

## Chapter 47

# Agnotology and Ideology: The Threat of Ignorance and Whiteness Ideology to Transformative Change

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### **ABSTRACT**

*During periods of local and national unrest, leaders engage in discussions surrounding the reexamination of old policies and the consideration of new policies. Their changes to policies and procedures may be symbolic to silence objections or performative to feign new awareness, but symbolic and performative changes will not lead to transformative change. So how does a nation fix a problem of which many of its citizens are mostly ignorant? How do organizations redress inequitable hiring practices when they believe America is a meritocracy where everyone has the same chance of succeeding? How do educational institutions restructure teaching practices when the predominately White teacher workforce continues to resist talking about race? Transformative change will require the unexamined power of Eurocentric culture and thought that normalizes the marginalization, oppression, and subordination of Communities of Color and other groups of people based on gender, class, and citizenship to be completely exposed and then abolished.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In banking, there has long been the practice that bank tellers study multiple examples of genuine currency in order to accurately identify counterfeits. The ability to recognize counterfeit money is one of the minimum requirements bank agents are required to learn to reduce overall risk to the institution (Lauer, Dias, & Tarazi, 2011). Imagine what would happen to the stability, infrastructure, and foundation of one bank agency if all its agents were incorrectly trained to identify counterfeit money as genuine currency. All incoming and outgoing financial transactions would be measured against the fake money and tenders would no longer be worth their actual value.

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## ***Agnotology and Ideology***

Now imagine an entire nation intentionally working to legitimize the enslavement of millions of Black bodies and the continual oppression and marginalization of People of Color by creating virtually the same dilemma: the inability to identify truth from deception. What would happen if an entire nation was deliberately and strategically kept ignorant of its history through the suppression of particular events and narratives or through the careful preservation of distorted perceptions to maintain systems that benefit only a few (Logue, 2013)? What if some forms of information were maintained by those with power to “keep people of African descent in undesirable places” (Ruffin, 2010, p. 12)? The suppression of information, or the distortion of the truth, or the manipulation of facts to serve a purpose that befits a particular belief over another is precisely what some scholars aim to understand when they study the production of ignorance; a study referred to as agnotology.

This chapter will analyze the intersection of agnotology and Whiteness Ideology, and their combined threat to an organization’s ability to effectively implement diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

This chapter is broken into five distinct sections:

1. Brief summation of Critical Race Theory (CRT)
2. Agnotology Defined
  - a. Examples from the past and present
3. Ideologies Defined
  - a. Whiteness Ideology
  - b. Ideologies of Poverty (Individual and Structural)
4. A Study of Ideologies within a School District
5. Rethinking the Design of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Trainings in Organizations & Schools
  - a. Critical Thinking Framework

The juxtaposition of agnotology to Whiteness Ideology provides leaders committed to racial and social justice an alarming point of interest because Whiteness Ideology can go undetected by most white Americans as it serves as the very infrastructure of society while agnotology will intentionally misguide and thwart any efforts to unveil and dismantle the existence of Whiteness Ideology. Whiteness Ideology is analogous to the bank teller’s training described earlier. Whiteness Ideology has been the exemplar by which many white Americans base their assumptions and decisions, and grounds their beliefs on. Because the production of Whiteness Ideology has been reproduced for hundreds of years, as we will see throughout the chapter, it is often the case that when white Americans are confronted with an alternate narrative, one that is supported by historical events and validated by true accounts from participants challenging the exemplar, the new accounts are rejected.

As seen in the figure below, agnotology and Whiteness Ideology will be the two overarching concepts that will be deeply examined using critical theory as the framework to ground the work throughout this chapter. Thus, the basic tenets of critical theory warrant a brief review.

## **Critical Race Theory**

Critical theory builds on the classical writings of Karl Marx who argued society is built on relationships of power and should be examined critically. “The goal of conflict/critical theory is to reduce inequalities such as gender stratification, ethnicity/ “race” stratification, sexual identity discrimination, age discrimination, and international inequalities” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 84). In 2001, Solórzano

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