education Statistics).

Because official demographics do not recognize black immigrant students by geographic origin or national identity, official numbers are unattainable. However, both adults and students at WHS acknowledge their growing presence, especially since the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan during the 1990s. More recently, these

students have been joined by students from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, as well as a growing student population from Haiti after the devastating earthquake in January 2010 left Port au Prince, the country's capital city, largely uninhabitable. Together, these black immigrant students are a growing presence at WHS and represent an ever-growing and visible segment of the school's black student population.

Mr. D's Class

Mr. D was well-respected by every student I interviewed for this study. A common refrain from students was, "Mr. D is the best", a reference to the mutual respect that was the foundation for the relaxed, safe, and comfortable classroom environment. Throughout the research process I viewed Mr. D's class as space that worked through Morrell's "access and dissent" model (2005). His sense of critical English education (Morrell, 2005) had the simultaneous goals of academic (and professional) access and social justice.

Mr. D's Journey to ELL

Mr. D was a veteran English teacher at WHS. About seven years ago, after hearing the stories of Sudanese refugee students new to WHS, he chose to transition from teaching "regular" English classes to English Language Learners (ELL) English classes. As Mr. D told the class one day, he was moved by the students' stories of survival of escaping genocide, walking for days through the desert, and finally finding safety in Westerville.

When Mr. D began teaching African students, he took it upon himself to learn more about the places they were from and the lives they lived in Africa. The students in

this study noticed and appreciated Mr. D's knowledge about Africa and his curiosity sincere curiosity and concern about Haiti in the wake of the earthquake. He took the time to learn about both regions and integrated both into this teaching repertoire. On many occasions he used "Liberian English" as Krio as teaching tools in his classroom and also invited Liberian students to use sayings from their language as teaching tools for the whole class.

When I asked Mr. D where he learned about Africa, outside of the experiences of his students, he mentioned having read *What is the What*, the story of the "Lost Boys of Sudan", and the French film *Johnny English* about war in an unnamed French speaking African country. From teaching his students, Mr. D has gained a sense of differences within and between Black populations. As he told me, "I've taught both [African students and African American students] so I've seen some of the stuff that comes up, the stereotypes they have about each other".

A New Literacies Stance

Bailey (2012) describes a new literacies stance as an orientation towards teaching and learning in which the teacher embraces the dialogic and collaborative construction of knowledge, inquiry-based learning, as well as multimodal consumption and production of texts. As a self-described "technology addict" with a passion for computers, movies, and making documentary films using iMovie, Mr. D certainly approaches teaching from a new literacies perspective. In my two school years (18 months) of participant observation in Mr. D's class, I was surprised and pleased at the extent to which a new literacies approach was embedded in his teaching. Chavez and Soep (2005) posit that a "pedagogy of collegiality" is characterized by successful adult-youth collaboration

around new media practices. During the multimodal composing process that I describe in chapter four, this type of collegiality was evident. In this project and other assignments as well, Mr. D regularly encouraged students to identify themes that elicited both emotional involvement and cooperation, hallmarks of Freire's theory of emancipatory education (Freire, 1970).

Curriculum as Racial Text

According to Carbado (2002), race does not exist “‘out there’, ontologically prior to its production and instantiation in discourses”. As sites of racial discourse, schools teach students about race and also teach students “how to be raced” (Carbado, 2002). He therefore posits that race is a “grammar” that “structures the experiences of, and interactions between, students and teachers (p. 181).

Rather than avoiding conversations about racism, a common practice among white high school English teachers (Godley, 2013), Mr. D embraced these moments in the classroom and in many ways discussing race and racism (as well as other identifications and social issues) was integral to his pedagogy. Mr. D described his class as “a history of big ideas and current issues”. As seniors, students in Mr. D's class are not subjected to statewide tests as frequently or aggressively as other students, and as a veteran teacher Mr. D has the advantage of curricular freedom. For the last two school years, justice has emerged as the red thread that bound texts, discussions, and projects, with many of the course readings directly addressing racism. For example, a poetry unit featured works by Langston Hughes, including *Dream Deferred*, *I, too*, *Sing America*, and *Democracy*, all of which invite readers to consider the ironies and realities of racism in America.

Students read and watched versions of Langston Hughes' *Thank You Ma'am* and Reginald Rose's *12 Angry Men*, readings and films Mr. D uses to compare and contrast different models of justice. *12 Angry Men* was one of the first teleplays written and produced for the new medium of television in 1954. *12 Angry Men* originally aired on September 20th, 1954, less than four months after *Brown v. Board of Education* decision changed the course of American history and racial ideology by banning racial segregation in public places. This move from de jure to de facto racial segregation coincided with a Post-War immigration panic: the "air born invasion" of Puerto Ricans to New York City, representative of a crucial period in American racialization and migration history (Briggs, 2005). Salient issues in *12 Angry Men* include the racial and ethnic profiling of a Puerto Rican teen accused of murder, and the centrality of rational, color-blind liberal jurisprudence in reestablishing core American values during this period of racial, ideological and demographic shifts. *Thank You Ma'am*, on the other hand, is a short story centering on an attempted purse snatching and the ensuing relationship between the young black purse-snatcher and the motherly victim. Mr. D uses the two texts to compare and contrast typologies of justice.

Students also read and watched *Persepolis*, a graphic novel and animated film about a young girl growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution of that late 1970s, and her subsequent exile into Europe and return to Iran. Class discussions focused on gender, class, and religion in relation to the notion of justice.

The tragic murder of Trayvon Martin in February 2012 was a crucial turning point in the research process, as the events inspired days of conversation,

theoretical and philosophical reflection, and media analysis, which I detail in chapter five.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Throughout the research process I employed a critical ethnographic approach. As I discussed in chapter two, this approach views research as inherently political and recognizes and embraces the ideological nature of research (Carspecken, 1996). My data collection methods included participant observation, audio and video recording of class sessions, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, details hand-written and typed fieldnotes, and collecting artifacts, meaning students' work (including journal entries, iMovies, and other written work). Mr. D and I also met informally and formally throughout the data collection phase to discuss lessons, reflect on classroom issues, and occasionally develop curriculum and plan lessons. I also interviewed Mr. D (two semistructured interviews) to gain a sense of his goals for particular lessons. I kept analytical memos throughout the process in order clarify my thinking and identify emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As a participant observer, I relied on unstructured and semi-structured interviews throughout the process. Unstructured interviews were used to gain insight on how students' perceived the issues in classroom texts and discussions, usually while they were occurring, during the 10-15 break in the middle of each class, or immediately after class. I relied on semi-structured interviews in order to understand experiences that took place outside of the classroom space but potentially affected how students interpreted classroom material and made sense of the social worlds in the U.S.

Along with fieldnotes, videonotes, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, student work was an important source of data for this study. Students' autobiographical narratives were collected to gain an understanding of how students narrated their lives in Africa and Haiti as well as their transitions to the U.S. The digital data, including a blog site and iMovies, were also crucial sites of students' identity work and cultural productions and representations. I kept regular tabs on the blog site and integrated these posts into the other data sources.

Analysis

According to Hatch (2002), interpretive analysis is about "making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what's going on within them. It's about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons" (p. 180). Hatch stresses that interpretation situates the researcher in the research process and therefore, interpretations have multiple meanings depending on who is doing the research and interpretation. My interpretive strategy involved reviewing data sources regularly throughout the data collection phase and analytical phase of the research process. After an initial reading of the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, blog site and watching the video data, I turned again to memos to further identify and develop the emerging themes. I then coded the data and developed my initial organizational categories, which included "Discourses About Africa", "Discourses About Haiti", "Transition to the U.S.", "Racism", "Media Representation", "Justice", "Islam", and "Initial Experiences in U.S. Schools", and "Future". After "fracturing" the data (Maxwell, 2013), I developed theoretical categories under my organizational categories, such as "Student talk about Africa", "Teacher talk about

Africa”, (under “Discourses about Africa”), “Media Representations of Haiti” and “Mr. D on Racism”, “Students on Racism in the U.S.” (under “Racism”) to name a few examples. Based on this strategy, I elaborated some initial organizational categories, tabled a few for later analysis, and eliminated others.

According to Maxwell (2013), a limitation of this strategy is that “it replaces the original set of contextual relationships within an interview transcript or observational fieldnotes with a different, categorical structure” (p. 112). In order to address this, I also relied on connecting strategies, an approach that keeps the data in context rather than fragmenting and sorting data into categories. Therefore, each data chapter includes analytical categories, in which the data are more fractured and segmented into discrete categories, as well as longer “texts” or swaths of data, in an attempt highlight the dialogical nature of both data collection and the creation of knowledge, and preserve the context in which the data were collected.

Narratives are a central feature in critical qualitative research (McClaurin, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Duncan, 2005). Recognizing that many research techniques inadvertently marginalize and silence voices and epistemologies, critical qualitative researchers seek to “unearth” experiential knowledge to explore the experiences of marginalized people, with the belief that this leads to a better understanding of social reality. One way to access experiential knowledge is through analysis of counternarratives to dominant racial and national ideologies. Such counterstories can be used as “theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 23). Like Solórzano and Yosso (2002), Duncan (2005) stresses the importance of counternarratives.

According to Duncan, the stories of people of color are necessary to disrupt allochronic discourses. In his words, “racially particular, culture-centric, standpoint knowledge throws into relief the values, assumptions, categories and concepts that inform racist epistemologies” (p. 101). Based on these and other insights, my analytical strategy focused on “unearthing” such moments, meaning when students seemed to be criticizing dominant knowledge and representations about Africa and Haiti, as well as the United States.

My Role in the Research Process

If social scientists see ourselves as objective and neutral observers of the process of racial formation, we contribute to the illusion that race is natural, not in the sense that biology is natural but in the sense that it just happens. If we study racism and racialization as if we do not participate in the process, as if our work does not contribute to the narratives that shape our normative world, we tell a story that supports white supremacy’s claim that racial hierarchies just happen. We join the racist construction project (Lawrence, 2012, 254)

In ethnographic research, the researcher is the primary tool for collecting data (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). As such, I was not only studying how students came to theorize and understand race and racism; I was (co) constructing this knowledge with them. As I explained in my introductory chapter, my life experiences informed my sightlines as a researcher and content of the curriculum I occasionally taught in Mr. D’s class. As a participant-observer in Mr. D’s class, I spent two school years, or eighteen total months, immersed in the research setting; I was an active member of the classroom community. Over the course of two school years, I facilitated numerous discussions, including a series of lessons covering the tragic murder of Trayvon Martin and ensuing trial of George Zimmerman. I taught lessons connecting Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech to the Dream Act to explore connections between civil rights and

immigration. I led discussions using hip-hop lyrics to explore justifiable homicide in cases of domestic violence. I helped students interpret the Bill of Rights, relying on my conversational French and rudimentary Pular (more for comic relief than instructional value) to illustrate concepts such as the right to petition. In short, I participated in many aspects of the teaching and learning and process.

Though I spent most of my time in Mr. D's class, I occasionally shadowed students throughout the entire school day, giving me the opportunity to observe them in "mainstream" classrooms, as well as non-classroom school settings.

Limitations

Like every study, mine has imitations. First, my focus on race and racism obscures other factors in students' lives that potentially have more meaning to them than race and racism. Like everyone else, race is only a fraction of how students see themselves and only one factor that influences their social worlds. By focusing on race and racism, I clearly missed other opportunities to explore in depth a host of other identifications, practices, and social locations that inform their lives. Second, I rarely saw students outside of Mr. D's class, which limited my understanding of how they interacted with peers and teachers in other school settings, as well as how their out-of-school lives provide a deeper understanding of how race and racism affect their lives. Finally, by focusing only on transnational black youth I contributed to a fracturing of black identification that might be arbitrary (especially given my focus on race and racism) and left out the voices and experiences of black youth born and raised in the United States. Putting these multi-vocal young black voices into conversation would have offered a richer understanding and presentation of the 21st century machinations of

race and racism. Despite these limitations, I believe this study makes significant contributions to critical race studies in the field of education. By offering a sample of the macro-level social forces and micro-level interactions that inform blackness in 21st century America, I hope I have added to our understandings of the present and possible future of Africana Studies.

Chapter Four

Theorizing Beyond Disaster: Multimodal Storytelling as a Lesson Against White Supremacy

In this chapter I incorporate in school and out-of-school sites of storytelling, including a blog site, student-authored music lyrics, classroom artifacts (iMovies and autobiographical narrative) and interview data, to compile and analyze some stories transnational black youth tell about racism, cultural representation, and education, across modalities and national boundaries, to identify and challenge an aspect of global white supremacy that V.Y. Mudimbe (1994) famously labeled the colonial library-- an archive of stories told and retold about Africa (which I argue extend to Haiti) that amount to little more than caricature, constructed from “epistemic fantasies deeply entrenched in Europe’s social imaginary of its ultimate and most intimate other” (Zezeza, 2010, p. 77). The first section focuses on two young men from Haiti, whose stories illustrate a disjuncture between the “rebuilding” discourse in Haiti and their experiences with the United Nations and International NGOs in their home country¹⁰. The second section continues with their stories, as well as those of their African peers (particularly two young Muslim women), with stories of how students negotiate a powerful set of media representations and school-level discourses about Africa and Haiti that prefigure how they are “known” by many peers and teachers alike. Media production is a key component in new media education, and a growing body of academic research focuses on youth’s creative media production (for example, Hull & Nelson, 2005; Hill &

¹⁰ By “home country”, I mean where the students in this study resided for most if not all of their lives before they came to the United States. As of the time of this writing, most of the students in this study still live in the United States. As I will discuss in this dissertation, many of them imagine their future homes as thoroughly transnational.

Vasudevan, 2008; Kafai & Pepler, 2011; Rolon Dow, 2012). Hence, the final section is an ethnographic analysis of how students (co)produced and circulated “multimodal counternarratives” (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010) that counter the colonial library. The “ways of knowing” Africa and Haiti embedded in their multimodal counternarratives demonstrate how teachers and students can co-design antiracist, culturally responsive pedagogies.

Collins (2009) proposes a “domains of power” framework as a heuristic device for guiding investigations into how racism works *as a system of power*. She identifies four domains, summarized here:

Structural Domain

- Racial practices are organized through social institutions
- Racism functions as an autonomous system of power

Disciplinary Domain

- Organized through bureaucracies that rely on practices of surveillance
- Comprised of the rules and regulations of everyday life that uphold or challenge racial hierarchy

(Collins, 2009)

Cultural Domain

- Manufactures the ideas that justify racial hierarchy
- Works particularly through the media

Interpersonal Domain

- Shapes race relations among individuals in everyday life
- Involves social interactions where people accept and/or resist racial inequality

Collins (2009) draws on multiple theoretical perspectives to outline how racism as a system of power operates across multiple domains. I found the domains of power perspective invaluable because it offers a framework for understanding the macro- and micro-level explanatory power students give to racism. By this I mean the youth in this study articulate racism as part and parcel of macro-level social arrangements such as the U.N. occupation of Haiti, as well as the microaggressive comments about Africa that are

part of their compulsory education the United States. Collins (2009) also stresses that racism is simultaneously structured and resisted *within* each domain as well as *across* all four domains. In the first two sections my analysis bends toward students' interpretations of the (re)structuring process across domains. The final section presents a classroom-level case study of a multimedia storytelling project as a site of possible resistance.

The United Nations, International NGOs, and “Relief” in Haiti

We are on a voyage between the discredited but undead racial past and the much anticipated but far from realized racial future” (Winant, 2001, p. 6).

“Haiti still feels the hatred of racism. But we can change that.”
-Diop

Diop, a young man from Haiti who recently arrived in the United States, confirms the accuracy of Winant's racial coordinates. Arguably white supremacy has been publically discredited since the mid-20th century, yet the visceral hatred of racism haunts Haiti's present. In what follows I analyze Diop's and Pierre's stories about the U.N. and International NGOs in Haiti, with an emphasis on the explanatory power of racism and neocolonialism in each young man's discourse.

Appadurai (1990) argued that ideoscapes are often politically oriented images that reflect ideologies of states¹¹, as well as the counter-ideologies of movements seeking state power. These ideoscapes often incorporate the Enlightenment language of freedom, rights, sovereignty, and democracy. It is precisely this enlightenment language and the expectations attached to it that are the source of tension. I use the term disjuncture to describe the stark difference between the language of rights and democracy espoused by

¹¹ I view the U.N. and the INGOs currently in Haiti as states. For a detailed analysis of how these organizations have usurped and bypassed the Haitian government, see Bell, 2013

the U.N. and INGOs and each young man's experiences in Haiti. Both young men were born and raised in Haiti; both were eighteen-year-old seniors in high school at the time of data collection. Diop arrived in Westerville in January 2009 and Pierre a year later in January 2010, just after and because of the massive earthquake that devastated Haiti. Because Pierre's family is still in Haiti, he lives with Diop and his family. Therefore, these young men are close friends and helped each other navigate WHS. Through their autobiographical writings, essays on Haitian culture, and song lyrics, both young men position themselves as cultural critics and burgeoning public intellectuals, writing themselves into public discussions on Haiti's past, present, and future.

**“One of the things that's going to destroy this world is racism because you really don't know who is racist or who is not”
-Diop**

Diop's analysis of the destructive power of 21st century racism is evident in the stories that follow. Diop is named after the famous Senegalese cultural theorist, Cheikh Diop. Like his namesake, Diop identified as a writer and aspired to write professionally in the future (Interview, February 12th, 2012). In what follows he recalls acute events that represent what he describes as “the enduring hatred of racism” in 21st century Haiti:

I can remember from since I was starting to understand the world the United Nations had their own army in Haiti. I remember U.N. soldiers used to rape and abuse little boys and girls and videotape it to send to others. How can the United Nations let others get raped and allow kidnapping, just sitting in the country watching others get abused? How can you help when you become the one that no one can trust? When they were asked to live in the country it was not supposed to be like that. [The U.N.] didn't care about the country, they only care about themselves. How are they going to change the world if they can't change themselves? ...One of the things that is going to destroy this world is racism because you don't really know who is racist or who is not. (Blog post, May 6th, 2012)

Diop associates his conscientization, or heightened consciousness of injustice and inequalities surrounding him (Freire, 1970), with the U.N. occupation of Haiti that began in 2004, just after the coup d'état supported by the United States Marines that ended the presidency of Jean Bertrand Aristide¹². U.N. Resolution 1542 authorized the creation of MINUSTAH, the United Nations stabilization mission in Haiti. So began this moment in a chronic history of military occupation of Haiti, which continues into 2013 with 9,000 U.N. troops currently occupying the country. While many social theorists have analyzed the racist and imperial overtones of Aristide's deposal from an economic perspective¹³, Diop's critical stance calls attention the persistence of racism's destructive power on different terrain.

Diop is clear: if something doesn't change, racism is going to destroy this world. His evidence: the U.N. occupation of Haiti as an exemplar of 21st century racism, in which racism's destructive power resides in its disguises: "you really don't know who is racist or who is not". Particularly informative is how racism explains the disjuncture between Diop's expectations of the United Nations as an agent of social change, and a reality of the U.N. occupation: the numerous human rights violations committed by U.N. soldiers, including but not limited to sex-trafficking children. His is an insightful take on how racism, while disguising itself in the transformational language of "helping" and "changing the world", operates across structural and interpersonal domains. His

¹² The 2004 coup was the third time the U.S. military supported his overthrow.

¹³ Robinson (2007) and Farmer (2009) argue that the military overthrow was a response to Aristide's attempt to reconcile history by restructuring one part of the global economy: He proposed that France repay Haiti 21 billion USD, today's monetary equivalent of the 90 million gold francs Haiti was forced to pay France after winning her freedom in 1804.

expectations of the U.N. as an institution seem rooted in notions of trust, care, and social transformation. MINUSTAH's stated mission is in line with Diop's expectations, as "peacekeeping" and "protecting civilians [from] threats of physical violence", and "carrying out of the democratic process" are written into its mission statement (United Nations, 2004). From this perspective, MINUSTAH presents itself as a social institution committed to what Winant (2001) describes as a worldwide racial project committed to "partially institutionalized legal and social commitments to racial justice, universalism, pluralism, and democracy" (2001, p. 6), or a social institution that would work to transform structural racism.

Diop's analysis of sexual abuse in Haiti goes beyond a single atrocity, committed by a single individual, and speaks to a chronic, global phenomenon that he interprets through the lens of racism. Empirical studies consistently link U.N. occupation to a rise in sex trafficking and sexual assault of children in countries the U.N. occupies (Smith & Smith, 2011). What makes Diop's analysis especially informative is his focus on racism as the factor that explains this phenomenon. However, Diop cites acts of rape as evidence of the sins of racism within both individual U.N. soldiers and the U.N. as an institution. He recalls the case of Johnny Jean, a young Haitian man allegedly gang-raped by four U.N. peacekeepers, one of whom used his cell phone to record the assault. The video eventually surfaced on YouTube and sparked international protests and outrage, with people in Haiti and abroad calling for an immediate end to the U.N. occupation. Diop asks us to consider this event as behavior that the U.N., as an institution, "lets" happen. While he is clear that individual "U.N. soldiers...rape little boys and girls", he insists the U.N., as an institution, "let others get raped,...just sitting in

the country watching others get abused”. The U.N.’s passive, if not voyeuristic, character is evident here and Diop’s analysis is consistent with Collins’ (2009) position that racism often works as an autonomous system of power, allowing racialized practices to “just happen”.

While Diop’s claim that the U.N. “did nothing” can certainly be disputed¹⁴, his critique draws attention to individual and institutional failures on the part of the U.N., which he cites as evidence of 21st century racism working through the structural and interpersonal domains.

Diop went on to analyze the contradictory aspects of the global rebuilding project in Haiti:

Chike: So Diop you wrote, when the U.N. was asked to live in the country it wasn’t supposed to be like that. What do you think it was supposed to be like?

Diop: They were supposed to make things better. They were supposed to help us prosper but they didn’t.

Chike: And what would that look like?

Diop: Building things like roads and maybe schools. There are some good things happening now, like they’re building a hospital in Mirebalais¹⁵ and I saw they’re building the biggest university in the Caribbean there too. After the earthquake [the U.N.] spread diseases all over the country by polluting the river where I’m from [Mirebalais]. They tried to deny it was them but we know the truth...The world is very racist to Haiti. I don’t think they like us very much (Interview, June 4th , 2012)

Diop is from the town of Mirebalais in Central Haiti, where his father once served as the town’s Mayor (Interview June 4th, 2012). As he points out, Mirebalais is the site of institutional success, representing the “prosperous” aspects of post-earthquake

¹⁴ By 2007 the U.N. had expelled 114 peacekeepers from Haiti for paying for sex with Haitian men, women, boys, and girls (Smith and Smith, 2010)

¹⁵ Partners In Health just completed a state-of-the-art hospital there, and a new university is under construction.

(re)building. On the other hand, when MINUSTAH converted Mirebalais' crumbling jail into its regional home base it made the area ground zero for a health disaster when in 2010, in the wake of the earthquake, U.N. troops caused a cholera epidemic by dumping human waste into the Arbornite River, the largest river in Haiti and only source of water for many people in the Arbornite Valley Region, who rely on the Arbornite for bathing, washing clothes, irrigating crops, and drinking water. 8,000 Haitians have died from the cholera epidemic since 2010, another 531,000 made ill by the disease (Zabludovsky, 2013). Yet, despite photographic evidence of U.N. soldiers dumping truckloads of human waste into the Arbornite river and "irrefutable molecular evidence" (Zabludovsky, 2013) that United Nations troops carried the disease to Haiti, the United Nations declared itself legally immune from prosecution and has refused to pay any compensation to the victims (Zabludovsky, 2013).

Recall Collins' (2009) position that racism is simultaneously structured and resisted within each domain. Diop's belief that some good things are indeed happening, such as a hospital and university, seems to reflect a stance that historical racism can be partially deconstructed through such projects, by providing healthcare and education to a poor Black population long denied these basic rights (Aristide, 2004). However, Diop's claim, "we know the truth" about the cholera outbreak evidences, to him, the world's continuing racism towards Haiti. His stance is indicative of a paradoxical nature of 21st century racism, or his claim that "you really don't know who is racist or who is not".

Below he discusses MINUSTAH's continuing presence in Haiti, despite the mass protests across Haiti demanding their withdrawal after numerous sexual assault cases came to public attention, and the cholera outbreak. In critiquing the last decade of U.N.

occupation, Diop discusses the enduring power of occupation and the feelings of disempowerment that follow:

But now [MINUSTAH] is being asked to leave, they won't because they have the power right now. Put yourself in the place of a Haitian. How is it going to be for you when since you were a child, you watch your country falling apart with nothing you can do about it. Sometimes Haitian people are ashamed to tell people from other nations where they come from because they already know what they are going to say about it, "How come you want to see [other Haitians] perish?" They treat us like this because the Haitians were the first black nation to take their liberty. We still feel the hatred of racism. People are still dying because of their color, right now people are dying because of race or because of what they believe in. But we all can stop this. Why can't we all get along? (Blog post, May 6th, 2012)

To Diop, the U.N. "having the power" renders it partially responsible for Haiti's current condition. As the supposed agent of social transformation becomes the occupying force, Diop asks us to consider why Haiti "still feels the hatred of racism". From his perspective, MINUSTAH's continuing occupation of Haiti, as well as the human rights violations committed by U.N. soldiers, can only be understood within the context of the Haitian Revolution, through which Haiti became "the first black nation to take their liberty". In deftly connecting MINUSTAH's occupation, the Haitian Revolution, and the present-day hatred of racism, Diop argues that racism is first and foremost a system of power, best understood by analyzing its historical, structural and inter-personal manifestations (Collins, 2009). As such, racism as a system of power explains MINUSTAH's continued occupation, despite mass protests across Haiti calling for an end to its occupation, as well as the feelings of shame resulting from peoples' inability to change Haiti's present condition. For Diop, it is partially racism that prevents personal and institutional transformation. Instead of ameliorating Haiti's socio-economic

present through personal and/or institutional transformation, the U.N. continued the status quo of racist occupation, through the guise of transformation.

In asking his reader to empathize with Haitian citizens, or “put yourself in the place of a Haitian”, Diop draws attention to the interpersonal domain of racism, or the socio-emotional effects of the U.N. “having the power”. He theorizes that as the U.N. consolidates power, Haitian citizens feel powerless to stop what they know are rapidly deteriorating living conditions. In order to break racism’s hold, Diop suggests that what is needed is the type of empathy described by Tim Wise (2012):

Real empathy-- not the situational and utterly phony kind that most any of us can muster when social convention calls for it-- requires that one be able to place oneself in the shoes of another, and to consider the world as *they* must consider it. It requires that we be able to suspend our own culturally-ingrained disbelief long enough to explore the possibility that perhaps the world doesn’t work as *we* would have it, but rather as others have long insisted it did. Empathy, which is always among the first casualties of racist thinking, mandates our acceptance of the possibility that maybe it isn’t those long targeted by oppression who are exaggerating the problem or making the proverbial mountain out of a molehill, but rather *we* who have underestimated the gravity of racial domination and subordination...and reduced what are, in fact, Everest-sized peaks to ankle-high summits, and for our own purposes, rather than in the service of truth. (Wise, 2012, “Trayvon Martin, White Denial”)

Recall Diop’s suggestion that “we can all stop” racism. I believe his liberation theology, rooted in the work of Jean Bertrand Aristide and Martin Luther King, is the basis for how he thinks we can work towards Winant’s “racial future”. Much like Wise (2012), Diop is calling for *agape*, or empathetic love, as the basis for human solidarity and commitments to ending racism, which would improve Haiti’s condition. I will come back to Diop’s call for *agape* love as his fundamental l.a.w. (lesson against white supremacy) in the chapters that follow. Next, I turn to Pierre’s stories and the politics of representation in Haiti post-earthquake.

**“They write things about Haiti they know aren’t true”
-Pierre**

Stuart Hall (1998) asks, “What does it mean to take seriously, in our present conjuncture, the thought that cultural politics and questions of culture, of discourse, and of metaphor are absolutely deadly political questions?” (p. 290). One potential meaning: Pierre’s criticism of how NGO workers represent Haiti is just as life-saving as his work as a Red Cross volunteer in the days after the earthquake. Pierre, an aspiring emcee and music producer, described himself as “normal teenager” before the earthquake (Interview, June 4th, 2012). However, his experience saving lives might explain his extraordinary critique of International NGOs and the politics of representation in Haiti post-earthquake. Before I analyze Pierre’s critique of the “NGO Republic” in Haiti, I quote at length from his autobiographical narrative, *A Few Seconds, A Large Change*, in which he writes about his experiences. Doing so, I believe, provides valuable context:

It was the second day back from school after the Christmas holiday. Carnival was about to come and everybody was getting prepared. Me and Fabian were planning our hip hop show. At the end of the school day everyone was happy. People started saying, “Male na we demain”, which means “Bye, see you tomorrow”. At around 5 I heard this noise, coming closer and closer but fast, and I felt it stop and become stronger, so much so that I almost felt I should run as fast as I could. The steps of my house were kind of falling apart and it was like the floor was about to explode. I saw my Grandma praying. She told me to get on my knees, but I forgot how...

My mother was president of the Red Cross at Petion Ville, my hometown. The next morning we went to the Red Cross to set up a base. We started putting things together and trying to find people that were injured. Many were scared and came to get help. But there were some that were so bad that we couldn’t tell them that it was hopeless. I remember a young boy, like it was yesterday. He lost part of his face and on the back of his head you could see the inside. I think he was seven and half of his face was gone. Some of the doctors were sorry for him because they said he wasn’t going to survive. After a few hours I got home to no electricity. I was tired but I was too scared to go to sleep, so I decided to go back to the base. On my way my dad called me. Again, I was scared that it was bad news, but he was just asking how I felt. Then I saw a woman that saw my Red Cross badge and asked me for help. I told her I couldn’t help her and she

started cursing at me. I tried to tell her that the Red Cross had a protocol, that I couldn't help her by myself in case something went bad. I promised her that I would send some people to get her help. It was getting dark. We were trying to help transport some victims of the tragedy, but there were so many of them that some would have to come back the next day. I went home and took a bath.

The next morning things started to get worse. People were starting to run out of food. This was very bad because all of the supermarkets were closed. To make it even worse, my cell phone battery was almost dead. It was almost the same for everybody. Soon we wouldn't be able to call and communicate with our families, and find help for people, and so many people were still missing. The dead bodies started to decompose. It was starting to get hard to breathe and dangerous because of disease. We had water delivered to the base and we gave some to people who were volunteering. After a few minutes my mother called me to go with a group of people to get a young woman who had left the clinic with her baby. If she didn't get help fast, we were going to have to amputate her hand. It took a long time to find her, but we did. Her little girl was very hot, with a high fever. We found out the mother was giving her bad medications, so we sent her to the hospital.

Aside from being an incredible first-person narrative that could probably stand as a dissertation in its own right, Pierre's narrative tells us how young black Haitian men like himself, typically cast in media narratives and NGO reports as rapists and looters in post-earthquake Haiti (King, 2011), also worked as frontline relief workers and lifesavers. On its own, therefore, his narrative challenges a dominant story about young Black men in Haiti. When coupled with his critique of the "development discourse" (Escobar, 1995) in Haiti, Pierre's storytelling challenges dominant representations on another front. Pierre has a unique perspective on the politics of rebuilding Haiti. In ways similar to how Diop viewed the United Nations as an occupying force rather than a benevolent presence, Pierre offers the following critique of United Nations employees, and other aid workers, in post-earthquake Haiti.

All over Haiti you see [NGO workers], most of them are white Europeans or Americans. I won't say all of them, but most of them. I know their houses, I know the neighborhoods where they live. They live in the most beautiful houses in the Caribbean, or at least in Haiti. Their kids go to the perfect schools. They party all the time, then try to tell something about Haiti they know isn't true. Like now, [they're] telling me [they're]

going to write a report about Haiti and only write about the bad parts, when [they] know there's another side of Haiti because [they] see it every day... In Haiti I see the U.N. workers all over the place that drive around in air-conditioned cars and never even get out or roll the window down, because [they] tell me the smell makes them sick. Then they're saying they 'know' Haiti! (Interview, March 19th, 2012)

As Bell (2013) argues, Haiti's current redevelopment is not principally about infrastructure, buildings, projects, or money; it is about power: "who gets to control what the future nation looks like" (p. 5). A crucial aspect of controlling "the look" of Haiti is the power to represent the nation to the rest of the world. Pierre views this project of representation as the work of primarily (but not exclusively) Europeans and Americans with a stake in constructing a discourse about Haiti that relies *exclusively* on stories of disaster. Particularly insightful is Pierre's use of the word "know" on multiple occasions, which I believe represents a key tension in his story. First, because of his intimate knowledge of the neighborhoods and schools that aid workers tend to populate (his neighborhood of Petion Ville is home to many ex-pats, U.N. workers, and NGO employees), Pierre has a basis on which to critique a particular paradox: what they represent as Haiti to the rest of world is not the Haiti they "know" most intimately. According to Pierre, the Haiti they truly "know" is "the good side", one with beautiful houses and "perfect" schools. Yet, the Haiti they report to the world, according to Pierre, is a place of *only* disaster. He goes on to suggest their distance from the Haiti they report to the world: through a rolled-up window, intimate yet distant, a step removed from the Haiti they represent in their reports.

Pierre goes beyond articulating this paradox of knowledge- the distance between what aid workers write about Haiti and the lives they live in Haiti. As others have argued, "aid", in the long run, ultimately benefits the donor countries, not those supposed

recipients of aid. Pierre goes on to clearly state his position on the politics of representation and the self-serving reasons for the monophonic representations of Haiti, produced by aid workers with a personal stake in constructing a singular narrative of Haiti as a country incapable of governing itself, in need of their expertise and presence:

They do that to get money. They think, “If people think Haiti is bad, I still have work. If people think everything is bad, I’m always gonna have a project to finish”. The foreign workers have the best contracts. They get contracts for like 75,000euro for less than 6 months and then don’t even spend their own money to live. We know this one guy who was there by himself with no family. He took the highest mortgage house he could find and the government is going to pay for everything, his cars, his food, even his pencils! They get so much cash, and then they’ll throw these big parties for all their friends and won’t even pay for it with their salary. They’ll say, ‘that was my food money’. You understand what I mean? (Interview, March 12th, 2012)

Pierre’s begins by voicing a clear position of why aid workers represent Haiti as a space of only disaster. If Haiti is represented as a space of perpetual disaster, there will, indeed, always be a project to finish. At the same time, if Haiti is represented a space of disaster and Haitian people such as Ed and his family are written out of the narrative, the foreign expert (Escobar, 1995), will remain essential to the development enterprise.

In the months and years following the earthquake, many have asked about the aid dollars, specifically where they went and how much actually reached Haiti (Beaubien, 2013). Pierre pinpoints one answer. “Disaster capitalism”, a term coined by Klein (2007), refers to how imperial countries impose their political and economic will during times of crisis. Previously, informed us about one aspect of disaster capitalism: the power of representation. In the above, Pierre gets at a second aspect: the re-funneling of aid dollars back to the donor countries. When the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti informed his friends in Washington, “THE GOLD RUSH IS ON”, he forecasted what would soon take place in Haiti. In what one contractor called in Miami called “The Super Bowl of

disasters”, American contractors and International NGOs lined up for a share of the aid contracts for Haitian “relief” (Bell, 2013, p. 146).

Together, Diop and Senghor’s stories about the disjuncture between U.N. and INGO espoused beliefs and their actions in Haiti demonstrate how racism operates through international social forces with deep roots in the colonial enterprise, and is best understood through an analysis that attends to its workings across multiple domains of power. To these two young men, racism is structured into occupying and rebuilding discourses, realities that seriously complicate “rebuilding” efforts. Next, I turn to the dominant narratives students negotiate in an American school setting.

Coming to America: Theorizing and Experiencing (American) Racism

They say America is a free country but you all can’t do what’s right...I consider the U.S. as a white country, even though people from other countries built it. The U.S. is a racist country. They don’t treat black people right, they don’t treat us equal because we are black. I just want to know what’s the difference between white and black? We are the same people, we make good and bad decisions sometimes. For example, the case of Trayvon Martin. The guy killed him because he was black and now they won’t give Trayvon and his family justice. It’s not fair, we should be treated equal. America is the land of liberty and justice for some because some of us are treated unequal.

-Kadisha (Journal Entry, June 6, 2012)

Mr. D: There’s some points where I thought I had to do a cultural lesson to new students who come here. It was African boys when I first started noticing it a lot, how they were very aggressive with women...They’d be yelling, “hey baby, yo baby”! Then she’d walk by and they’d all be lookin’ at their butt. (Class laughs). I’d be like “No, no. You can’t do that”. I felt like I had to teach people sometimes, like, “That’s illegal in our country. You can get in a lot trouble for that”

Kadisha: It’s not just Africans though. American boys do that too (Fieldnotes, May 6th, 2012)

In this section I analyze the stories students tell about experiencing racism in the United States. As the fieldnotes that open this section show, the students in this study theorize about and negotiate racism in ways that reference “black” as a racial

identification that does not necessarily mark a distinction between “foreign-born” and “native-born” people. For example, when Kadisha informs us she considers the U.S. “a white country” and writes, “The U.S. is a racist country. They don’t treat black people right, they don’t treat us equal because we are black”, she seems to be voicing a general opinion about black people and white racism that does not call for such a distinction. On the other hand, the brief exchange between Mr. D and Kadisha shows a particular view of Africa (African boys, in this case) that I view as representative of the collective “commonsense” about Africa and Haiti. Do African boys require a special “cultural lesson” to teach them the ways and mores of appropriate behavior in the United States? Or, as Kadisha suggests, do many boys, regardless of nationality, need to rethink, relearn, and reframe their interactions with young women? Mr. D’s call for a “cultural lesson” takes the aggressive behavior of a few young men from Africa and places it within the larger context of cultural reform. This not only makes a statement about African culture, but also subtly makes a point about American culture as a place of heightened civilization. Kadisha’s immediate challenge to this position, “American boys do that too”, speaks to the extent to which African culture and the meanings attached to it emerge as a central point of contention for the students in this study. In what follows, I pay particular attention to how these stories connect racism, media representations, and school life in the United States.

It is well known that racialization works most commonly through cultural rather than biological referents. Such “colorblind” explanations for racial disparity often rely on discourses of cultural inferiority (Bonilla Silva, 2007). Recall Zeleza’s (2010) description of the colonial library as “the Africa of Western derision, a caricature

constructed from European epistemic fantasies deeply entrenched in Europe's social imaginary of [Africa as] its ultimate and most intimate other". As such it represents a form of discursive racism and lives in the stories told and retold about African culture. According to Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (2010), Mudimbe's Colonial Library lives through what they describe as the representations of Africa that fall within the framework of "atavism and absence". In the following, I show how students interpret the frames of atavism and absence within larger discourses about race and racism.

**"Just Because We're Black Doesn't Mean Everything Bad Comes From Us"
-Miriam**

Miriam's statement speaks to intersections of race, place and misinformation that all of the students in this study navigated in American schools. I see these statements as microaggressions, or the unconscious discursive practices by the majority that perpetuate stereotypes and wound marginalized individuals or groups (Roy and Roxas, 2011).

While common in interracial interactions, microaggressions experienced by the students in this study transcend racial and cultural lines. Miriam, for example, told me when it comes to microaggressions about Africa, "It's all types of people. Black, white, teachers, students, it doesn't matter. So many people have bad things to say about Africa"

(Interview, March 12th, 2012). Miriam went on to explain:

Miriam: Last year, there was a girl, she used to ask us like... "Do African people live in the forest?" She would say, [Africans] don't eat really well, like everyone's starving. She would say all kinds of things. She was saying how bad the schools are [in Africa], like how no one can read. She was saying these things like she's been [to Africa], like she *knew* African people live in the forest with animals. Finally I just told her, "You got it all wrong. I haven't seen an elephant or a lion yet, you're talking like we live in the forest with animals" If you don't understand something you should ask it, not say it. To be honest that hurt me because I couldn't imagine that people have horrible thoughts about Africans. (Interview, March 12, 2012)

Miriam's story has similarities to Pierre's take on aid workers I discussed in the previous section. For both Miriam and Pierre, the point of contention arises over what people "know", or how their knowledge or truth about a place is either flat-out wrong or fixated on a singular narrative. In the case of Haiti, the singular narrative Pierre identified revolved around "only the bad parts". For Miriam, the singular (and false) narrative might be described as only the (imagined) primitive parts. In particular, we see Miriam and her African peers confronting an Africa viewed through the lens of primitivism, evident in statements such as people living with animals, in the forest, partially clothed. It is imagined as a place of only starvation, with "bad schools" and perpetual illiteracy.

Miriam goes on to discuss the association of Africa with "everything bad":

Miriam: I think people here believe all the bad things come from Africa- that's what they believe. Like diseases, bad people, all the bad things in the world are from Africa. They think because you are black and you come from Africa you come from a poor family, with nothing to eat at home. They think that's why [I'm] here. I say, "No, I'm just here for my studies. When I lived in Africa I had a better life...School is good here, that's why I'm here (Interview, March 12th, 2012).

Perhaps even more upsetting, because of their position as authority figures and knowledgeable experts, teachers share this misperception as well:

Miriam: In a discussion in class, even the teacher will say most of the world's diseases come from Africa. I was like, "Oh my God, really?" I say, why? Just because we're black it doesn't mean everything bad comes from us. It really makes me mad, I'm serious. When you hear some false stuff, maybe you should really know what you hear is true before you say anything. [Other teachers] say things about how bad African governments are, how they let people die of hunger and have lots of sickness. (Interview, March 12th, 2012)

In both cases, Miriam interprets derisions of Africa and African culture through a racial lens, showing her ability to see through colorblind racism, which many have

argued as the dominant framework for how racial disparities are justified (Bonilla Silva, 2007). While students and teachers commonly affix disease, poverty, starvation of inept governance to Africa, Miriam informs us that these derisions are connected to color-conscious racism: “just because we’re black”, she informs us, is no reason to associate Africa with everything bad. This reads as a critique of colorblind racism, in which racial inequality is attributed to cultural factors. While students and teachers are quick to point out the atrocities of African culture, it is Miriam herself that connects their comments to racism.

**“Teachers treated me like an animal”
-Diop**

Similar to Miriam, Diop and Pierre shared stories of the (mis)perceptions about Haiti that framed their reception in the U.S:

Pierre: When I first got here I heard all kinds of stupid jokes, like when I first got to Miami the kids in school called us kids from Haiti boat people. They would say, “Go back to Haiti”. Some kids would say, “You’re still like a slave” because they think Haiti is all poor people. People would say that we are violent, that we like to fight. Since I came right after [the earthquake] people would prejudge me when they talk about the disaster. At first I didn’t even tell people I was in the earthquake because I got sick of hearing people say, “Oh my God, Oh my God, you were in the earthquake, Oh my God, what was it like?” People think I came here poor and hungry just like the people they see on T.V. (Interview, May 4th, 2012)

Pierre sights boat people, slavery, poverty, and disaster as the dominant frames through which Haiti was “known” by his peers when he first arrived in the U.S. When coupled with Miriam citing poverty, disease, famine and poor schooling as the dominant frames for interpreting Africa, a clear picture of discursive violence emerges, a violence that *all* of the students in this study negotiated when they arrived in the U.S. While

neither Pierre nor Miriam experienced physical violence that they chalk up to African or Haitian personhood, Diop shared the following experience:

Diop: My first week at [another high school] someone threw a Snapple bottle and hit me in the back of the head. I had to get stitches. Most people don't believe how much some people hate foreigners but it's true. When I first got here people said all kinds of bad things about me because I came from Haiti.

Chike: What do people say about Haiti?

Diop: Americans think everyone in Haiti is poor. They would ask me if I came on a boat. They thought just because I came from Haiti I came with nothing.

Chike: And can you say a bit more about your experiences at school when you first got here?

Diop: It was bad. Students and teachers treated me bad. I remember when I first came to the U.S., how teachers were being racist to me and they treated me like an animal. This one teacher was racist because I didn't speak English and no one wanted to help me learn English. That's one of the reasons I hated it at first. Every time I asked for help she ignored me, like "No, I'm not going to help you". Every time I asked her she said, "No". You know, some people don't like foreigners. I had this one teacher named Mrs. C. She'll hold you back, even if you pass. Most teachers are not racist, but some of them are. Last semester when I was having trouble with math [Mrs. C's class] I came to Mr. D so he could help me. Mr. D talked to her for me. (Interview, March 6th, 2012)

Like Miriam's, Diop's story confirms that discursive violence is not limited to students; some teachers, according to both Miriam and Pierre, articulate ignorance (in Miriam's case) or practice racism (Diop's story) in ways that students analyze through the lens of anti-black sentiments attached to Africa and Haiti. In the next section, students make clear how media outlets are a common source of (mis)information.

(Mis)Learning Africa and Haiti from Media Outlets

In the last section I showed that students are confronted with a form of anti-black racism articulated through "atavistic and absent" imaginings of Africa and Haiti, which

have real and painful effects. In this section I focus on students' view that "mass media" outlets are the source of this (mis)information.

Critical media literacy refers to the ability "to analyze media codes and conventions, to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts" (Kellner and Share, 2005, p. 372). This approach to literacy as media critique can be especially useful for analyzing racialized and racist media discourses (King, 2007; Yosso, 2002). In this section students articulate their critical media literacies, evident in their ability to critique the media landscape about Africa and Haiti, and also the reasons why they believe these representations are so prevalent.

According to Keim (2009) the monkey image, or primatial personhood, is often associated with Africa in popular representations of the Continent. Other research studies focusing on African youth in American schools confirm the predominance of monkey discourses being attached to African students (Smalls, 2011; Traore, 2004). As shown in the previous section, this ranking of human subjects is consequential for the students in this study. In what follows, Abe, a young man from Liberia, recalls the predominance of this association when he started school in the U.S. and identifies its source:

Abe: When I first got here, oh man, it was *rough*. All I heard was "Hey Jungle Boy, George of the Jungle". Man, I had to fight all the time. On the bus, on the way home. Or at school, like right after school. [People] believe if you come from Africa you live a hut. We don't have lions and snakes, and dangerous animals. We're not from the jungle. They think I come from a savage country. They think Africa is a poor continent but Africa is not poor. Africa has good resources, gold, food, gas, iron, oil, all those things (Interview, May 4th, 2011).

George of the Jungle is both a series of Disney films and a cartoon series from the 1960s (repackaged and repurposed in 2007) based on the Tarzan stories written by Edgar

Rice Burroughs. Abe arrived from Liberia in 2007 (Interview, May 4th, 2011) just when George (a.k.a. Tarzan) was repackaged for a new audience. For Gene, this pervasive media narrative had real effects in his life (“I had to fight all the time”). Like Miriam, Abe opposes the primitive notion of Africa with the reality of Africa as intimate to, not distant from, the notion of “developed”. His words show a common theme in how students attempt to close the deviation that is attached to Africa. By pointing out the ways in which Africa is similar to the U.S., Abe seems to be making moves to close the gap in perception. I will return to this strategy later in this chapter, as I believe it is evident in students’ “multimodal counternarratives” (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010).

Below, Pierre recalls a similar set of media representations about Haiti:

Pierre: TV is where people get ideas. Here, they always show you like, ‘Oh, Haiti’s bad, Haiti’s bad, Haiti’s bad, Haiti’s bad’. How can I say it? It’s like, it’s true, I know it’s true, I know it’s there, you know it’s true, you saw it. The bad part is there, it’s true. But they *never* show the good part. Haiti is always bad and they always try to show you the baddest, baddest, place and say everywhere in Haiti is like that. They’re not showing the best parts. Like the beaches, I never saw a picture of a nice beach on T.V. and they say, ‘that’s Haiti’¹⁶. Also the art in Haiti is the best. We have the best artists, but they never show that. Our artist can make anything out of wood, and also we have the best iron artists [wrought ironsmiths] in the world (Interview, March 12th, 2012)

Diop concurs with “mass media” representations of Haiti:

If you watch T.V., like on CNN or something, they always show the poorest places, the people that are hungry, but they never show the [places] with money and people that survive and prosper. On everything (all media sources) they make [Haitians] look like animals, but we can change that. (Interview, May 16th, 2012)

In discussing where people get their “knowledge” about Africa, Miriam says:

The media, TV because they never show the good part of Africa. They will always show the bad part, where the misery come from...they will never show the good part where you

¹⁶ Carnival Cruise lines leases the private resort island of Labadee from the Haitian government. In the early 1990s, at the height of AIDS hysteria, Carnival cruise lines did not inform, and even misinformed people as to their exact location in the Caribbean. (Farmer, AIDS and accusation: the geography of blame)

really see the best part of the country... The always show war, starving people, violence. I mean it is true; it is there. People die from hunger. There is war in Africa, way too much. What makes me mad [is] they don't show the good parts, they only just show the bad way of Africa, how bad it is. (Interview, March 12th, 2012)

What unites these narratives is their shared belief that the media does not circulate lies, as much as it circulates half-truths in the form of monophonic representations and repetitive stories and images. All of these young adults acknowledge that “the bad part” is there. Their critique is the absence of the complete narrative. In these narrations I hear students acknowledging social conditions in Africa and Haiti often make life in many parts of each area exceedingly difficult. In such, they do not appear to be romanticizing social realities. I will return to this point in the next section of this chapter, in which students present images of people prospering, making art, and enjoying beaches, not in overly-romanticized ways but in ways to present an under-represented narrative; in short, a counter-narrative to what students face when they arrive in the U.S. But first, I turn briefly to the reasons why the media presents the world in this particular way.

As Pierre discussed in the previous data section, NGO workers might represent Haiti as place of *only* disaster for pragmatic and financial reasons. In his words, “if people think Haiti is bad, they will always have a project to finish”; the perpetual representation of Haiti in disaster constructs the reality of Haiti as only disaster, in perpetual need of their expertise. Diop links the dominant narrative of Haiti to the past and the present:

Diop: I think they like to talk bad about Haiti because back in the day, we were the strongest. They're happy; they want to minimize us so they can keep the power. The media, the people [in the US], they don't like Haiti. (Interview, June 4th, 2012)

Just as Diop made clear his position that the U.N. occupation of Haiti is first and foremost about power, so too are monophonic media representations of Haiti. Part of keeping the power, according to Diop, is the minimization of Haiti. In this sense, the media works as part of the colonizing structure, and again, according to Diop, Haiti is still paying the price for taking its liberty.

Although the students face an unforgiving media landscape that informs how they are “known” by peers and teachers alike, many of them maintain that things can change. Throughout his stories, Diop, for example, is clear that “things can change”, in the case of media representations of Haiti, and “we can change that”, in the case of the racism that still haunts Haiti. In other words, reality is not a finished product; it is constantly being (re)constructed, and Diop’s words remind us of the power of agency in imaging and becoming a critical agent of change. Along the same lines, Miriam suggested how students and teachers can relearn what they think they know about Africa:

Miriam: [In class discussions] teachers say what they see on T.V. Most of them are more educated than the students when it comes to Africa, but they still say ignorant things. Some teachers know nothing of Africa, they just say what they see on TV. Not all the teachers, though. Some teachers read books and travel. Some teachers know a lot about Africa. Dr. T [an ESL teacher] knows more about Africa. So does Mr. D. They’ve gotten to know a little bit. The teachers who spend time with African students, I think, know more about Africa. But the ones that do not, know nothing about Africa. (Interview, March 12th, 2012)

Miriam’s final comment, as well as Diop’s words, suggest the possibility and space for change. Some teachers know a lot about Africa, mainly through travel, reading, and spending time with African students. As Binta will tell us, “if we tell them”, or establish “authorial agency” in the way Africa is represented (Hull and Katz, 2006), we can rewrite the global archive of particular forms of representation.

Agents Against White Supremacies: A Case Study of a Digital Cultural Storytelling Project

Tonight Miriam and Binta presented their iMovies at UPenn's Ethnography Forum. The timeslot wasn't ideal- Saturday night, the last block of sessions. Yet still, the room was almost full. Fred Erickson was there and I think I saw Lalitha Vasudevan. The members of the research team were there, and what I'm guessing were friends of the students presenting. Dr. Rymes and Sofia introduced the research goals, then Mr. D introduced the projects: multimedia presentations of culture through the medium of music. I've seen their films many times and talked to students about why they chose the videos, personal photos, and written texts to represent African culture. I felt like I was seeing the iMovies "from the outside", not in Mr. D's class, immersed in their production. To the audience, I wonder what they looked like. Did they see valuable teaching tools? A random cut and paste of music videos, pictures, and words? Did they imagine students in groups of three or four, debating the reasons for presenting West African culture instead of Guinean culture? Binta's iMovie featured a clip of Alicia Keys singing her megahit "Fallin" with Oumou Sangare, the Aretha Franklin of West Africa who uses her music a means to critique and revolutionize gender norms. As Alicia played the familiar bridge on her piano, Oumou's vocal style that earned her the nickname "songbird of Mali" took the familiar chords to a new place. It seemed like an improv; the two legends made eye contact, smiling as they navigated this novel yet well-known journey together. Binta's text, imposed on the video, informed us, "This song represents modern African culture". Between the two iMovies presenting "African culture", we watched about 40 minutes of film. Absent were heroic South African diamond smugglers, cigar chomping warlords, child soldiers, and bloated politicians; not a single image of the forest, or a smiling monkey with eerily human emotions. No starving babies, too weak to swat the flies that surround them. No children accompanied by heroic white journalists as they struggle to make it safely home from night school. In short, no visual representation of Africa in crisis, which makes these digital assemblages significant, even revolutionary, for what is absent, as much as what is present. (Fieldnotes, February 25th, 2012)

"The only way [people] can understand what Africa is really like is if they travel there or we tell them"

-Binta

Curwood and Gibbons (2010) describe "multimodal counternarratives" as the ways in which "individuals employ multiple modes of representation to push back against oppressive master narratives" (p. 59). They go on to argue that youth can create counternarratives in school contexts by employing multiple modes within digital media production "to simultaneously highlight and resist cultural ideologies that may otherwise

function to marginalize them or silence their voices” (p. 59). As I argued in the previous section, negotiating a colonial library of master narratives is compulsory education for the students in this study. As the fieldnote that opens this section shows, I see a particular challenge to the colonial library at work in these digital assemblages. Following Binta’s opening epithet, this section is a case study of a digital cultural storytelling project that created a space, a platform, and a medium for Binta and her peers to tell us what Africa and Haiti are “really like”.

Hull and Nelson (2005) argue, “If digital storytelling becomes incorporated into school-based literacy activities, there will need to be a way of saying what’s powerful about the compositions” (p. 233). As I will explain, students’ multimodal counternarratives, or “multimodal counterstories” (Vasudevan, 2006) represent a powerful challenge to white supremacy on two specific fronts. First, as a corrective to the colonial library (Mudimbe, 1994), these digital stories represent an epistemological challenge the predominant “way of knowing” Africa and Haiti at work in the school lives of the students in this study. These digital assemblages present counterstories that revolve around an alternate body of knowledge, embedded in the histories, music, writings, photos, and social commentary that students bring to the project. The rich and complex assemblages of cultural stories told this way is far more nuanced and complex than what we typically see on CNN, Fox News, or our local cinema (Keim, 2009). Second, as Duncan (2005) argues, white supremacy manifests in differential curricula, as black students are routinely denied an equal education due to a material differences in resources. This skills-based curriculum, in which learning digital software and

composing skills were compulsory, represents what Duncan (2005) describes as a temporal, material challenge to the differentiated resources often seen in school settings.

Along with these challenges, the project also represents a critical addition to research on culturally responsive pedagogies. Howard (2012) notes that culturally responsive pedagogies

Incorporate attributes, characteristics, or knowledge from student’s cultural background into instructional strategies and course content...one of the primary ideas is to create learning environments that allow students to utilize cultural elements, cultural, spatial, and other recognizable knowledge that they are familiar with to learn...and enhance success (p. 1)

As I will show throughout this chapter, the digital cultural storytelling project fulfilled these goals.

Collins’ (2009) framework for “practicing resistance” in a classroom setting posits that racism can be resisted through teaching strategies and lessons that invite students to analyze racism across four domains:

Structural Domain -Creating safe and free learning spaces -?	Cultural Domain -Media literacy; telling one’s own story -?
Disciplinary Domain -Cultivating counter-surveillance -?	Interpersonal Domain -Specialized resistance; Hope -?

(Collins, 2009)

Collins’ built-in question marks represent the unfinished and unknown aspects of resisting racism and provide a jump off point for extending a “domains of power” analysis. I draw on this analytical framework, especially the unfinished aspects, arguing that these digital narratives, created in a relatively safe and free learning space, draw on students’ media literacy and storytelling capabilities, as well as their collective hope for a transformed racial future. According to Bernal (2002), counterstories can serve as

pedagogical tools to openly listen, understand, and appreciate the experiences of students of color. Potentially, digital stories offer new ground for understanding. Here I draw on Hull and Nelson's (2005) belief that

“multimodal composing is not simply an additive art whereby images, words and music, by virtue of being juxtaposed, increase the meaning-making potential of the text...a multimodal text can create a different system of signification, one that transcends the collective contribution of its constituent parts...multimodality can afford, not just a new way to make meaning, but a different kind of meaning” (p. 225).

From this perspective, the meaning of the multimodal text is qualitatively different, “transcending what is possible via each mode separately” (Hull and Nelson, 2005, 251).

Rolon-Dow (2011) notes that, counterstories within educational research have mostly relied on textual data, such as interview transcripts and autobiographical narratives.

Following Rolon-Dow (2011) and Curwood and Gibbons (2010) in this chapter I argue that the digital story-making process and its engagement of multimodal literacy practices offer educators a new way to document and understand the complex knowledge of youth (see also Vasudevan, 2006; Pleasants, 2008).

Given that multimodal analysis in classroom settings is still in its infancy (Miller & McVee, 2012), no well-trod path for their analysis has been established. My analysis pays particular attention to the dominant frames of atavism and absence; or Africa and Haiti *always already* in crisis, and how students use the project to create cultural artifacts (narrations of culture, if you will) that run counter to such stories. Therefore, my analysis integrates students' critiques of these dominant frames into my interpretation of their iMovies. “Authorial agency”, according to Hull and Katz (2006) is evidenced when digital storytellers borrow and repurpose texts, images, photographs and music as means to, in the end, tell their own stories and claim agency over how their stories are told. I

argue this is precisely what the students in this study did through composing their iMovies. I use the term digital cultural stories to foreground the cultural work performed by these particular counternarratives. Recognizing that in many ways every story is a cultural story, my analysis focuses on the composing processes: why students chose the videos, imposed the words, and provided the social commentary to tell different cultural stories and tell these cultural stories differently (Vasudevan, 2006); and what these choices might say about how they imagine themselves in the future.

Foreground

Ed: “They have these statues [in South America] that prove they worshiped African Gods. They have these big statues that look African. Why would you build a monument to slaves? They didn’t do that. They built monuments for the Gods”.

Mr. Z: “Wow, that’s amazing. Where did you learn that?”

Pierre: “My dad told me”

Mr. Z: “Your dad’s a smart guy” (Fieldnotes, January 19th, 2012)

This brief fieldnote illustrates a moment in which Mr. D, as he did on numerous occasions, honored the epistemologies that students brought into the classroom. By acknowledging that perhaps “they [Africans] came before Columbus” instead of chastising or challenging Pierre’s knowledge, Mr. D routinely established the type of open classroom environment that I believe were essential for these digital cultural narratives to take shape. As I will show in this section, the project allowed students to integrate their “ways of knowing” into their projects and representations of culture.

In order to get a clear sense of Mr. D's goals for the digital cultural story project, I interviewed him, with a specific focus on how he imagined the connections between music and culture:

Mr. D: I wanted [students] to think about music and culture, but I also wanted to make a cultural connection through music-

Chike: Okay.

Mr. D: Yeah I wanted to show how there's that cultural connection there. Music is something that's common throughout humanity. Music plays a role in every culture. We have all these differences that we perceive but music can offer that...

Chike: No I got you, it's like-

Mr. D: Like cultures can connect through music. There's a common humanity there. I want them to think about how music plays a role in every culture. It's something that all humans have in common. Last year I did a food unit with some of the same goals in mind. I like showing those common things that all cultures have or do (Interview, February 3rd, 2012).

With the goals of cultural universalism and shared humanity in mind¹⁷, Mr. D introduced the "Music and Culture Around the World" project, which instructed to students to find music from "your country" and compose a multimedia presentation of videos, pictures, descriptions of instruments for the purpose of explaining the importance of music in "your culture". He devoted substantial class time to it for roughly three weeks. Before students began work on their iMovies, I asked them to identify a few songs they would include on a soundtrack of their life. Mr. D and I agreed that this quick journal assignment would help students think about music as a way to tell one's story.

Binta, whose iMovie I analyze in detail, identified Oumou Sangare's album *Moussolou*

¹⁷ While these were Mr. D's stated goals, I am not implying that the students shared them. As will become clear in the next data chapter, this notion of cultural universalism was certainly put on trial.

(“Women”) as particularly important. According to Binta, *Moussolou* is “loved by me and African women across the world because it speaks out against injustice and prejudice against women” (Journal entry, November 5th, 2011). Binta went on to share her enjoyment of Oumou Sangare’s music because of Binta and Sangare’s shared belief in the necessity of transforming gender norms in Africa. For these reasons Nene Soumano, and other West African chantresses are were prominently in Binta’s iMovie. Below I describe how she used the project to tell a cultural narrative focusing on history, transforming gender norms, and contemporary Africa as much more like America than her peers and teachers imagine. As Binta’s journal entry shows and I will detail in the following section, her choice of artists from West Africa as opposed to “her country” of Guinea was an important transgression.

Griots, Songbirds, Gender, and Education: Why Binta is “Proud to be African”

Binta shared the following story about her first days in the U.S:

When I first came, people said to me, “In Africa people eat humans. I hear that in Africa you don’t have houses, you live in the forest, you don’t eat well”. Another person was saying we Africans don’t wear clothes. It is amazing. Chike, *That was 500 years ago*. (Interview, March 19th, 2012)

In this statement, I hear Binta asking that a different narrative about Africa be told, one rooted in “contemporary Africa”, to supplant the image of Africa “500 years ago”, or Africa perpetually locked in an atavistic past. In what follows I describe how she went about this process and more specifically what contemporary looks and sounds like to her.

When choosing music videos to represent African culture, Binta told me, “Chike, my father always says to me, ‘The first husband of a woman is her education’. Look

here. I was looking at that video because of the girls in the classroom, see?” (Fieldnotes, November 17th 2011). Recall the widespread belief among her peers at WHS that Africa is filled with people with no formal schooling and a region with poor or no schools. Binta’s family’s strong belief in education runs contrary to her peers’ perceptions (see also Roy and Roxas, 2011), and in the video, the Ivorian singer strolls through a classroom full of school children, extolling the virtues of education for girls. Like the others videos that Binta will choose from to put in her final product, the video’s focus is on the importance of education for children, and the importance of women in west African culture.

Binta’s iMovie opens with a still shot of Aicha Kone, a well-known singer from Cote d’Ivoire. She is smiling in the picture, taken from the cover of her album *Farafina Miria*. One of Kone’s many anthems begins, and the song takes us into the next two frames. The first is a map of the African continent, with a red circle around West Africa, and title, “West African Music and Culture”. Along with her French-speaking peers, Miriam from Burkina Faso and Kadisha from Cote d’Ivoire, Binta has decided to present a regional musical tradition, arguing that the themes she wants to highlight about music and culture cut across national boundaries. To these young women, limiting their choice of videos and images to one country would prohibit them from telling a full narrative. Hence, they agreed that their digital assemblages cut across national lines and draw on the region of west Africa (Fieldnotes, Nov. 5th 2011).

The next frame features a picture of a smiling Binta, dressed in a fashionable strapless dress, with the caption “Proud to be African”. Binta’s feeling about one piece her cultural identity is evident. This caption in many ways indicates Binta’s stance on a

phenomenon she observed among African immigrant students. According to Binta, “When some kids come to this country, they seem like they’re ashamed to be African. They change the way they talk, the way they act. I don’t understand. I look at them and I think, ‘you know you’re not like that, what are you doing?’” (Interview, March 12th 2012)¹⁸. Given her sentiments, Binta’s digital cultural story highlights what she describes as “African Pride”, or a positive sense of herself born from her knowledge of Africa and her refusal to succumb to “shame”. This is evident in her emphasis on what she describes as “the positive things” about Africa as a teaching tool she uses to confront ignorance:

Binta: When people say ignorant things [about Africa] I tell them the negative side and the positive side. I don’t try to hide the negative side. For example, in some places there is no electricity and no running water. Like girls have to go find water and that’s a problem because then they can’t go to school. The positive side is things like kids going to school and getting scholarships, and women working to make things better. Everyone knows the negative side but not the positive side (Interview, May 12th, 2012)

As she constructed her iMovie, Binta endeavored to present what she described as “the positive things”, with a particular emphasis on history, gender, and education.

Following her “proud to be African” assemblage, Binta’s next cut and mix of videos introduces music from Guinea, which is Binta’s home country. As Sory Kandia Kouyateh’s anthem *Conakry* plays in the background, accompanied by footage of the singer performing the song in front of a massive audience, Binta’s text on the screen

¹⁸ Of course such acts of “fitting in”, such as changing one’s talk, walk, or dress (see Forman, 2005 for an extensive discussion on this topic), may or may not be result of students feeling “ashamed” of clothing and what-not that mark them as African. My analytical point is what these acts mean to Binta and how they inform her presentation of what it means to be “proud to be African”. They can also be read as distancing and ranking practices she uses to distinguish African students like herself, who do not change their dress, walk, and talk, from those who choose to “fit in”. Another student in this study made similar comments about African students who had been at WHS for a few years making disparaging comments about students, like himself, who more recently arrived. Miriam also shared these sentiments. Their comments point to a tension between recently arriving African students and those who had been at WHS for a few years.

informs us that, “The music of Guinea is intertwined with politics and history. Many bands started in the 1960s after Sekou Toure became the first president. He tried to promote Guinean music so people would be excited about the country. Kouyateh comes from a family of griots. Griots are traveling musicians whose songs tell our history and culture”. As Binta told me as she constructed her video assemblage, the song *Conakry*, is like “the unofficial national anthem of Guinea. On holidays, weddings, birthdays, any celebration, you hear it everywhere. It’s very important to us” (Fieldnotes, Nov 17th, 2011). Therefore, while her presentation informs us about the importance of griots in constructing nationhood in the newly independent Guinea of the 1960s, her home country, assemblage tells a larger cultural story that addresses the larger theme of “African pride”.

After providing her audience with her story of Guinean history, highlighting the griot tradition and the importance of musical traditions in establishing an anti-colonial identity for Guinea in the years following independence from France, Binta moved on to a cultural story about gender equality in West Africa.

After *Conakry*, Binta edited a series of video clips into a narrative about gender in Africa. The first is a clip from Nene Soumano’s *Moussoya*, (“Woman”). In the segment of the video that Binta included, Nene Soumano sings about women as the foundation of society. As she sings lyrics that honor the role of women in Malian society, the artist moves through scapes of femininity in Africa: in turn, she sings next to a nursing mother, women cooking food, and others dressed up for ceremonies and holidays. Soumano joins women pounding grain in a traditional calabash, all while singing into the camera and honoring the role of women in African culture. According to Binta’s text that

accompanies the video, “This song has a special meaning from African women all around the world. She’s telling us how important woman are for the whole world, how its women that keep things going”.

This video and the theme of this section in general reflects Binta’s future personal goals. She envisions herself as returning to Guinea with an American education:

Binta: I really want to build a health clinic for girls. That’s why I want to be a nurse. In Africa a lot of girls get pregnant at a young age. It’s not a good idea because the girls don’t know [how to parent]. If I can show them how to take care of themselves and their babies I think I can help make things better. I also think we need schools for schools. Most girls don’t go to school past a young age (Interview, April 8th, 2012)

As such, in telling her story of African culture, she seems to be commenting on her possible place in Africa’s future, one in which she, like the singers and the message on the music, works to transform gender norms in west Africa.

Next Binta introduces us to Sekouba Bambino Diabate, also from a family of griots. His song, *Bamako Jolie Den*, (“Beautiful Women of Mali”), is an ode to the beauty of Malian women. The video features women who are candidates for Miss Mali 2006. Recall in the previous data section, students critiqued of the dominant media representations of Africa, which rarely show, in their words, the beautiful parts. This video reads like a choice to contradict these prevalent images. When I asked Binta about this video, she told me, “People think Africa is all forest. Chike, you’ve been to Conakry, right? You know Africa, you know we have cities” (Interview, November 17th, 2011). As Sekou Bambino strolls through downtown Bamako, we see a metropolitan Africa, complete with all the features of metropolitan cities across the globe. As Binta told me, “There is nothing [in the U.S.] that we don’t have in Africa. People think it’s all forest and jungle. Africa is developed too (Interview, March 19th, 2012).

In the closing image of her iMovie, dressed up in a blue and white *complet* (a matching, traditional African print ensemble usually worn on special occasions), a smiling Binta looks directly into the camera as her closing credits roll: Producer: Binta, Director: Mr. D. It is telling that she credits two authors with her multimodal representation of African culture. The collaboration between the student (who produced the multimedia representations of African culture by cataloguing, cutting, and mixing music videos, dance performances, personal photos, and text into an iMovie) and the director (a teacher whose teaching style established a safe learning environment and taught her and her peers how to subvert the school's internet censors and use the editing software needed to construct the digital cultural stories) is instructive, I argue, because it demonstrates how teachers and students can co-create meaning in ways that challenge an aspect of white supremacy: the dominant narratives transnational black youth students face in American school settings (Roxas & Roy, 2012; Smalls, 2011; Traore, 2006).

Through this analysis I tried to show how Binta uses the iMovie project as an opportunity to tell a different story about Africa, and tell that story differently (Vasudevan, 2006). She also used the project as a space for identity work, in her choosing videos that represent women's critical role in African societies that align with her personal goals. In the next section, I describe and analyze how Pierre used the assignment to construct a counterstory about Haiti (and how hip hop culture is viewed within Haiti. Like Binta, Pierre's iMovie also aligns with is how he imagines his role in Haiti's future.

Elev Kap Trip: Youth and Hip Hop for Social Change in Haiti

In this section I show how Pierre used the digital cultural story assignment to reflect his personal passion for and belief in music as a vehicle for social change in Haiti. Before I detail Pierre's digital cultural story, I begin with an account of Pierre's music-making practices which highlight how his music works as transnational cultural building.

Pierre: When people say, 'do you have cell phones in your country?' I want to be like, 'do people punch you in the face in your country?' So stupid. Basically my life is like, music all day long. It keeps me out of trouble and everything. It kind of like...it keeps you away from bad ideas and doing stupid things. It's not going to hurt you or anyone else. You can do everything with music. It keeps you happy; you can control that. You can say, 'today I'm only going to listen to good music'. If you feel like you're going crazy, music can help with that. (Interview, May 4th, 2012)

After telling me about a particularly vexing form of ignorance and the essential role of music in his life (especially given the role of cell phones in keeping contact after the earthquake), Pierre thumbed his phone's screen and pulled up *FL Studio*, a music production program. He located an audiofile of a song he had recently recorded with his group Ekt, or Eleve Kap Trip. Eleve Kap Trip translates as "young people on a journey", "kids are trippin'", "kids on the move" or "kids are changing things", depending on the word emphasized when saying the name (Interview, May 4th, 2012). The multiple meaning is significant. Pierre's group was geographically dispersed after the earthquake, so literally its members are on a journey to new places. The name also speaks to their larger social commitments about young people using hip hop as a voice of change. Pierre put his phone on speaker mode and the beat dropped- - it's a sonic cousin Shakira and Wyclef's 'hips don't lie', - a world beat with hip-hop overtones. The first MC rapped in three languages, Creole, French and English. Pierre smiled at me: "You understand?" I usually greeted Pierre with a "Sak Pase", to which he would respond, "Nap Boule".

Despite my ability to “fake it”, much to the amusement of my in-laws, this universal Haitian greeting (“What’s up”/“I’m fine”) is basically the extent of my Creole, so I’m way lost trying to keep up with the young rapper. I asked Pierre, “So how do you guys exchange music?” Pierre answers, “Me and my producer talk every day. If he wants to send me a beat he can send it by email. Then I put it on a thumb drive. He’ll be like, ‘Fabian is gonna take this part, you can take this part’. Then when I’m done I send it back to him. But once I learn FL Studio good, that will be easier“ (Interview, May, 4th, 2012). Next we hear Pierre’s cousin Wilna, who sings the hook. Pierre tells me, “She’s gonna be a star. I’m serious. People are already trying to sign her in Haiti”. Pierre raps next. Like Fabian (the friend with whom he was planning his hip hop show on the day of the earthquake), his verse is mostly Creole, with a few French phrases mixed in. I recognized his closing sentence, “Je suis desolee” and asked, “What are you sorry for?” He laughed and explained that:

The song is about all the confusion after the earthquake, like how our lives changed and things will probably never go back to how they were before. Like Fabian, he’s still in Haiti; he’s still there so he’s taking about just trying to get things back to normal. Me, I’m talking about, like, leaving Haiti, like going to a new place and starting over, like going to a new school and making new friends. That’s why I said “I’m sorry”, that part was for my girlfriend. If it weren’t for the earthquake I’d still be there” (Interview, May 4th, 2012).

The digital cultural story assignment allowed Pierre to integrate his passion for music into a classroom project and tell a cultural story about the role of hip hop music and video culture in Haiti. Pierre’s story is one Haitian culture through music of his choice; he constructed and circulated a powerful and timely counternarrative. In what follows I focus on a few videos Pierre chose and the text he juxtaposed with the messages in the music.

Much like his own group, Ekt, Pierre chooses Kreyol Hip Hop videos that stress social change, young people authoring a different Haitian future, while also serving as a challenge to the images of Haiti he critiqued in mainstream media narratives.

As Pierre's iMovie begins, the opening text informs us, "At first hip hop in Haiti was just party music, but then artists started to focus on social issues in Haiti". His first video supports this "evolution" of hip hop in Haiti. It features Mystic 703, an incredibly popular hip hop collective, and their single "Pa Fe Yo Abi" (Woman, The Symbol of Life). As the song plays, Pierre's words tell us, "They wrote this song because of the rise of domestic violence in Haiti after the earthquake. They want to use their music to try and change things". His translation of the hook confirms the song's message and Pierre's reason for the song's importance: "Women are lights, they are the Mother/Thanks to them, we grow. Don't wait to give them help/Please stop abusing them. Pierre explained that he chose this particular video because: "Like, a lot of people in Haiti, they think like all hip hop is no good, like rappers are up to no good and stuff. They're wrong though. Rappers are like changing things now" (Interview, May 4th, 2012). In this way, Pierre's text works to critique how hip hop is perceived in Haiti.

The next video continues this theme. It's called "Mwen Pwale la Kay Mwen", by Olivier Martelley. "This is some more music for social change", Pierre's text inform us. "These words 'Pa leve men sou femn' means do not lift your hands to a woman. When I interviewed Pierre about the choice of this video, he cited not only the song's message, but also its imagery. "Even though, like, the words aren't really that happy, the song about my country reminds me of the good times. You see here? That's like the most beautiful beach in Haiti. That's why it reminds of then good times we used to have, like

going to the beach and stuff” (Interview, November 17th, 2011). Recall Ed’s frustration with the visual discourse on Haiti presented by most media sources. Ed’s frustration that “they only show the bad parts” and his wish for a well-rounded media narrative about Haiti comes to mind, as the artists, even in the midst of a less-than-joyful song, still represent the beauty of Haiti.

The next video is “Yap Pale” (They Talkin’) by Princess Eud and Ded Kra-Z of the group Mystic 703. In the opening scene, Princess Eud is in Miami, cruising through shopping malls with her friends, using her cell phone to send text messages in Creole and catch up on what people are saying about her in Haiti. Recall Pierre’s frustration about people in the United States believing Haiti as a country without the capacity for cellular technology (“so stupid”), perhaps the ultimate expression of “underdeveloped” in the networked world. Cellular technology and text messages are prominent in the video, as the members of Mystic 703 talk and text to communicate with people in Haiti. Pierre chose the video for two stated reasons. First, he wants people to see a different side of Haitian subjectivity, which is present in the thoroughly contemporary leisure activities of Mystic 703- shopping in Miami and texting to communicate with friends and family. He also chose Mystic 703 because they have a female MC and he’s tired of rap music that degrades women. He wants to let people know that hip hop in Haiti (as in the U.S. and other places) has a female presence (Interview, Nov 17th, 2011).

This representation of Haitian subjectivity as “beyond misery” is particularly important to Pierre. Recall his criticism on NGO work in Haiti was the one-sided totalizing narratives of Haiti as a space of *only* disaster. When commenting on life in Haiti and the United States, Pierre claimed:

Here [in the U.S.] you *talk* about freedom; in Haiti you *know* freedom. Here [in the U.S.], like you have to be careful all the time. If you go to a party or something you never know what can happen. It's not like that in Haiti. when we go out, we can relax and have a good time. [In Haiti] you don't have to worry about someone being on drugs or having a gun or something (interview, May 4th, 2013)

In the last video and Pierre's take on freedom, he seems to be commenting on a dominant perception about Haiti (imprisonment) and one about America as well

(Freedom). Diop expressed a similar stance on freedom:

In America they tell you it is a free country but when you start to tell the truth, they want to get rid of you. But why does the truth hurt so bad especially if you are from another country? I remember when President Bush was the president in America two girls that came from Haiti were talking on the bus bad about him and he sent the cops to arrest them and send them back to [to Haiti]¹⁹. If America is a free country why would he send them back to the country? If it is a free country why can't someone say whatever they want? Why take revenge on that person just because that person wants to express something? (Blog post, May 11th, 2012)

These counternarratives and critiques on the notion of freedom are instructive. In the lives of these two young men, coming to America in many ways represents confinement rather than "freedom". By inverting to dominant narratives about Haiti and America, these critiques emerge as thought-provoking counternarratives to dominant knowledge about Haiti and Africa.

Conclusion

In this chapter I highlighted the explanatory power that students give to racism as they negotiate their social worlds. First I showed how to young men from Haiti view the U.N. occupation and post-earthquake NGO activities as extending rather than dismantling neocolonial relationships. I then showed how (mis)representations of Africa and Haiti,

¹⁹ I attempted a fairly extensive Internet "fact check" to see if I could confirm Diop's story. I was unable to find confirmation. I believe his analytical point, if even a metaphorical comment on Post-911 cultures of surveillance and detention, remains valid.

prevalent in both media narratives and school-level discourse students, are part and parcel of a compulsory education in America. Finally, I described how students (co)constructed and circulated multimodal counternarratives that challenge and debunk the myths about African and Haitian personhood, discursive violences if you will, that they negotiate on a regular basis. I believe these counternarratives offer a new perspective on culturally responsive pedagogies by considering a host of “cultural” work and culturally-mediated expressions that teachers can draw upon when considering “culture”. In the next chapter I turn to a Justice for Trayvon unit I co-taught.

Chapter Five

Justice for Trayvon(s): An Ethnographic Case Study of a Teachable Movement

“Nothing in the world is easier in the United States than to accuse a black man of a crime”

-W.E.B. Du Bois

“Something was just off about the guy”

-George Zimmerman

Today I sat down in my regular spot in the back row, a seat or two behind Abe. We exchanged our usual greeting, a “what’s up?” followed by a dap. He saw my coat and said, “Chike, no hoodies in school”. I was confused until I remembered I was wearing a different coat than I usually wear, one that does have a hood. “Oh whoops, my bad”, I replied with a smile. Abe then asked, “Oh, is it for Trayvon Martin? We talked about the case, which he and other students have been following since Zimmerman’s 9-1-1 call broke nationally. Abe talked about how the Skittles and Arizona Iced Tea made Trayvon seem like an innocent boy walking home from the store, who was shot just because he was wearing a hoodie. Hearing our conversation, others join in. Most cosign Abe’s sense of disbelief. Venice adds, “That’s racist”. I asked her what she meant, and she said rhetorically, “How can Zimmerman just shoot the boy and not go to jail? What if Trayvon was white?” Others are skeptical: Trayvon did something wrong came up as well, accompanied with, “you weren’t there, you can’t say for sure” what happened; maybe Trayvon attacked Zimmerman. Diop said, in response to this, “But does that mean [Trayvon] deserves to die?” The bell rang and class started, but later Trayvon Martin came up again. There was a class discussion about safe and unsafe areas of Westerville. Despite Westerville’s representation in a newspaper article that Mr. D distributed as crime-ridden and dangerous, students described it as “quiet” “safe”, and “boring”. Abe added, “But it’s dangerous over there by the cemetery. I play soccer over there and you gotta be careful man!” Venice concurred, adding “He’s right, by the cemetery it’s dangerous. They’ll shoot you over there for nothing, just like they did Trayvon Martin”. (Fieldnotes, March 27th, 2012)

By now the events leading to the murder of Trayvon Martin are well known. On the evening of February 26th 2012, on his way home from the store, Trayvon drew the attention of George Zimmerman, a Sanford 2.5²⁰ who described the Black teenager as a

²⁰ I was in D.C. for the second Obama inauguration and befriended an electrician who does contract work for the city of Sanford, Fl. He told me he works at both the firehouses and police stations. He informed me that Sanford policeman and fireman refer to the scores of Zimmerman types in the area as 2.5s, or half-ass 5-0s. 5-0 is slang for police.

“real suspicious guy” to police dispatchers before exiting his car, armed with a 9mm pistol, and pursuing Martin as the teenager ran home. Less than eight minutes after Zimmerman exited his car, Trayvon Martin lay dead, killed by a single gunshot wound to the chest. In July 2013 Zimmerman was acquitted by the State of Florida, a decision that shocked many and reconfirmed Du Bois’ words that open this chapter.

Since the murder, journalists, edited volumes, special journal issues, academic conferences, webinars, blogs, and cable news discussions²¹ have explored the event from many disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. This chapter adds to a growing body of literature from the field of education, as I explore what the “Justice for Trayvon” movement means for curriculum theory and practice. Section one uses the analytical frames of *Trayvon(s) as a Problem* and *Trayvon(s)²² Facing Problems* (see also Harris-Perry, 2012) to interpret the racialized epistemologies, or racial common sense, at work in perceptions of Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, and American justice systems writ large. Section two engages the visual discourses that emerged in the aftermath of the murder and explores the politics and limits of liberal participation and protest. Through engaging this visual dialogue, my analysis asks how images and slogans such as “We are all Trayvon Martin” work as contested boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Finally, in a class discussion initiated by my question, “What would justice for Trayvon look like? How can we do this thing called Justice for Trayvon?”, I analyze how students imagine

²¹ See Yancy and Jones, 2013; *Theory and Event*, June, 2012, as well as Mark Anthony Neale’s Blog site NewBlackMan (in exile) at www.newblackman.blogspot.com

²² I pluralize Trayvon here to indicate how the murder of one black manchild has become symbolic for black youth and quests for justice. I will explain the limitations of the phrase, “we are all Trayvon Martin” in this chapter, but the pluralization symbolizes what is universal, or goes beyond just Trayvon.

Justice for Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman in the face of the (possible) permanence of racism and failure of the criminal justice system to treat black people equally. While the Justice for Trayvon movement was certainly the entry point for discussion, the larger movement at stake is how to dismantle the global racisms that the students in this study live with every day.

Engaging the Teachable Moment

According to Blum (2008) students confront racially charged incidents on a regular basis but rarely have the chance to unpack racism in classroom settings. Such dialogue affords students and teachers a space to look at America's history and present through a lens rarely explored openly and honestly (Haney-Lopez, 2008). Trayvon's killing represented this type of teachable moment. Brockenbrough (2012), for example, advocates teaching the murder of Trayvon Martin for the purpose of pursuing education for social transformation, specifically viewing the case as an opportunity to engage in an interrogation of white supremacy as a structural condition. This is similar to Catone (2012), who situates teaching the murder within the framework of education for liberation. Trayvon's killing represents, to Catone, a society without education for liberation, and one with a stark inability to recognize the humanity of all its members. The event represents an act of dehumanization, as "Zimmerman didn't see a young man in front of him...he saw a brown-skinned male in a hoodie and quickly assumed Trayvon was 'up to no good' or 'on drugs or something' grounds for pursuit and murder" (p. 4).

In classroom settings, the murder of Trayvon Martin has been used by educators to explore America's history of racial violence, with teachers using the incident to connect Trayvon Martin to Emmet Till in particular and the lynching of Black men in

general (Adeeb, 2012). Focusing on contemporary racism, that might affect high school students, Lynch (2012) suggests teachers can use the event to focus on racial profiling. Focusing on teacher interactions with the young people they see every day, Vilson (2012) stresses what can be learned about teachers' perceptions of students, arguing that teachers play a central and crucial role in the move toward racial consciousness.

Over the course of six weeks, I co-facilitated three planned lessons designed to document and describe the key issues that emerged on a national scale between March-May 2012. These included keeping up with developments in the case, the unfolding media discourses, and the question of what "Justice for Trayvon" might actually look like. Data were collected through student journal responses, whole-class discussions, and follow-up interviews, both individual and small group.

As a teacher, researcher, and parent of an African American boy, I made no attempt to appear neutral during the Justice for Trayvon unit. Singleton and Hays (2008), in their "four agreements for courageous conversations" on racism, suggest "speak your truth" and "expect and accept a lack of closure". As such, neither Mr. D nor I played the role of disinterested facilitator of the conversation. At times we initiated dialogue; other times we were drawn into conversations. We were both asked and gave our opinions on the extent to which racism, age, gender, and sartorial choices played a role in the murder²³. Certainly the goal was not closure, nor do I suggest this chapter should close off what is possible in the classroom. In the wake of Zimmerman's acquittal and the prevalence of racism in 2013, expecting closure on any front would risk romanticizing

²³ Murder is my term; I do not know if Mr. D concurs.

the role of the classroom in fighting racism as other forms of injustice. As the Martin family and their supporters relentlessly pursued a trial for Zimmerman, my wife and I, like millions of people across the globe, were outraged and saddened that murdering a Black child is still so easy. In conversations with other Black parents, including university professors, security guards, medical doctors, contractors, and teachers, I often heard the opinion that Zimmerman should be shot on sight; “had it been my son”, I often heard, “I’d kill him myself”. I shared these conversations with the class, not for the sake of bolster but to make clear the extent to which this murder affected the lives of many. To paraphrase Anthea Butler (2012), the murder left a cold burning in our hearts and heads, and nearly two years later, we still refuse to leave it alone.

Grappling With Intersectionality and the Power of Racism Across Domains

Intersectionality is the belief that race is best understood as an identification that is always read with other identifications, such as gender, class, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991). In this section I analyze how the class debated and grappled with the notion of intersectionality as we discussed Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, sartorial codes, and American justice systems.

Trayvon(s) as a Problem: Racial Scripts, Cultural Tropes, and the Logic of Black Guilt.

In their analysis of racial ideologies in the United States, Anderson, Hoagland, and Leighton argue that white supremacy is a foundation, “like an axis, held in place by all that surrounds it” (2013, p. 30), constructing complex interrelationships among individuals and between individuals and institutions. In such a moral universe, the black

body brings its own wrongness with it, rewriting the rules for what counts as reasonable suspicion, standing one's ground, and justifiable self-defense (Mills, 2013).

Look for example, at Trayvon's "wrongness" evident in journal entries in which students were asked about their first impression of the Trayvon Martin event:

Trayvon Martin sound like a black name. I heard he got suspended from his school because he had a bag of weed in his backpack which he should not have. I heard he got shot by a white man. I heard the white man said take your hoodie off and Trayvon didn't. He got shot because the white man thought he had a gun and Trayvon was wearing a hoodie. Some people do wear hoodies and have guns, not just black, black and white and Spanish. (Etta, Journal Entry, April 4th, 2012)

In this entry, we see Trayvon Martin imagined as a particular type of problem- a weed-smoking truant, who, if he had obeyed Zimmerman's *non-authority*²⁴, would still be alive. Her reference to Trayvon's suspension presumes his guilt ("which he should not have"), while her belief that Trayvon was shot because he didn't take his hoodie off is a comment on authority and citizenship; it represents a worldview in which, to preserve his own life, Trayvon Martin was obliged to make himself a second-class citizen.

According to Harvey (2013), moments of acute racial violence and atrocity are followed by a familiar set of racial scripts that provide the pre-determined narratives we use to explain such situations. This "common sense" racial reasoning is often rooted in a pervasive unwillingness to take white supremacy seriously, as well as a deep devaluation of African American life in the U.S (Harvey, 2013). For these reasons Harvey describes these scripts as "deadly speech" (p. 105), precisely because, in the end, such set stories justify the murder of black people by concluding that the victim was somehow culpable

²⁴ I use this term not to editorialize, but to point out a defense made for Zimmerman by his supporters after the shooting. Many suggested that had Trayvon simply obeyed Zimmerman's orders (authority) and explained "what he was doing around here", the shooting never would have occurred.

in his or her own death. In the months following the murder, Harvey identified, “I can understand why a Black male in a hoodie might make a neighborhood watchman nervous” (2013, p. 108) as a prevalent script. I interpret Etta’s journal entry as such a script.

According to Wills (2013), such speech acts indicate a particular racial logic at play, described as “the logic of Black guilt”. Mixing elements of victim-blaming and racial profiling, the logic of black guilt is “a form of thought that erases the possibility of innocent black persons, so that any black person and especially any black man is read as an imminent threat, and furthermore, *ultimately bears the responsibility for whatever harm might befall him at the hands of another* (Wills, 2013, p. 211, emphasis added)”. This same logic is perhaps evident in the following conversation, which adds a cultural dimension to the logic of black guilt. Wills (2013) centers blackness, while in the following conversation, I see Mr. D layering a particular cultural dimension to the underlying logic. Note the mobilization of an earlier lesson on hip hop and perceptions of authenticity to make an argument for Trayvon’s possible culpability in his own murder:

Kadisha: I think the only reason he shot him because he was black

Chike: You think he got shot because he was black?

Kadisha: Yeah

Etta: No...

Kadisha: I think that was the only reason. Cuz, they were all white, all these people that were making comments. I saw a lot of comments, people were saying, “Why does a black kid have to be in a white people neighborhood?”

Mr. D: If I could ask you a question- racism comes up a lot in this story and I'm sure it has something to do with it. Do you think...remember when we talked about hip hop when Mecca [another researcher] did her lesson with us? We talked about style. We talked about more than race. We talked about how when people from different races even dress hip hop style like sometimes it looks strange. Because most people when we think about hoodies, and ya know baggy clothes, saggy jeans, whatever, what race do we think about?

Choral Response: Black

Etta: Ghetto

Mr. D: African American, right? Even if a white person's dressing that way, you might say, you're dressing like you're black. Or if an Asian person dresses that way, we say you're acting black. So, that's an interesting thing to think about because if you say, "he got shot because he's black"...do you think if...[scans the room], you now, um, Abe is...you're a black man, right, a young black man?

Abe: Yeah

Mr. D: Right now he's got his collared plaid shirt on, it's tucked in right ...if Abe is walking down that street dressed like he's dressed right now, do you think Abe gets shot, just because he's black? Or does it have to do with the way that he was dressed, *and* being black? I don't know the answer, this is something to just think about, how much of it is style and the way that maybe Trayvon was?

Ibrahim: I don't think he would have been shot.

Mr. D: He wouldn't have, if he was dressed preppie?

Ibrahim: Yeah. I think the way he was dressed scared [Zimmerman].

Abe: Yeah, I agree with that. I think maybe the guy thought [Trayvon] was a thug, because he was dressed like a thug, yeah.

Mr. D: Like the way he looks? Like, he was a 'thug' or 'gangster' or something, right? Maybe [Trayvon] did something, we don't know...I'm just trying to make you think how much of it is race, or how much of it is the way that [Trayvon] ought...

Abe: Maybe [Trayvon] disrespected [Zimmerman] when the guy stopped him.

Mr. D: And Zimmerman felt upset about it.

Kadisha: The only reason why, he was black.

Pierre: It's because he was black?

Mr. D: She said that, I didn't say that.

Chike: Okay Kadisha isn't alone in thinking the only reason why [Trayvon got shot] was because he was black. Mr. D is saying maybe there's a combination of his race and his dress. You can ask yourself, if a seventeen-year-old black kid in a suit would have been shot, or if a white kid in a hoodie would have been shot, right? So, there might be a combination of a lot of things going on here.

Diop: In your opinion, let me ask you that question- why do you think he shot him?

Chike: You're asking me or the class?

Diop: I'm asking you.

Chike: (laughing) Diop you're not supposed to put me on the spot like that man! I think it was a combination of a lot of things. It was partly race and partly dress. I say George Zimmerman takes his job as a neighborhood watchmen too seriously. He'd made about 40 calls to 911 in the past few months, so I think there's a lot of things going on, but I think that race and age and dress and perception all had a lot to do with it.

Kadisha: I bet you if that was a white kid he wouldn't have done anything. (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

In this script I hear the participants as trying to locate and articulate the role of race and racism in the murder, as well as other factors that might have been at play. Like he did consistently throughout the school year, Mr. D acknowledged that racism is a social fact. Particularly interesting and perhaps commendable is when he asks students to think about race in combination with dress. "Does it have to do with the way he was dressed, *and* being black?" (a stance twice rejected by Kadisha) indicates an understanding that race is often read within the context of other factors. Yet, by shifting his focus from the fact that "racism comes up a lot in this story" to Martin's sartorial choice as evidence of his "thug" or "gangster" persona, what aspects of American racism go unchallenged? I believe our (Mr. D, Abe and Ibrahim, and I) choice to focus on the

interpersonal aspects of racism, Zimmerman's prejudice and his perception of Martin's "thuggish", "gangster" apparel, rather than, perhaps the more structural aspects of racism at work in the case, represents a missed opportunity to explore other domains of racism's power (Collins, 2009). I will elaborate this point in the next section, but first I return to two statements embedded in Mr. D's racial script: "how Trayvon was" and "how Trayvon ought", both of which, perhaps, partially implicate Trayvon in his own murder.

Mr. D seems to be saying that had Trayvon been dressed like Abe, in the school dress code, which requires all male students to wear a collared shirt and forbids denim and athletic pants, Trayvon would still be alive. This, then, is an indictment of Zimmerman's personal racism as much as an indictment of what might fall under the "cultural" category. The hoodie, argues Logan (2012), is a clearly identifiable trope of hip hop culture and urban black masculinity. As Gallagher (2012) reminds us, race is often understood by whites as pertaining to culture, rather than mapping onto a privilege and power hierarchy from which they directly benefit. Thus, according to Mr. D's analysis, the problem is Zimmerman's individual racism and Trayvon's "gangster" wear, not racism as a system of power working across multiple domains.

A generous interpretation of Mr. D's speech act might argue that this is his attempt at intersectionality, or attempting to look beyond a singular (i.e., strictly racial) reading of the murder and ask how race intersects with sartorial codes or semiotic signs, if you will. After all, he begins by acknowledging that racism (presumably Zimmerman's) "has a lot to do with this story". However, I interpret his comments as a racial script anchored in the logic of black guilt because of his subsequent reliance on a particular cultural trope that emerged in the public conversation following the murder, that

of a Trayvon Martin as a “thug” or a “gangster”. A similar juxtaposition of race, dress, and responsibility was voiced by many, most notably Geraldo Rivera, who on two separate occasions placed equal blame on Zimmerman and Trayvon’s hoodie:

I am urging the parents of black and Latino youngsters, particularly, to not let their children go out wearing hoodies! I think the hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin’s death as George Zimmerman...if you dress like a wannabe gangster, some knucklehead is gonna take you at your word. (Quoted in Jeffers, 2013, p. 136)

While placing partial responsibility (though not guilt, which he shifts to black parents) on Zimmerman, Geraldo’s stance simultaneously and undoubtedly implicates the hoodie, and by extension calls on black parents to lead the charge to end such killings by controlling our children’s wardrobe. As Jeffers (2013) argues, these arguments about the dress code are loaded with cultural connotations about innocence and guilt. While Mr. D certainly identifies the interpersonal aspects of racism, my argument is that his story takes a deadly turn through its limited take on hoodies, “gangster” appearance, and “thuggish” dress. Thus, even a well-meaning teacher who wishes to engage students in conversations about racism can unwittingly make decisions that explain away the structural aspects of white supremacy, or, as Harvey (2013) claims, refuse to take it seriously.

As for my own speech act, I clearly failed (in this moment) to provide the type of analysis I am criticizing Mr. D, Abe, and Ibrahim for ignoring. My attempt at transposing race and clothing is limited to the interpersonal domain of how racism is at work in the killing, while simultaneously re-imposing a black-white binary that fails to adequately address the broad range of racialized identifications and power hierarchies in America. Though I attempted to shift the attention away from Trayvon’s culpability and

focus on Zimmerman's "taking his job too seriously" and suggesting race played a factor in the murder, I too fell woefully short of challenging the interpersonal limitations of this conversation. As such, I, Mr. D, and a group of students did not take white supremacy seriously enough. In the second section, I look at another set of responses that put both interpersonal and structural racism front and center.

Trayvon(s) facing Problems: Zimmerman within the context of structural racism

In the last section I argued that while Mr. D and I asked students to consider race, racism, age, and sartorial codes as essential elements in the case, our focus on individual characteristics, namely individual racism and "thuggish" dress, represent a missed opportunity to connect racism to other systems of power. In this section, students make these connections, viewing Zimmerman as a (racial) exterminator acting within a legal framework riddled with racism. Building on Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) notion of intersectionality, Hancock (2012) argues for paradigm intersectionality as a lens through which to view the murder. Such an approach locates individual actors within larger social structures. According to Hancock, such a reading would lead to the following essential question: "How do *inegalitarian traditions* interact and emerge in our understanding of the meaning of George Zimmerman's shooting of Trayvon Martin?" (2012, p. 122, emphasis added). While I certainly didn't pose Hancock's question in those terms, I believe many students interpreted the murder from this perspective. Take, for example, Fode's journal entry:

I heard [Trayvon] was killed by some guy who thought [he] was a bad black guy so he need to protect the environment by killing him. They said that Martin went outside to get something from the store with his hoodie on his head, then coming out of the store, walking home when Zimmerman who was in his car, saw [Trayvon] coming, thought he was a bad guy so [he] followed him and shot him. (Journal Entry, April 4th, 2012)

Particularly informative is Fode's description of Zimmerman's need to "protect his environment" by killing Trayvon Martin. Such a description suggests that, apart from his individual motivations, Zimmerman saw himself as playing a particular role of citizen/quasi-cop/exterminator. This characterization is similar Goldberg's (2012) description of Zimmerman as "gravitating in the no-man's land between neighborhood watchman and self-appointed vigilante (p. 117), a social position that Goldberg (2012) traces to state policies such as stop and frisk that empower "Zimmerman-like figures to detain and question black men who are 'up to no good', meaning not white" (p. 116; see also Giroux, 2012). In such a race-relevant social landscape, questioning and detaining "bad black guys", to borrow Fode's phrasing, goes beyond individual racism and suggests a larger role or identity for Zimmerman.

Venice imagines the murder unfolding in similar ways:

Trayvon Martin was a student who got suspended from his school because they said he had some drugs in his book bag. He went to the store to buy some snacks. This man who was a neighborhood guard started walking behind him, he went and shot the boy. Now the police are going to let the man that shot Trayvon go free. I think he should stay in jail for life. That's being racist to shoot somebody because you think they black and a bad guy (Journal Entry, April 4th, 2012)

Recall Etta's journal entry, in which she also cited Trayvon's school suspension as evidence of his probable guilt. Venice's term, "they said" allows for the possibility that "they" (perhaps news reporters or school officials) are mistaken; that Trayvon was suspended not for something he did, but for something they said he did. Her skepticism of the "official narrative" about Trayvon Martin is evident, as is her skepticism that law enforcement is capable of ensuring any kind of justice. Venice's connecting the police "letting him go" to Zimmerman's individual "being racist" recalls Foucault's claim that

“Racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the state functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the state” (quoted in Havis, 2013, p. 117). Havis’ Foucauldian analysis (pp. 121-126) shows how seemingly race-neutral laws such as Florida’s Stand Your Ground actually function as “anchorage points for state-sponsored racisms” (p. 121). Citizens come to view populations as undesirable “political problems”, and laws such as Stand Your Ground empower citizens to “make live and let die”-- preserving desirables, and allowing the death of undesirables. Havis’ (2013) analysis is particularly prescient in light of Zimmerman’s acquittal, but my purpose here is to use her analysis to situate Venice’s criticism of Stand Your Ground, evident in the following exchange:

Kadisha: The parents wanted justice for Trayvon, for their son, but they have a law. [Zimmerman] has the right to shoot him. That’s what they said, it’s for protection or whatever...

Venice: No he don’t! He don’t have the right to nobody! Just because a person is walking in the wrong neighborhood you can’t just follow somebody because you don’t like the way they look when they’re on their way home.

Kadisha: I’m not saying it’s right, I’m just saying-

Venice: I think [Stand Your Ground] is unfair cuz maybe [Zimmerman] made it up, maybe the kid didn’t do nothing. Maybe [Zimmerman] just wanted to take somebody’s life. I think he made it up saying [Trayvon] punch him in the face...maybe the kid didn’t do nothing. The boy was walking home! He wasn’t doing nothing wrong (Videonotes, April 20th, 2013).

While Venice’s journal entry linked policing to racism, her comments above draw further attention to racism as a system of power. She points out the inherent power imbalance and corruptibility of Stand Your Ground, which is why dismantling these laws is the basis of the work Sabrina Fulton and Tracy Martin (Trayvon’s parents) at this

point. From Venice's perspective, George Zimmerman may have had full knowledge of Florida's Stand Your Ground laws and took advantage of them because he "wanted to take somebody's life", secure in the knowledge that he could "make up" whatever story was necessary and still be "made to live" through a system in which exterminating undesirables is the norm²⁵. As such, his individual racism is indeed state-sponsored.

Like Venice, many students took their analysis of the murder beyond interpersonal racism to interrogate the structural aspects of state-sponsored racism. Says Fode:

If it were the opposite side, like Trayvon killed a white guy, what would there be a trial or would they take him straight to jail? If Trayvon shot and killed [Zimmerman], would he just be free until the trial? I think they would take him straight to jail. If a black kid shot a white man could he say, 'Oh, he was attacking me'? Would [the police] believe him? (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

Miriam raises a similar point:

Miriam: I just don't get it. I mean, I have a question. Is this because it's a black kid? I think it's because of racism in society.

Chike: You think it's because of racism? Because he's a black kid?

Miriam: Yeah. If [Zimmerman] shot a white kid, [the police] are not gonna let him go. The police would never let him go. (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

Fode and Miriam use the killing of a black teenager to indict the presence of racism in the criminal justice system. Through imagining a set of racial role reversals, in which, if a Black kid shot a white man, or Zimmerman shot a white kid, they both argue that police would have acted differently due solely to race (and of course racism).

²⁵ Though Zimmerman claimed complete ignorance of "Stand Your Ground", a former professor of Zimmerman's testified that "Stand Your Ground" statutes were thoroughly covered in a class Zimmerman took while he was pursuing a career in law enforcement.

Similar speculations were common after the murder. In Miriam's words, "it's because of racism *in society*", not only racist individuals, that allow such conditions. As Jones (2013) asks,

In U.S. society, as it is presently configured, can we imagine an armed Black man pursuing a young White boy, killing him, because, allegedly, he felt threatened by the White boy, and subsequently, on his testimony alone, being given a pass by the State's Attorney's Office to walk free, allegedly because there was not enough evidence to make an arrest? (p. 141)

These imaginings are not about white males and black males as individuals; they are about black men and white men within the larger context structural racism.

Alexander (2010) makes a similar point about drug enforcement, asking:

Can we envision a system that would enforce drug laws almost exclusively among young white men and largely ignore drug crime among Black men? Can we imagine young White men being rounded up for minor drug offenses, placed under the control of the criminal justice system, and then subjected to a lifetime of discrimination, scorn, and exclusion? Can we imagine this happening while [imagining] most Black men landed decent jobs or trotted off to college? (Quoted in Jones, 2013, p. 142)

Both Jones and Alexander answer emphatically, "No, we cannot", linking law enforcement, punishment, and structural racism. I see Miriam and Fode doing similar philosophical and empirical work, asking us to question the role of the police, which they seem to imagine as primarily protecting white life, through immediately detaining a Black male (Fode) or immediately arresting a man who kill white kids (Miriam). Binta makes a similar point:

The police know he shot him right, so why didn't they take him to jail? [Zimmerman's] not a policeman, he just saw the boy walking then he followed him and shot him? It's racism. Has he ever killed a white kid before since he had been there? There are white kids who dress in baggy clothes or hoodies or whatever. But, has this man ever shot one of those kids before? If he saw a white boy dressed in a hoodie, he wouldn't have done that. (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

Recall Mr. D suggesting that it was primarily the hoodie, not the *body in the hoodie*, that caused the killing. Binta asks us to consider the body wearing the hoodie, through her imagining of a “white boy” wearing a similar sweatshirt. “[Zimmerman] wouldn’t have done that”, she asserts. In these conversations we see three varying expressions of the same query-- would the justice system, specifically the police, have allowed a different racial scenario to end up in the same place? If Trayvon killed a white man, would he get away with it? Would Zimmerman, under the same circumstances, have gotten away with shooting a white kid? Has Zimmerman ever pursued a white kid, then shot him? By emphatically answering No to all three scenarios, these students asks us to consider racism as a system of power operating across multiple domains: the structural, the disciplinary, the cultural, and the interpersonal (Collins, 2009).

These perspectives broaden the “Trayvon(s) as a Problem” perspective that limited readings of the murder to interpersonal factors. Viewing “Trayvon(s) Facing Problems” indicts the criminal justice system, the racism inherent in policing and detention, as well as Zimmerman’s interpersonal racism. In the next section I turn to the visual discourse that emerged in the wake of the murder as a site for critical literacy.

“What’s frisk mean?”: Reading the visual world of “Justice for Trayvon” (Photos attached at the end of this draft)

According to Freire and Macedo (1987) critical literacy involves “reading the world”, or drawing upon life experiences to understand and critique larger social structures and our place in the world. In this section I show how the media landscape of Justice for Trayvon provided an opportunity for students to read the larger social landscape of race and protest movements in America, and their possible place in it. In the

following discussion, Mr. D incorporated images of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman to make a point about the power of the media to frame perceptions of guilt or innocence.

Mr. D: In the news a lot, we've been seeing these two people. Last night I was looking and I found these two pictures (see photo 2). This just shows you the power of pictures and how the media can make us think things. Now, when you look at these pictures what kind of impression do you get of the two people"? Does [Trayvon] look like he could be a troublemaker?

(Choral response of yes and no)

Kadisha: I don't think he looks guilty.

Mr. D: Maybe he looks guilty, because of the way he looks, right? Does [Zimmerman] look like a respectable man? Maybe, right? Look at him, he's got a nice suit on...How does your opinion change if they use these pictures? (See photo 1). It shows you how much it changes your perception. It shows you how much the way people look can influence people.

As Mr. D's demonstration pointed out, visual discourses indeed have the power to shape perception, especially when the images are analyzed from a racial lens. It also points out that the same photo can be viewed very differently. To Mr. D, the iconic photo of Trayvon Martin adorned in a white hoodie, the face of the Justice for Trayvon movement, is visually indicting, marking Trayvon as potential criminal. The same photo, apparently, can produce polar(izing) conclusions.

After Mr. Z's opening photos, I introduced a series of images from the protests around the country (Photos 4-7).

Chike: What do you all think about this one? (Photo 4). His sign says, "They never stop and frisk old white guys like me". You can see he's got the American flag over his face.

Ibrahim: What's frisk mean?

Mr. D: Frisk is when they pat you down, like to look for weapons, like a cop would frisk you, to pull you over, sometimes for no reason.

Ibrahim: So he's saying it's about race.

Mr. D: Yes, He's saying it's about race. Who do the cops bother? He's saying the cops bother black kids, not people like him.

Diop: And he's got the flag covering his eyes too. Like blind justice.

Chike: Yeah that's a good point Diop. In America we have this saying, "Justice is Blind", right?

Diop: If they say [Zimmerman's] innocent, there's no justice. That's my opinion.

Pierre: Justice isn't really blind though, at least I don't think so. Like at the store-

Mr. D: Yeah

Pierre: At the store up there they have rules about only two students in the store at a time, then we go on there, they still follow us around.

Mr. D: Yeah I've heard other students say that too, that in that store, they treat kids unfair. Maybe black kids more, but I've heard all kids say it's unfair. (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

In this exchange, the photos offered an opportunity to read the world of racism within the context of the Trayvon Martin murder in particular, but also in the students' lives as well. Mr. D's connection of "frisk" to policing policies offers an opportunity for students to comment on similar policing experiences. As Pierre points out, the ideal of blind justice fails when students are profiled in local businesses after school. As Mr. D points out, this issue of profiling students might go beyond race, which is a central issue in the next set of photos. Take, for example, this exchange in response to Photo 5:

Ibrahim: That lady's saying that might be her son

Chike: Even though she's an older white lady, a lot of people are identifying, saying this could be anyone's kid.

Ibrahim: I saw some other pictures of all the people wearing hoodies.

Kadisha: That's because [Trayvon] was wearing a hoodie when he got shot.

Diop: And she's putting herself in his place. That's what she's doing.

Chike: So there's a lot of people saying they can identify and empathize with Trayvon Martin and his family. You see, she's got her Skittles and Iced Tea. In these pictures you can see it's a white woman old enough to be someone's mother saying 'I still identify', saying this could be my son. So while we might think race has something to do with this murder, people of all races are protesting this larger issue of justice.

Abe: This guy's in trouble man. Everyone know him around the world...it's too late for a fair trial, because of the protests, even president has said something.

Venice: It's too late for justice, the boy is dead and can't tell his side of the story.

Pierre: All the stuff from his past is coming out. "He's bad", he already went to jail, the news stories and the President.

Mr. D: It shows how the media can make you think someone is innocent or not.

Diop: Even if they put him out, he'll still be in jail. Even if they let him out, he won't be able to walk down the street to go to the store. Anyone see him outside they're gonna kill him. I think he got two punishments, home jail and public jail (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012).

Engaging the visual aspects of the Justice for Trayvon movement opened a space for discussions about solidarity across racial lines, as well as the media's power to frame guilt or innocence. As Diop presciently pointed out, Zimmerman is indeed navigating (or rather, failing at navigating) "public jail"²⁶. What also emerges in this dialogue is the possibility of a multi-racial, multigenerational movement for social justice. As Diop pointed out, many protestors did put themselves in Trayvon's place. The next section shows how we engaged this issue in depth, as our discussion moved toward the possibilities and limits of universal racial participation.

²⁶ At the time of this writing George Zimmerman's life is unraveling before our eyes. He is, indeed, trying to live with the reality of "public jail".

I am (not) Trayvon Martin: Engaging the politics of race, age, and (white) liberal belonging.

I am not Trayvon Martin. And to the middle class, white, socially concerned activists who wears a shirt emblazoned with this slogans, you are wrong. I know you wear that shirt to stand in solidarity with Trayvon and other victims of injustice. The purpose of those shirts is to humanize these victims of our society by likening them to the middleclass white activist wearing it. Once you humanize the victim, it proves to us the arbitrariness of their deaths and thereby the injustice at play. But the fact of the matter is, Trayvon's death was anything but arbitrary. The fact that the real Trayvon and other countless victims of oppression are buried under 6 feet of cold dirt while we middle class white activists are alive and wearing their names is an indication that our societal system is working exactly as its intended... Listen to marginalized people like Trayvon's family... Listen to them, stand in solidarity with them. But do not, I repeat, DO NOT claim to be them (Downloaded from YouTube, May 5th, 2012)

The speaker in the YouTube video appears to be a young white woman in her late teens or early twenties. She sports hipster bangs, dyed pink, and speaks directly into the camera with certainty, urging her target audience not to universalize the deaths of young black men by claiming to be them. Her position, that she is NOT Trayvon Martin, emerged as a backlash against what many read as the naïve white privilege inherent in claiming to be Trayvon Martin. This politics of racial belonging embedded in her stance was taken up in the following discussion.

Chike: Basically what the girl is saying is she was offended by an old white woman wearing a shirt that says "I am Trayvon Martin". She's offended by that because she thinks it's silly for an old white middle class woman to try to put herself in Trayvon's shoes in that kind of way. What do you all think? Is this girl right? Is it silly for a 58 year-old middle class white woman to say, "I am Trayvon Martin"?

Pierre: I think it is because it's like, there's so much difference, like you're 58 he was like 17. You are two different type of people, it's like you're lying, you know, it's like-

Ibrahim: She's not talking about age though. That's not the important part.

Pierre: But there's too much distance between them. What does she know about Tray, what it's like to be Tray.

Chike: So Pierre you think there's too much social distance, that, it's kinda silly to say you can walk in that person's shoes

Pierre: Yeah exactly

Abe: But the lady saying she is Trayvon don't mean it in that way. She probably has a son and if her son was killed she would be upset. So that's why she did that.

Chike: So it's like a position, like I'm standing with Trayvon Martin and his family?

Abe: It's not about race or age or money it's about humanity, like, yeah.

Chike: I got you, so it's a deeper human connection that goes beyond race or age or any other social position? Got you. And she's saying there is a place for white people in this trial, there is a place and a way for white people to support Trayvon Martin. The way though is not to say you *are* Trayvon Martin. That's what she has an issue with. It might be better to stand in solidarity but not try say you are actually that person.

Diop: Why can't she say that?

Chike: What's that?

Diop: Why can't you say you are Trayvon Martin if you're white?

Chike: Good question, what do you think? Do you think white people should say they are Trayvon Martin?

Diop: Yeah, why not? Race doesn't matter.

Chike: Race doesn't matter? What Pierre said, is that he thinks there's too much social distance between Trayvon Martin and this older white woman to say she is him.

Diop: Is it because she's white? Why? Just because she's white and old?

Ibrahim: What if she was in his place would she have been killed? That's the main thing to me why she shouldn't say that. She isn't Trayvon Martin because she'd still be alive. What does she know about his-

Diop: It's not about race or age, it could have happened to anyone

Chike: So you think anyone could have been shot that night.

Diop: Anyone

Chike: What do other people think?

Etta: It doesn't matter if you're black or white. People can care about it, you don't have to be black to care about somebody.

Ibrahim: No, [Zimmerman's] racist. You heard the 911 call²⁷. Why did he follow Trayvon? Because he's black, right?

Mr. D: It's a tough question. There's this idea of the Other. Being an outsider. There's people who belong to the accepted group and people that don't fit into that group. And we all are that, we all belong to a group, like your race, your religion, your grade, but you're also Others, you're outsiders in different ways, maybe it's race or religion or language. We all have that. We all have that. It reminds me of Walt Whitman. Around the civil war, which was a war about slavery, in one of his poems he says "I am the slave", I am the...he goes through all the things he is, and he's this old white man. People were really offended. How can you say that you are a slave?

Ibrahim: That's different.

Mr. D: But is it? Can people really relate to people that are outside of them?

Ibrahim: Yeah I think so, but-

Mr. D: Some people might say humans have enough in common that I can understand what it's like, even though I didn't go through suffering or racism. Or is there a thing like, I'll never know what it's like to be you?

Chike: Ibrahim why is it different?

Ibrahim: She doesn't mean it this way. She's asking what would happen if she was in his place. I think the girl is saying if she were there that night she wouldn't get shot. [Whitman] is saying something that isn't about right now. She's speaking about one time, right now, he's just talking about being a slave [in a way] that doesn't make sense.

Mr. D: Could that just mean, if there was another neighborhood somewhere in this country, I'd be the outsider, where she'd be attacked? Somewhere in this world I'd be the outsider.

Pierre: I get what [the girl in the YouTube video] saying because she doesn't live that life. Does she get followed in stores like we do? Do the police follow her around? I don't think Zimmerman would have even called 911 or followed her. It's like the old white guy when he had that sign that said, "Cops never frisk old white men like me". I think he's

²⁷ This conversation followed a section in which I played the now famous call Zimmerman made to police dispatchers.

right when he says that and he still cares about Trayvon. He's not saying he is Trayvon. (Fieldnotes, May 5th, 2012)

In many ways this exchange puts abstract liberalism on trial. On the one hand, there is the universalism of the "Hoodie Movement" in which Whitman's claim, "I am the slave", was echoed by a multi-racial set of protestors wearing T-shirts and carrying signs reading, "I am Trayvon Martin". As Abe informs us, "It's about humanity"; this form of protest seeks a connection that transcends race, age, or economic status. Diop and Etta seem to concur with Abe's stance, arguing in favor of the productive elements of racial protest to, perhaps, move us into a racial future in which "race doesn't matter". Perhaps the only way to make this future a material reality is to recognize our common humanity (as Abe suggests) and live our everyday lives accordingly. Hence, we are all Trayvon Martin. On the other hand, Pierre points out the material of difference, or the real world, day to day social distance between young black men like "Tray" (and himself) and the "old white women" claiming to be him. Ahmed seems to take an even harder line, pointing out that the issue at hand is a particular moment in which race is life and death, and despite Mr. Z's theorizing the universal nature of difference, or the Other as a universal experience, such abstraction doesn't hold water if one considers the social context of racism. These two stances, in many ways, come to the fore in the final section.

"How can we do this thing called Justice for Trayvon?"

In the following dialogue we see the productive tension between unpunished violence, on the one hand, and unrequited love, on the other. In my analysis I pay particular attention to the tension between what Malcolm X identified as the problem of unpunished violence and a liberation theology grounded in an ethic of love and

forgiveness. I conclude by suggesting that engaging “teachable moments” such as Justice for Trayvon open curricular space for what Collins (2009) calls “another kind of public education” which engages multiple aspects of (global) racial injustice as well as resistance to these injustices.

Chike: So, I have one more question- what would Justice for Trayvon look like? How can we do this thing called ‘Justice for Trayvon’?

Fode: They should kill this guy.

Unidentified student: Yes, kill this guy who killed Trayvon.

Chike: Okay so that would be more like the ‘eye for an eye’ type justice?²⁸

Diop: Killing Zimmerman is not Justice for Trayvon. No, that’s not fair, that’s not justice. They should not kill him, because when someone kills another person that person is already gone, now you’re gonna take another life again for no reason?

Fode: Yo, if that was your brother what are you gonna do about that?

Diop: Take him to jail.

Fode: That’s it? If that guy went to jail for five or six years, and [Trayvon’s] family saw him? How do you think they will feel? He’s gonna be like done, they’re gonna kill him. No one can replace [Trayvon] to his family. So if I saw you, my nigga there’s trouble for you! [Class laughs]. That’s why for me, the good way for justice is for George to like die. He’s guilty. He’s guilty of what he did. If they find him guilty, he’s gonna face justice, fine. But if they don’t find him guilty, then what? Then what should Trayvon’s family do? Justice for Trayvon can’t happen unless his family can do something about it. (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

Fode's comments bring us back to a central question of Black existence in the United States: what is a justifiable or appropriate response when faced with a justice system that routinely fails to protect Black life? Is it possible that killing Zimmerman is in fact justice? In suggesting that George Zimmerman’s death is an appropriate and

²⁸ My referencing “eye for an eye” is a connection to previous class discussions about the various forms justice can take. I did not introduce this term to the class, yet I did invoke it here.

justifiable response to racist violence, Fode's words echo Africana theorists who have long advocated counter-violence as a strategy for community defense against racist violence as well as a strategy to attain freedom (Ferguson & McClendon, 2013). While Malcolm X did not invent this stance, he is perhaps its most well-known propagator:

The history of unpunished violence against our people clearly indicates that we must be prepared to defend ourselves or we will continue to be defenseless people at the mercy of a ruthless and violent racist mob... We assert that in those areas where the government is either unable or unwilling to protect the lives... of our people, that our people are within our rights to protect themselves by whatever means necessary (Malcolm X; quoted in Ferguson & McClendon, 2013, p. 54)

Fode also points out Trayvon Martin is irreplaceable and the criminal justice system routinely fails to protect Black life. If Gordon (2013) is correct that forgetting Trayvon's irreplaceability is the first step in his dehumanization, then Fode's position becomes that much more intriguing. Writing this in the wake of the acquittal, I hear the prescience in his words more than I did at the time of data collection. As Fode asks, what should Trayvon's family do? For Fode, the murder represents an instance in which counter-violence would serve as a form of morally justifiable action, especially when read in relation to his earlier beliefs about Zimmerman as a racist exterminator, whose actions were sanctioned by the State. How else, he asks, can we combat those "made to live".

Pierre, Miriam, and Diop all disagreed with Fode, as the following dialogue makes clear:

Pierre: But you don't know what happened, how can you kill him? Did you see it? Let me finish, let me finish! For me, the good way for justice is for [Zimmerman] to get a fair trial. If he gets a fair trial, then that's justice.

Miriam: Even if they kill [Zimmerman], it's not gonna stop racism. There's gonna be like some other cases again. The problem isn't justice, the problem is how to stop racism,

that's the problem. That's what the case is about, it's not about justice. Even if they get justice for Trayvon, he's dead. It's not gonna stop the problem of racism.

Fode: It's gonna be like that.

Binta: There's no solution for racism. We've all met racists and we're going to meet racists...No, I'm right! Our grandparents, even when they were alive there were racists. No one knows where racism comes from, it's all around the world.

Diop: What about the new generation that's coming up?

Chike: What do you think about that?

Diop: What's the example are we gonna leave for them? Think about the next generation. There's always gonna be a case like this. When you...how did Martin Luther King, for example. How did he respond to [racism]?

Fode: One thing about racism: there's no solution for racism.

Diop: MLK was...it's because of racism... If Martin Luther King can change it, one of us can change it, why not? He was human just like me. What about the next generation? What's the example we're gonna leave for them? We're supposed to leave a trace for them. Like every generation is supposed to be better than the one before. Every generation makes it a little better. Every generation does a little part to make it better.

Chike: So Diop what would justice for Trayvon look like for you?

Pierre: Fair trial

Mr. D: Life in prison?

Diop: Maybe life in prison, yeah, life in prison. Stop the racism, I agree with Miriam. The first thing is stop the racism. Racism is the biggest problem in the world. If you stop the racism-

Binta: How can you stop racism?

Fode: That's it. How?

Diop: Love. Love can stop everything. Trust me.

Choral: LOVE???? (Laughter)

Diop: Exactly. You might not have the heart to-

Binta: How can my heart stop a racist?

Diop: You might not have it inside to love someone. If you love that person, even if that person hates you, you can change it. In the end, that person is gonna love you, trust me.

Fode: Racism will never stop

Ibrahim: You said love, if Trayvon was my friend, my relative, and you killed him, would I you love you?

Kadisha: It's called forgiveness. You might not love that person, but could you forgive that person?

Ibrahim: If you killed my friend, or my brother, or my son-

Diop: Let me give you an example from my country. You know why [Haiti] is so poor? One of the poorest countries on the world? It's because they believe in that kind of justice, that when someone gets killed, then that person should get killed. Every time someone kill someone, the public just come in that person house and kill them. It's wrong.

Mr. D: Yeah

Diop: You're supposed to leave a trace for the next generation.

Pierre: Ibrahim, it's not about love or hate, it's about a fair trial. It's not you hate him, you don't even know what happened.

Ibrahim: I know what happened. Trayvon's dead and Zimmerman's alive.

Diop: That's not justice. That's anger.

Fode: If Trayvon was white he'd still be alive.

[Bell rings, ending class] (Videonotes, April 20th, 2012)

What emerges in this discussion is agreement that racism is a global phenomenon, perhaps the biggest problem facing the world, and that there will be another Trayvon Martin because racism dictates it is so. Intense disagreement, however, emerges about the possibility of "stopping the racism". Drawing on his faith in the redemptive power of liberation theology, Diop asks us to reconsider the work of love in social transformation.

In Diop's words we hear Martin Luther King Jr.'s articulation of *agape* love as a vehicle for spiritual transformation of the enemy. According to King, Jr. (1957):

Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men...it is the love of God working in the minds of men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. And when you come to love on this level you begin to love men...because God loves them and here we love the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does...agape says you must go on with wise restraint and calm reasonableness but you must keep moving [toward the goal] of all men living as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality ("The Power of Nonviolence")

Diop's idealist vision of a love movement for social transformation is met with cynicism, as I believe the laughter indicates, as well as a "racial realist" perspective on the permanence of racism, which I hear in Binta's contention that "there is no solution for racism" as well as Fode's belief that "racism will never stop". The quest to reconcile these two beliefs, in many ways, is the core of Africana social theory.

Conclusion

In this chapter I showed how engaging a teachable movement such as Justice for Trayvon can open space for classroom dialogues that engage students in contemporary, real-time issues that connect the classroom to some of their daily struggles. I also showed how engaging media discourses can be used to critique not only media representations, but also ask about the politics and possibilities of a racial and intergenerational solidarity and the tensions and limits of abstracting and universalizing material differences. I concluded by showing how the central questions of Africana studies remain salient and relevant in the lives of transnational black youth as they theorize about and negotiate their social worlds. By doing so, I believe this data demonstrates the importance of integrating such teachable movements (after all, as Miriam reminds us, there will be another, and another Trayvon Martin) into classroom spaces. In the next chapter I bring together the

insights from these two data chapters to offer some suggestions for imagining and practicing global l.a.w.s. (lessons against white supremacies).

Chapter Six

Toward a Global l.a.w.s. (lessons against white supremacies) Framework for Teaching and Learning

At this point, there are different histories not because of the forms of racism but because of *the histories of antiracist struggles*...The racism, in other words, sets the context, but it is the commitment to antiracism that questions the future (Gordon, 2013, p. 89-90, emphasis in original)

As I have tried to show throughout this dissertation, the explanatory power students give to racism demonstrates how racism is a social force rooted in legacies of the past but still very much at work in the present. As such, racism is a localized truth that transcends national boundaries, influencing many aspects of life “back home” (especially in Haiti), as well as how students are “known” in the U.S. These life experiences call for an approach to antiracist practice that recognizes the global dimensions of racism, as well as the work students engage in to resist it.

In the first chapter of this study, I argued that contemporary black migrations to the United States call for studies that pay close attention to the overlooked experiences of transnational black youth in American school settings. This claim was rooted in a desire to outline new possibilities for engaged classroom praxis that draw on students’ lived experiences in Africa, Haiti, and the United States as the building blocks for critical pedagogy. My data chapters highlighted the explanatory power students give of racism as they theorize about and navigate their social worlds. I argued that students’ experiential knowledge about life in Africa, Haiti, and the United States draws attention to particular expressions of anti-Black racism attached to African and Haitian personhood. To counter these dehumanizing narratives, students used media technologies to construct and circulate rich, complex counternarratives that offer a

necessary corrective to the colonial library (Mudimbe, 1994). I then offered an analysis of the Justice for Trayvon movement from the perspective of teachers and students. I suggested that grappling with the problem of unpunished violence and the state's unwillingness to protect black life connects students' theorizing of the murder to central debates in Africana studies and the unfinished quest for racial justice across the globe. Further, I showed how even well-meaning educators can fall victim to articulating "the logic of black guilt" (Wills, 2013), which, in this instance, implicates Trayvon Martin in his own murder. Finally, discussing Justice for Trayvon opened space for broader discussions about how we might collectively work to stop racism. Despite acknowledging the centrality of interpersonal, cultural and structural racism in American life, a love movement, rooted in Martin Luther King and Jean Bertrand Aristide's call for *agape love* retains its place in how we imagine conquering and deconstructing racism. Thus, throughout this dissertation I have attempted to provide ethnographic access to how students negotiate and "speak back" to the complex racialized terrain of the United States, Africa, and Haiti.

I begin this final chapter by making a case for the theoretical contributions of this study. I then suggest some practical contributions by revisiting the themes that cut across this data and suggesting what educators committed to culturally responsive teaching and learning can learn from this study. Specifically, I focus on how students' experiential knowledge and theorizing can serve as an outline for the development of a global l.a.w.s (lessons against white supremacies) framework for classroom work. By global l.a.w.s., I refer to the complex, global, and multiple manifestations of white supremacies and the teaching and learning strategies educators can draw on to challenge them. In particular, I

draw on the notion of decolonial love to address the dialectic of love and anger that remains at the heart of critical theory. I view a l.a.w.s. framework for teaching and learning as a particular dialect of decolonial love and critical, humanizing pedagogy, or what Sandoval (2000) describes pedagogies of differential consciousness. Such pedagogies draw on a hermeneutics of love, a concept I will explain in detail in the pages that follow.

Theoretical Contributions

As the number of black migrants in the United States continues to rise, it becomes more important to recognize how the lived experiences of transnational black youth can inform educational practice. First, this study challenges the American common knowledge and typical theoretical stance that conflates black and African American subjectivities (Arthur, 2000; O'Connor, Lewis, & Meuller, 2007). I believe this conflation is a common theme in educational research that centers the experiential knowledge and cultural practices of black youth living in the United States. Given the rise of (youth) cultural studies in the field of education research and the continuing significance of culturally responsive pedagogies for teaching praxis, I believe my intervention is more timely than ever. Thus, this study argues for recognizing distinction among black students (specifically, recognizing African and Haitian subjectivities in school settings) not for the sake of elaborating difference, but to more accurately contextualize and understand the particular forms of anti-Black racism these students face in school settings and America writ large. Further, such recognition means educators can create space for students to build on these unique lived experiences for the purpose of

rethinking notions such as “culturally relevant”, “culturally responsive”, and “antiracist” pedagogical practices.

Second, while Critical Race Theory (CRT) has certainly been foundational for studies of racism and its intersections with other forms of oppression in education, I believe a shortcoming of CRT has been its overly nationalistic assumptions about the black experience in the United States and concomitant strategies for addressing racism that overlook the transnational, cross-border practices transnational black youth engage in. This is particularly ironic given that CRT emerged at the same time as the exponential growth of black migration to the United States. As a corrective I have attempted to articulate the importance of a theoretical bricolage (Rogers, 2012) of CRT, postcolonial theory and transnational studies as a theoretical entry point into studies of the complexity of contemporary racisms in peoples’ lived worlds. As Rogers (2012) makes clear, “from varied, sometimes conflicting, perspectives, a theoretical bricoleur performs multiple readings on an artifact, text, or phenomenon” (p. 6). From my perspective, the phenomena of contemporary racism requires such a reading of the narratives, artifacts, and texts that comprise the data in this study.

Third, this study contributes to a theoretical understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy by adding ethnographic texture and nuance to our understanding of how transnational black youth not only face the challenges of particular forms of anti-Black racism rooted in notions of atavism and absence, but also how they use media technology to produce and circulate “multimodal counternarratives” (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010). I have also tried to show how culturally responsive pedagogies can integrate teachable moments such as the murder of Trayvon Martin as starting points for

in-depth engagements of racism as a system of power operating across multiple domains. Thus, this study is both a collection of narratives as well as a singular multi-perspectival counternarrative that challenges taken-for-granted (mis)representations of African and Haitian personhood as well as implicit assumptions about black youth living in the United States.

What Now?

How can educators who believe white supremacies remain foundational to our world go about analyzing their effects without making sweeping generalizations? As Clarke and Thomas (2006) remind us, “evoking race in a global context seems to conjure up Western experiences of difference or generalized concepts such as racial white supremacy, concepts that reek of a kind of ontological approach to whiteness and blackness—an absolute truth about racial difference everywhere—that the constructionist approach disavows” (p. 2). In other words, how can one acknowledge the “global” aspects of white supremacies while devising strategies to dismantle them at local levels?

Critical race theorist working in the field of education (e.g., Gloria Ladson-Billings, Daniel Solórzano, William Tate, Shaun Harper, Tara Yosso, and many others) have long called for national, state, and district-level implementations of a critical race curriculum (see Yosso, 2002 for just one example) that helps educators, students, and families better understand (or begin to understand) sociopolitical and sociocultural constructions of race and racism. Like Smalls (2011), I believe school-level curricula that connect local meanings of race (or consider the various ways race operates in local institutions) provides a nuance that top-down strategies cannot address. Pedagogues who argue for what Carbado (2002) describes as “racecentricity”—“an explicitly race

conscious approach to education that also makes clear that educational discourses and institutions both reflect particular conceptions of, and produce, race”. (2002, p. 181) must begin “from the ground up”, so to speak, for an understanding of what race means (and does not or cannot mean) at local levels.

Practical Contributions

First, I should make it clear that I agree with Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2008) that schools typically reproduce racial hierarchies and educators of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are often complicit in these processes. Therefore, “educators must always consider how they unwittingly assist in the reproduction of the racial order through their everyday interactions with students” (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2008, p. 354). That said, I hold out hope that these everyday interactions can be renegotiated. I return again to the students’ words and stories to outline some possible starting points for a global l.a.w.s. framework.

Sandoval theorizes love as a hermeneutics of social change, or a “set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accommodating technologies of method and social movement” (Sandoval, 2000, p.139). Such an approach centers love as a political action-emotion which can be mobilized to guide a set of practices and procedures that seek to decolonize the social imagination through the practitioner’s commitment to the equal distribution of power, commitment to deconstruction of supremacies, and insistence on emancipation (Sandoval, 2000). In Sandoval’s words I hear a call to decolonize pedagogy through such a commitment. In this spirit, I’ll outline a few starting points for what such a pedagogy of emancipation looks like to me:

Teach about Racism from a (Global) Domains of Power Framework

I agree with Patricia Hill Collins (2009) that racism is often taught from an interpersonal perspective, meaning teachers who address racism in the classroom tend to focus on “racist” interactions between individuals. This perspective not only limits our understandings of racism; it also imagines antiracist work as a process of educating individuals out of their personal prejudices (see also Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Diop and Pierre, for example, perceive racism in Haiti as partly the fault of individual U.N. soldiers who committed numerous atrocities against Haiti and Haitian people and aid workers who (mis)represent Haiti for personal security and financial gain. However, they are also clear that institutions ignore and support these acts of racism. As such, their stories call attention to racism across domains. In the United States, these students are equally clear that racism operates at interpersonal institutional, and cultural domains. They must negotiate particular forms of anti-Black racism derived from (mis)readings of Africa and Haiti in both media meta-narratives and school-level discourses. As their collective readings of the Trayvon Martin murder make clear, any teaching of racism that does not incorporate the criminal justice system and policing policies is incomplete.

I believe my study calls attention for the need to think through a global domain of power, in which educators make clear that racism has global articulations that do not perfectly overlap with American expressions of racism. As the stories in this study make clear, transnational black youth are not “tabula rasas”, on which teachers and researchers can easily ascribe their own racial meanings and views on race and racism. What I believe my study adds to this framework is a global dimension to racism, meaning

educators must recognize that transnational black youth are familiar with the workings of racism and bring these meanings with them to American settings.

Teach About Africa

Many researchers have called for comprehensive strategies that educators can use to teach about Africa in ways that challenge and debunk the constant barrage of (mis)representations of the Continent in the U.S. media (Dei, 2010; Keim, 2009). As Dei (2010) stresses, “a nagging intellectual problem that most students of Africa have to deal with is the oversimplification and over-romanticization of Africa, in terms of the challenges, opportunities, and problems confronting the continent and its peoples” (p. xiii). This call for “(re) conceptualizing Africa” (Dei, 2010, p. xx) is echoed by Keim (2009) who calls on educators to turn their classrooms into spaces where “mass media” images of Africa can be challenged and more nuanced portrayals can take center stage. This involves telling success stories without romanticizing the present conditions. I believe the digital cultural narratives composed by the students in this study offer one such approach.

Curricularize the (Counter)narrative

The digital cultural storytelling project in Mr. D’s opened new ground for how teachers and students can co-construct counternarratives to the dominant forms of representation I analyzed in this study. Students’ narratives about life in Africa, Haiti, and the U.S. were central to Mr. D’s pedagogy and offer an excellent starting point for how teachers can integrate such narratives into curricular units. As students’ (counter)narratives demonstrate, such stories and visual texts go beyond identity work and speak to the continued explanatory power students give to racism in an era dominated

by post-racial, colorblind rhetoric. I also suggest that teachers engage in storytelling, just as Mr. D did, on a regular basis. I do not suggest this because teachers automatically serve as counternarratives that challenge prevailing racial wisdom. Yet, by engaging in storytelling and opening themselves up to criticism (recall Mr. D's story about African boys requiring a "cultural lesson" on interactions with young women and Kadisha's immediate response that "American boys do that too") I believe teachers create a mutual learning environment that challenges the traditional roles of "student as empty vessel" and "teacher as sole possessor of knowledge" outlined by Freire (1970). Doing so often redresses traditional power roles and worked toward the creation of more equal power relationships in the classroom.

Recognize and Embrace Multimodal Racism/Antiracism

By this I mean that as media texts become more central in classrooms and multimodal pedagogies continue to be integrated into school settings (Miller and McVee, 2012), teachers need to pay close attention to how media narratives represent Africa and Haiti (as well as Black America and Black Americans). Stovall (2006) and Yosso (2002) have both shown the power of racism in the media narratives to which students are exposed, using CRT to as a theoretical stance to explore how media narratives often carry deficit perspectives about African American and Latino/a youth. Both theorists also offer suggest media pedagogies that draw on a more comprehensive set of representations can open new ground in classroom spaces. As such, they have demonstrated how pedagogies *about* and *with* media (Hill and Vasudevan, 2008) can be used to challenge one-sided representations. I argue that popular texts often carry similar perspectives about Africa and Haiti that go unchecked. Research on the experiences of African migrants in the

United States (Awokoya, 2012) demonstrates that media texts are common sources of (mis)information about African personhood. As such, critiquing these media narratives can also serve as starting point for global l.a.w.s.

Engage the Teachable Moment

Unfortunately, the real world offers and endless supply of opportunities to integrate case studies of racism into the classroom as they unfold in real time. As chapter five of this dissertation demonstrated, the murder of Trayvon Martin became one such moment in this study. Engaging this teachable moment moved class discussions beyond the immediate event (i.e., racist murder of a young black man) and opened space for students to discuss racial profiling in their own lives as well as theorize about racisms on global scales. Instead of turning a blind eye to these teachable moments and assuming they do not fit into one's curricula or lesson plan, I suggest that committed educators adopt flexible strategies for making these teachable moments the backbone of antiracist pedagogies. As the Trayvon martin data suggests, I have no doubt that Mr. D and I had very different opinions on the role of racism in the murder and what a morally appropriate and justifiable response might be in the face of a criminal justice system that refuses to protect black life. Yet, personal ideologies did not stop us from agreeing that this event merited a unit of study.

Racial Grammar Checks

As Bonilla-Silva argues (2012), "racial domination generates a grammar that helps reproduce racial order as just the way things are" (p. 174). My findings suggest that transnational black youth face such a grammar that reproduces and racial-culture hierarchies. In this grammatical structure, Africa is imagined as a primitive space, full of

violence and lacking markers of “civilization”, such as houses, schools, even clothes. In a similar act of ranking, Haiti is imagined as a space of only disaster. I suggest that teachers and researchers need to engage in racial grammar checks, or continuously question what we think we know about life in Africa and Haiti. Doing so I believe is the best remedy against re-inscribing racial grammars.

(mal)Adjust

Inspired by Diop’s unflinching faith in *agape* love (“love can stop anything, trust me!”), I turn to King Jr.’s (1957) call for Americans to become maladjusted. By this, King Jr. means to never adjust or become complicit with the status quo. For King Jr. (1957), this meant maladjusting himself to discrimination, segregation, mob rule, the methods of physical violence, and tragic militarism. The concept of maladjustment is up to each person to apply, but I suggest that educators can maladjust ourselves to the status quo of “formal” education as it is practiced en masse. I believe Mr. D’s class and by extension this research offers some possible sites for maladjustment.

Of course, a global l.a.w.s. framework has no guarantees; failure (f.l.a.w.s., if you will) is certainly possible. However, in the hands of *committed* and trained teachers and students, a global l.a.w.s. framework could potentially serve as a workable outline on which educators can build to recommit educational studies to deconstructing global racisms.

Appendix A: Photo images



Photo 1 (Images courtesy of Associated Press)



Photo 3 (Images courtesy of Associated Press)



Photo 4 (Courtesy of Associated Press)



Photo 5 (Courtesy of Associated Press)



Photo 6 (Courtesy of Associated Press)



Photo 7 (Courtesy of Associated Press)

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