

Chapter 5

From PWI to HBCU: When the Oppressed Takes on the Characteristics of the Oppressor

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ABSTRACT

Using critical race theory and Freire's theoretical framework of oppression as a guide, this chapter discusses institutionalized oppression through the lens of the chapter's author. She provides a collection of lived experiences in the form of short narratives. These narratives begin with the author's experiences as a Black student at predominantly White institutions (PWI). The author describes many firsts—the first time she was referred to by a White male classmate as a beneficiary of Affirmative Action as the reason for admission into college and not by her merit, experienced low expectations of her academic ability, was called the N-word, and her first encounter with racial profiling. She then details personal accounts of navigating academia as a Black female faculty member in predominantly White institutions (PWI), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), as well as other organizations. Freire's theoretical framework on oppression guides her reflection and discussion of these Black-on-Black encounters. She ends the chapter with a discussion of actions taken.

USING CRITICAL RACE THEORY

According to Orelus (2013), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an interrogation of the dominant ideology informing social and historical construction of race and the profound effects of this construction on the lived experiences of people of color, including students and faculty of color. Originating in the mid-1970s, CRT was a response to the perceived failure of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) to sufficiently address the effects of race and racism in U.S. jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT developed initially as a result of the work of legal scholars Alan Freeman, Derrick Bell, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While CLS tackles the meritocracy of the U.S., CRT addresses the effects of race and racism, while at the same time focusing on the hegemonic system of

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White Supremacy on the “meritocratic” system (Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Dalton, 1995; DeCuir& Dixon, 2004; Matsuda, 1995). Moreover, the ultimate goal of CRT is to effect change that will instigate social justice (Crenshaw, 1995; DeCuir& Dixon, 2004). The principles of CRT specifically include: (1) counter storytelling (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, 1995), (2) the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992, 1995; Lawrence, 1995), (3) Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995), (4) interest convergence (Bell, 1980) and (5) the critique of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), counter-storytelling is a way of telling a story that “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p.144). It is a “means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004 p. 27). Using counterstories makes it possible to challenge privileged discourses, the discourses of the “majority,” thus empowering marginalized groups by giving them a voice (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004). In the field of education, counterstories can be found in various forms, such as narratives or personal stories, other people’s narratives or personal stories, and composite narratives or stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

With regards to the CRT principle, the permanence of racism, Bell (1992) states that “racism is a permanent component of American life” (p. 13). Acknowledging racism as permanent embraces a “realist view” of the societal structure within the U.S. (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004). Adopting a “realist view” requires an awareness of the continuous dominant role that racism plays in American society (Bell, 1995), as both a conscious and unconscious act (Lawrence, 1995). Moreover, the concept of racism as permanent denotes that racist hierarchical structures dominate all political, economic, and social domains. These structures allow for White privilege and people of color being placed in the category of “other” in all arenas (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004).

A third CRT principle is Whiteness as property. According to Harris (1995), “due to the history of race and racism in the U.S. and the role that U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property interest (p. 280). Property operates on three levels: (1) the right of possession, (2) the right to use, and the right to disposition (Harris, 1995). Moreover, the right to transfer, the right of usage and pleasure, and the right to exclude are important characteristics associated with property entitlements (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004). Whiteness as a type of property is resultant of the historical utilization of these levels and associated characteristics (Harris, 1995).

Interest convergence is a fourth CRT principle. According to Bell (1980), one should regard critically gains achieved in civil rights within communities of color, and particularly those for African Americans. Rights that African Americans received due to early civil rights legislation were only basic rights that Whites had been enjoying for centuries. Further, these basic rights came about only to the extent that they *converged* with what Whites considered to be self-interests (Bell, 1980) and not to interfere with the “normal” way of life for most Whites (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004).

The final CRT principle is the critique of liberalism. Three basic ideas of liberal ideology and that CRT scholars have been critical of include (1) colorblindness, (2) neutrality of the law, and (3) incremental change. Accepting the concept of colorblindness and neutrality ignores the fact that inequity, inopportunity and oppression have been historically part of American society. Ignoring race does not consider racism as permanent and persistent. In addition, ignoring race will not erase this past or prevent future acts of inequity, inopportunity and oppression (DeCuir& Dixon, 2004; Gotanda, 1991). Regarding incremental change, any gains for marginalized groups must be made slowly and in a way that is agreeable for those in positions of power. Emphasis is placed on *equality*, rather than *equity*. Solutions based on equality

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