TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY DYNAMICS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Beyond Post-Racial America

By

MARTIN GUEVARA URBINA, Ph.D.

Professor, Criminal Justice
Sul Ross State University–Rio Grande College

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

2014
Chapter 8

THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF ETHNIC PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION:
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MANIFESTATIONS OF HISTORICALLY ENTRENCHED RACIAL IDEOLOGIES

Marcos Pizarro

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a “more convenient season.”

—Rev. Martin Luther King

In the new millennium, race and racism continue to dominate the landscape of social life in the United States. That is not, however, an easily accepted statement for many Americans. After the election of the first black president in the United States there is a popular conception that, while racism may still exist, it is no longer a significant part of most people’s lives across the country. This chapter is an analysis of the historical and ideological forces that shape the racial climate we live in, the popular discourse on race in the United States, and, in turn, the manifestations of racism in the early twenty-first century.
INTRODUCING U.S. POPULAR RACIAL HISTORY

A short review of popular conceptions of race and racism and their histories can help us understand why the perception that racism is irrelevant in the United States is so easily accepted. Today, it is commonly understood that the earliest racial history of the United States was problematic, if not tragic. Most people tend to agree that slavery and the genocide of indigenous communities, as two examples, were horrific. We also know that there were severe consequential effects from these periods in American history and that they lingered for some time. However, the popular understanding and analysis of racial history jumps from these early atrocities, most often skimming over the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, to the civil rights era (1955–1968), emphasizing this as a proud moment of resistance and change that we all shared. In effect, the civil rights period serves as the cornerstone of our contemporary understandings of America’s racial history. It is framed as the time of our racial redemption, allowing us to portray those earlier travesties as tragic historical events whose effects have, supposedly, evaporated.

Open discussions of America’s racial history reveal that, among many whites, there are feelings of guilt associated with the racist roots of U.S. history. Many whites recognize that if they had been alive during one of these violently racist periods, then they likely would have been a part of this racism in some way and, regardless, would have benefitted significantly from racist views and behaviors. Many people are uncomfortable with that guilt and understandably want to disassociate themselves from this racist legacy. This may be the reason that so many whites want to emphasize our racial progress, even when people of color are discussing, analyzing, and confronting obvious contemporary manifestations of racism that they live. Invariably, many whites, and people of color as well, want to emphasize the ways they see us having moved beyond these racist realities. There is a belief that this process of recognizing and vilifying historical racism serves as a means of distancing ourselves from it, if not atonement itself, marking the shift in our racial beliefs and reflecting the absence of racism. For many people, the evolution of our racial beliefs in the United States began to achieve its contemporary heights with the movements of the 1960s and 1970s that manifested the resistance of people of color against racism, and with the subsequent responses of U.S. institutions with what are often lauded as major structural changes, like affirmative action, bilingual education, and ethnic studies. For many people, the election of President Obama in 2008 functions as the most powerful demonstration of the end of institutional racism that began to be disassembled with those shifts in policy a generation earlier.
The common belief is that acknowledging the atrocity of blatant forms of racism and wanting to rectify those past wrongs reflect the end of racism. So, “If we clearly acknowledge that we abhor racism, then we cannot be racist.” Further, “If we are no longer racist, then the next step in the pursuit of full equality has to be to ignore the role of race in society, to be color-blind.” This final move, popular thinking asserts, represents the true end of racism in the United States, particularly in the twenty-first century. Reality, however, often clashes with the popular imagination, as detailed in the following sections.

**COMPLICATING U.S. RACIAL HISTORY**

My work with high school and university students in countless settings over the last two decades has shown me that this is the most common way in which young people learn to understand race today. These understandings, however, are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of both history and racism that they are implicitly taught over the course of their schooling. In the United States, we learn to understand history as events, jumping from major event to major event, often focusing on those that represent shifts in policy and practice. This approach to history (evidenced in the first three paragraphs of this chapter) prevents us from understanding history as it truly is: a process. History is about how things happen, and, even more important for understanding racial history, most often it is about how things morph so they can continue to happen. Relatedly, history is often understood as what happened instead of what we believed or how we continued to believe what we believed. In this chapter, I am most interested in understanding how racism continues to happen and how we have continued to believe in racist ideologies, often without being aware of its impact on our beliefs and daily habits. Recognizing history as a way of understanding the processes by which our ideologies evolve provides a framework for deconstructing racism. It moves us away from a focus on what are thought to be turning point events by exposing the reality that such an approach prevents us from seeing that our understandings of race are not represented in a policy change or even the election of one African American to the presidency.

Looking back at the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, we can see that the existence of minor policy shifts (like the creation of affirmative action) in response to these movements is hailed as significant because of our narrow understanding of history and change. The fact that new policies came into being that were based on the recognition of racism represented a major accomplishment to many. This is understandable if we reflect back on the dominance of blatant racism in U.S. institutions and
daily life prior to this time. This narrow analysis, however, prevents many of us from even considering whether the movements that took place or the subsequent policy changes actually evinced a shift in the racial ideologies or popular racial beliefs of the majority of "Americans." While these policy and legal changes were supposedly intended to rectify the generations of blatant racism that preceded them, there has been little acknowledgment that these shifts did not address the root causes of the inequalities people of color were protesting. For example, affirmative action policies in universities have never addressed the dramatic racial injustices that dominated the landscape of K-12 schooling even after the policies were implemented. Further, these policies did not confront the ideologies and racial beliefs of those who were entrusted with the responsibility of providing equal opportunities in these institutions, and thus the emphasis on change through policies resulted in those who implemented these policies most often continuing to base their practices on their existing racial ideologies. In effect, just one manifestation of these realities is the way in which school districts that were desegregated by court rulings continued to segregate students within given schools and provide students of color distinctly inferior schooling.35

RACIAL IDEOLOGY AND THE SEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY RACISM

Understanding racism requires that we not simply consider law, policy, and even practice, but that we focus on ideology—the often-unacknowledged forces shaping the way we learn to understand the world and our deepest beliefs about race and equality. Ideology, and racial ideology in particular, allows us to most clearly understand how race functions both today and historically. The reality is that, through our popular ideologies, racism was and remains fundamental to "American" understandings of basic concepts like society, citizenship, rights, intelligence, and meritocracy. Racism was an integral part of the formation and development of every institution in the United States, including politics, economics, criminal justice, media, health care, and education.36 My own analysis of early research intended to assist teachers of Mexican students during the first half of the twentieth century makes it clear how powerful these racist legacies were in shaping the basic organization of schooling (as just one example). Two master's theses completed at the University of Southern California during this period demonstrate how the schooling of Mexican descent students in California was founded on beliefs in their inherent inferiority. These two researchers used their theses to provide guidance to teachers and teacher trainers on how to deal with the
The Twists and Turns of Ethnic Prejudice and Discrimination

Mexican students whom many had in their Southern California classrooms. Rollen Drake (1927:24) simply explained that his research examining performance on achievement tests proved that "the whites as a group are superior to the Mexicans in intelligence." The focus of his work was to provide evidence to the educational community that Mexicans were intellectually inferior and that classroom work should be based on recognition of these students' limited abilities. Five years later, in *Methods of Teaching Mexicans*, Betty Gould (1932:3) concluded that, "The Mexican children of laboring parents are, for the most part, handicapped by having decidedly inferior mental equipment." In Chapter 6 of this work, "How to Overcome Undesirable Racial Characteristics," Gould (1932:48) charges, "There are many traits and habits that the Mexican practices which may all be traced directly to his general feeling of irresponsibility. This feeling has been handed down to him over a long period of time." Research such as that produced at the University of Southern California was used both to train future teachers and as the justification for policies such as the teaching of non-academic curriculum and the segregation of Mexican students. These common segregationist policies and practices, as well as their popular justifications, affirmed the commonly shared belief in the intellectual inferiority of Mexicans during that time.

Popular racist understandings of the role that race played in shaping the intelligence and ability of people of color determined the practices of school personnel for generations, which shaped opportunities for people of color and, thus, outcomes.37 Ironically, these outcomes were then used as the justification for the ideologies as well as the practices that actually created said outcomes, which were not seen as causal but rather as effective policy and implementation. To be explicit, teachers and teacher trainers learned racist ideologies that unequivocally defined Mexican students as intellectually inferior and deficient. Subsequently, these teachers developed classroom practices that limited the possibility for Mexican students to develop higher order intellectual skills, often while blatantly demeaning the students. Countless students did not achieve in school as a result of these limited or often nonexistent opportunities. Their poor outcomes then became the justification for the teachers' initial beliefs, often reinforcing those beliefs in ways that communities of color found it almost impossible to challenge, sometimes for generations.38

To better understand the reasons that these legacies of racism still inhabit our institutions through the beliefs of those who make decisions within them, we can focus our attention on the times during which racist educational practices were most directly challenged. As segregationist policies were attacked by people of color in the courts and communities, these courts ruled that many of the practices were unconstitutional and needed to be changed. Over the course of years (some of the legal battles went on for decades), the poli-
cies were modified, but what happened to the beliefs of those who taught in
the schools, made policy, hired teachers, and disciplined and advised stu-
dents? The 1954 Brown decision and any of the subsequent changes in dis-
trict-level segregation practices had no effect on the beliefs of teachers and
administrators in the schools. A court ruling does not and cannot confront
the racial learning of a lifetime, let alone generations. These school per-
sonnel, for the most part, remained in their jobs and maintained their racial
perceptions. For instance, around the time that Gould’s (1932) work was
being read by teachers and future teachers, the courts in California were
beginning to require schools to include Mexican children in classrooms with
white children. These rulings, however, did nothing to combat the belief sys-
tems (based on the classroom experience and “research”) of Gould and the
teachers who learned their understandings from her.

The point of this overview is to demonstrate the fact that our popular
approach to explaining how our racial perceptions have evolved in this
country is wrong-headed. We emphasize the changes in policy and law in the
post-civil rights era as a reflection of the changes in our beliefs and practices,
when the two are not remotely related. The result of our focus on those poli-
cies and laws as the litmus test of our racial progress is that it prevents us
from understanding how race is lived in our daily lives in meaningful ways.39

Because of its history—generations of U.S. citizens learn through virtually
every facet of their lives that people of color are inferior to whites—racist
logic became part of the fabric of social thinking in the United States.
Through hindsight, we can clearly see that the seed of racism was planted by
way of the unification of religion and greed, which were used to rationalize
conquest, slavery, and genocide.40 Still, it can be challenging to see the pro-
found ways in which this thinking penetrated every facet of life in the United
States over hundreds of years when we have intentionally been taught to for-
get and ignore these historical processes.

We forget that, for example, the most popular form of entertainment in the
United States in the second half of the nineteenth century was the minstrel
show, a traveling stage show in which white actors portrayed African
Americans in extremely derogatory ways, reflecting a shared understanding
and agreement with the audience that African Americans were socially, intel-
lectually, spiritually, emotionally, and morally inferior to whites. This form
of entertainment became a mechanism whereby community- and nation-
building took place. Through these racialized community-building practices,
understandings of African American inferiority were established, agreed on,
and reified. Further, these practices became understood as central to the
American experience, the cornerstone of how we understood ourselves as a
nation.

We also forget that illegal lynchings of African Americans that were
implicitly and explicitly approved by the legal community (police and
judges) were also seen as entertainment, attended by families with small children, with portraits taken of these families in front of the victims of these lynchings/murders. These community events were the primary means by which racist ideologies were embodied in daily practices that superseded the laws and which people of color learned and reflected the real rules of life in so many communities. I recently purchased a postcard that was mailed between two family members in Utah in 1907 that had a blatantly racist portrayal of an African American on it, and the personal note simply mentioned the weather and how the family was doing. Daily practices in the United States were shaped by racist understandings to the extent that the perpetrators and beneficiaries of this racism thought nothing of it, at least in a negative light. Eventually, racist beliefs did not need to be explicitly taught to subsequent generations (although they were by many) because they were so integral to social life that they became part of the unseen logic by which everyday people organized their social thinking.

This unconscious practice of racism is the legacy most deeply affecting social life in the United States today. As we know, our racist logic was an affront to our legal principles of equality and was eventually challenged in the courts. When it was finally acknowledged by the courts that our racial practices stood in opposition to our legal principles and changes in the law and in policy began, racism was so deeply imbedded in the genetic code of life in the United States that it continued to be passed down to subsequent generations of Americans even when it had been successfully challenged in the courts and when policies had been changed.

I recognize that it is extremely difficult to effectively make all of the complex connections I am only briefly explaining in this chapter. I hear the retort that my students learn through their own schooling: "Life in the U.S., where we have now re-elected our first African American president, can't still be influenced by our racial history." One example may help denounce this belief. Today, it is still common for teachers to explain the "failure" of Latina and Latino students with one sweeping explanation: "Latino parents don't value education." Even this year, I have heard this from white students training to be teachers and from practicing white teachers. I have also heard from countless Latina/o teachers who have been told this by their white colleagues. Whenever I ask those who espouse this belief where they learned it or how they support the claim, I am almost always met with a puzzled look. They cannot believe that this idea is not shared by everyone. They often stammer because they know it is a fact but have a hard time supporting the claim. My own work with Latina/o students (Pizarro, 2005) has debunked this racial myth as the students and their families display aspirations for educational success in college, but when I explain that, students often do not believe me. I must be wrong. Their certainty in my obvious mistake is
grounded in the fact that this belief is central to their understandings of race, schooling, and meritocracy. If we do not have a justification for our dramatic educational inequality that we can lay at the doorstep of Latina/o families and children, then the basic principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy at the core of our social contract become little more than propaganda. That is too unsettling for many. So, the racial myth of Latina/o parent disinterest in school lives on, as it represents the unconscious racism that has been passed on over generations. Looking back to the Gould (1932:2) thesis, she explains, “As a general rule, the parents [of Mexican students] lack any desire for education.” As we saw earlier, Gould packages this analysis of Mexican parents in explicitly racist writing.43 While the shifts in our popular racial analyses have had to reflect the legal and policy changes that have been required by their previous discrepancy with our principles of justice and equality, the underlying and unconsciously taught racist logic remains.

Looking back through our history and focusing not on major events as markers of policy shifts but instead on how we continued to believe what we believed, the power of ideology and its centrality to any analysis of race and racism become apparent. Policies and laws changed throughout this history from separate but equal, to mandated integration, and even reforms to address past injustices, such as affirmative action. At the same time, racialized and racist popular understandings of intelligence, ability, and merit were propelled through popular culture, entrenched racial myths, and daily practices.

The power of these informal mechanisms that regenerated racist ideologies remained unacknowledged in popular discourse, in sharp contrast to the common focus on how policy changes reflected our growth and evolution toward the embodiment of “American” principles of justice and equality. This shift in popular discourse seemed significant, as it meant that blatant forms of racism gradually became demonized. The policy shifts became accepted as just, as the overt and common forms of racism that preceded the shifts became increasingly unacceptable in many parts of the United States. This meant that, for many, racism was becoming a thing of the past.44 What was missed in this analysis is the fact that the underlying ideologies of racial inferiority were propelled not by policies or laws in themselves but by popular culture and everyday practice. A system of belief’s had evolved that rationalized racial inequality by laying blame for that inequality on people of color, be it for their lack of effort or any of a number of other “deficits.” Racial inequality ran contradictory to our theories of justice and equality, and so there was a need for constant affirmation of the justifications for the racial inequality that were used to deflect attention from the underlying covert racism and corresponding racist practices.

The minstrel shows, as referenced earlier, were an early form of these mechanisms, as they continually affirmed the inferiority of African Ameri-
cans. Similarly, the mainstream media and schooling both served as daily sites of confirming the inferiority of people of color in the United States outside the realm of policy and the law. This has gone on for hundreds of years because the heart and lifeblood of racism has remained unchecked. Instead, through our focus on policy and practice, we have always attacked the manifestations of racism, such as discriminatory practices. We have not attacked the thinking that leads to these practices: the belief in white superiority (supported by an ongoing, unspoken understanding of the inferiority of people of color). Accepted notions of white superiority dominate the social landscape of the United States today as a result of how deeply entrenched they were in the formation of the core ideologies upon which the United States was founded. The belief in the moral, intellectual, and social inferiority of people of color led to policies and laws such as slavery, the extermination policies targeted at Native American nations, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), and the removal of Mexican descent peoples from their legally held land-ownings. This same belief system allows for dramatically unequal education opportunities for the majority of Latina/o students and for the discriminatory sentencing policies affecting African Americans in the U.S. criminal justice system (as two examples).

RE-LEARNING WHITE SUPERIORITY

Today, despite numerous policy and legal changes and even fairly significant shifts in the nature of popular racial discourse, the notion of white superiority still remains at the heart of the U.S. ideology of meritocracy. There is a commonly held belief that equal opportunity is an essential right in the United States and that we will adamantly defend this right for anyone of any race or ethnicity. There is also a fairly agreed-on recognition that our past policies and practices did not provide equal opportunity to all and that this was wrong. At the same time, this notion of white superiority remains central to our understanding and explanation of inequality in the United States, albeit unspoken and even unseen in most circles. I see this in the classes I teach for future teachers. They often share the popular understanding of race, racism, and the racial history of the United States that was described early in this chapter: they abhor racism and our racist past and will defend anyone who faces blatant racism. They are also confident that racism no longer plays a role in the schooling of our youth. How does this reflect a belief in white superiority? These students would never claim such a belief. Yet when they are confronted with the dramatic racial inequality we see in U.S. schools (as reflected in the achievement gap and the deplorable out-
comes in many majority-minority schools), their explanations always have to
do with the students' lack of effort, the devaluing of education among their
families, and other forms of student, family, or cultural "deficiencies." When
I ask these students what their explanations might be if we saw similar per-
formance issues among groups of white students, their answers always turn
to possible issues with the schools, teachers, and leadership. Next, when I ask
them to uncover the ways in which they learned all of this, they are often
stumped. They are confident in all of these beliefs and understand them as
facts, but they struggle to provide evidence that supports the positions they
have learned to adopt.

We can begin to uncover how we all learn these racialized ideologies by
examining popular culture. Any analysis of popular media and its coverage
of communities of color and outcomes in these communities immediately
exposes a deficit approach to how the media frame the issues (as seen in the
papers, local news, and even mainstream movies such as Freedom Writers). A
popular form of covering these issues today is to highlight examples of stu-
dents of color who make it out of their communities. These stories almost
invariably emphasize the amazing obstacles students faced and had to over-
come, never identifying any of the strengths of these communities that might
have played a role in their success. We herald these students because we see
them as overcoming their deficiencies. Where I live, three of four Latina/o
students who graduate from county high schools are unable to attend a four-
year public university because, despite their high school diplomas, they have
not completed the requirements for admission. Their schools have provided
them diplomas but not prepared 75 percent of their graduates for college.
The fact of the matter is that this is not a big issue in the media or popular
discussions of education in our community. It is expected, and yet, as sug-
gested earlier, if we had similar numbers for white students, there would like-
ly be an uproar. Most of us never have any awareness of the role racial and
racist ideologies play in our explanations of the social issues in our commu-
nities because we have a deeply entrenched and unconscious belief in white
superiority that governs our understanding and explanation of racial inequal-
ity in the United States, but which is masked from our consciousness by our
focus on ideals like meritocracy. Consequently, because this often-unac-
nowledged ideology runs counter to the more conscious beliefs about race
and racism that we hold, the practices and manifestations of racism that we
exhibit are distinct from those of our past—complicating the racist legacy of
the United States in the twenty-first century.
TOOLS FROM CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND CHICANA/O STUDIES FOR DECONSTRUCTING CONTEMPORARY RACISM: CENTERING RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE

Today's manifestations of our racist ideologies are seen as less dramatic and severe. Yet because they are viewed as innocuous, they have the potential to be even more problematic for people of color who are confronted with those who subconsciously adopt the beliefs but feel that they are actually challenging injustice in the process. Work in Critical Race Theory and Chicana/o Studies today has helped us understand these beliefs and actions as racial microaggressions:

subtle verbal and nonverbal insults directed at people of color, often automatically or unconsciously; layered insults based on one's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and cumulative insults, which cause unnecessary stress to people of color while privileging Whites. (Yosso, 2006:113)

Racial microaggressions represent the ways in which the ideology of white supremacy finds its way into our thinking and behaviors, often without us being conscious of it.\(^{45}\)

The most powerful way I can describe this is through the work I am currently doing in a local high school and previous work at the college level. Based on the work I had done at the college level, I found that Latina/o students were relieved when they learned of the concept of racial microaggressions. This concept gave meaning to many of their experiences, which they felt were wrong but they did not have the ability to deconstruct. For example, white friends might tell them that they are not like other Mexicans or that they are the “good kind of Mexicans” as a compliment. These friends are trying to tell them that they like them, that they connect with them, and that they are not what they expect from Mexicans. In so doing, what these friends are also saying is that they have adopted a perception that Mexicans cannot typically be smart, likeable, knowledgeable of American culture, or any number of other manifestations of stereotypes and profiling that dominate the landscape of racial “understanding” in the modern era. These white friends are saying that they are not real Mexicans because real Mexicans cannot be these things. Such are common comments that Latinas and Latinos hear come from friends, who they also like. So many of these Latina/o students have a feeling that these kinds of comments are wrong, as they make them feel uncomfortable, but the students are conflicted because the com-
ments also come from people they like. However, many of these students do not have the tools to make sense of these experiences.

In my recent work with high school students, I introduced the concept of racial microaggressions to the students and found that many acknowledged the concept with a palpable excitement. These students felt that they now had a tool to explain things that they had been feeling but could not put into words. Latina and Latino students spoke of teachers who treated them unfairly but never made any racialized comments. These teachers might ignore the requests for help from only certain students, they might make "examples" of those students, and teachers might also target them for discipline in ways that were clearly unfair. Many of the Latina/o students shared examples of being disciplined for dress code violations that simply were not enforced equally, and often they were punished while looking at a white student dressed almost identically who was ignored by school staff. In all of these cases, there was an unspoken racial coding that seemed to govern these practices. Students shared countless examples of Latina/o-identified students who had experienced these staff practices and often could not come up with one comparable example from a white student. As the students understood it, school rules were enforced strictly with Latina/o students while white students were often given the benefit of the doubt since it was understood that they were not troublemakers or discipline concerns.

These are some of the more obvious forms of racial microaggressions that Latina/o students tend to experience. As they became more adept with this construct, many students also began to use it to explain even more subtle forms of racial microaggressions. For example, students started to look at teacher expectations with a clearer understanding of how they work. Besides the more blatant forms of racial profiling confronting Latina/o students, they also felt that many teachers did not expect them to be successful in school. They were asked whether they were in the right class when they walked into advanced classes, they were recommended to aim for the lowest standards that would allow them to earn a passing grade on assignments, and thus they were simply not being prepared for college, all despite their aspirations.

Through our work with and connections to the teachers, we also found that almost all of them had the best of intentions for their Latina/o students. They wanted them to be successful, but at the same time, they had serious doubts that many of these students could be successful. Some teachers felt the students had too many obstacles to overcome. Many of our students described a wall of racial microaggressions that they experienced, often from the time they stepped foot into middle school. What is most profound is that for almost all of the students, there was never any explicit reference to them being expected to fail because they are Latina/o. They were simply shown, through the expectations they faced in the realms of discipline and academ-
ic performance, that they were unlikely to be successful in school. Like the public that learns to accept the dramatic racial inequality in school outcomes, the students learned that this was natural. In effect, most accepted it, and, worse, most actually internalized it. They learned to blame themselves and their peers for their shortcomings, despite the fact that one of the middle schools that many of them attended is known to do a poor job preparing students for high school (by the high school staff and in a recent assessment that gave the school the lowest performance rating possible). As the students explained, despite whatever success and confidence they had in elementary school, early in middle school, many learned to believe that their academic fate was not going to include school success. In short, they learned to internalize the low expectations they faced. They began to believe in their own inferiority without ever being told any of this explicitly. For many, our conversations during their junior year in high school about these issues was the first time they had the chance to openly and collectively discuss and think through any of this. By that time, even as we provided a space to expose and explain the common barriers that they faced, many of the students were still convinced that they could never succeed and that this lack of success was completely and only attributable to their corresponding lack of ability and effort.46

Obviously, there is a great deal of complexity to the way in which race and racism manifest themselves in our daily lives today. The work in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Chicana/o Studies (CS) is criticized as overemphasizing race issues that are not as significant as CRT and CS scholars make them out to be. My hope is that this analysis has shown why this critique is leveled and also why it is naïve and dangerous. The critique against CRT and CS often includes an attack against people of color for over-using racial analysis as a means of “playing the race card” and removing personal responsibility from the explanation of individual student failure, for example. Ironically, our students not only do not use the race card, but they even challenge the racial analysis described above and emphasize their own laziness as the main reason for their failure, even in the context of discussing the racial microaggressions they experienced. Because of the power of the ideologies they have grown up living in and adopting themselves, they do not want to be seen as coping out. They have learned that their outcomes are always and only the result of their effort or lack of effort and ability. Through public conversations about their experiences, recognizing the cumulative effect of racial microaggressions on their school opportunities and performance, they can begin to consider that these experiences might have had an impact on who they have become as students.47

These challenges are related to another construct that has been explored through the scholarship in Critical Race Theory: Racial Battle Fatigue. As William Smith, Walter Allen, and Lynette Danley (2007:553) explain,
Differential exposure to race-related stressors at the societal, institutional, interpersonal and individual levels and the interpretations and coping responses employed by African Americans can lead to the traumatic psychological and physiological stress conditions of Racial Battle Fatigue.

They further report that "Racial Battle Fatigue is the result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional coping with Racial Microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments" (Smith et al., 2007:555). Our discussions with the high school students reflected experiences that fit into these definitions. Many of our students described environments first encountered in middle school that they found extremely demeaning and stressful. The racial discourse in these contexts affected them deeply. They felt threatened and under attack by teachers and administrators. For many, these experiences came as a surprise at first since they enjoyed elementary school and felt capable and even confident as students. The shift in middle school seemed abrupt, but it became consistent, so they had to learn how to cope with these contexts in a way that worked for them. This was hard because, as explained above, the "rules" were always unspoken, and most did not have the tools to process what they were experiencing. One of the most common responses was to stop trying in school. By not trying, these students began the process of divesting from school. Not trying provided them with a rationale for their lack of success. For many, it was simply too disconcerting to continue trying and hoping for success when they were being told they were incapable and not competent students by school staff. They were seeking ways of making these realities manageable. Some of our students had become withdrawn in school, striving for a sense of emotional detachment, while others became angry and hostile, needing a place to vent the emotional turmoil they were experiencing. Many were exhibiting symptoms of Racial Battle Fatigue. They were stressed and tired and felt emotionally beat up by the school. They had grown up in schools that told them they lived in a meritocracy, but their experiences made them feel that they would never achieve success no matter how hard they worked. Yet they wanted to be successful and had tried or were still trying to achieve that success. The dissonance was irreconcilable. The analysis and tools provided by CRT, therefore, became invaluable to many of the students as they provided a means by which the students could begin to explain their experiences and even develop strategies for moving forward in ways that helped them achieve their personal goals in school and, ultimately, career.
DAILY EXPERIENCES WITH RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Recently, I created a website as a forum for people to share stories about these kinds of experiences. Since the tool of racial microaggressions was so helpful to our high school students as a way of beginning to make sense of their experiences, I thought that a space for sharing stories might help others with that process and also with finding constructive ways of dealing with the racial issues they are experiencing. Some of the stories that emerged from this forum are helpful to this analysis, as they provide examples of the complex forces at work in shaping our contemporary understandings of race and inequality. What follows is a brief overview of the themes that have emerged in this forum with specific examples that demonstrate them.48

In one of the first posts on the site, a teacher working in an urban school with a large Latina/o population wrote about a recent staff meeting. She explained that the focus of the meeting was addressing achievement gap issues, and at the end, a group of teachers reported back to their colleagues using a poster that concluded one solution to this problem was to “recruit more Asian students.” This example helps us understand the ways in which Latina/o inferiority is accepted as fact and unchangeable in many schools. No one in this group of teachers contested this “solution” to the racial inequity in the school, and no one who heard it and reported back objected. Many of us learn Latina/o inferiority as a publicly accepted fact, believing that those who work with us to share this understanding. This comment also reflects another facet of our racist hierarchy, suggesting that Asian students are inherently superior to Latina/o students, based on popular portrayals of Asians, but this is also problematic because there are sub-groups within the larger Asian population that face serious challenges in the community served by this school, while individual Asian students also often feel overwhelmed by the assumptions and expectations they face as a result.

In another post, a Latina doctoral student enrolled in a master’s-level course wrote about an interaction she had with a white student. He asked her if she knew “a more politically correct term for Mexican.” The student was looking for a way to talk about this community in the class without offending anyone. He had learned only negative connotations of the term “Mexican” and felt that using this term might be seen as derogatory by other students in the class. This example demonstrates the way in which we often learn ideologies of inferiority to attribute to people of color in unconscious ways that we cannot even unpack. In effect, U.S. ideologies create an understood inferiority of Latinas and Latinos through the force of language in ways that we often never see, to the point that someone can ask for a less offensive descriptor for a community beside the national-origin label that describes that community.
Like the students in the high school, on this forum, some discussed being told they must be in the wrong class when they first attended higher level classes. One, who was encouraged to drop the class as her early assignments were being passed back, went on to explain how this affected her self-confidence, remarking: “I always remembered how embarrassed I felt and how written off as a bad student he made me feel when all I needed was some useful studying techniques and encouragement from my teacher.” Student stories like this often include them describing teachers who are well liked by classmates and who serve as critical gatekeepers because they are instructors of advanced classes that can be a ticket into college. These instructors approach Latina/o students with what they feel is a legitimate concern. They do not want these students to be in over their heads, and when they see them, they often, without any knowledge of the students’ abilities, decide that these students will not be able to handle the workload. For the students who stick it out, like the one in the example above, the teachers may also make these assessments based on preliminary performance in class, although white peers who struggle on early assignments are not typically assessed in the same way. As this student explained, she needed support and confidence, and her eventual success, despite this severe blow to her confidence, actually reflects her strength and perseverance. The real challenge of these kinds of interactions with teachers is the fact that the teachers are usually well meaning, but they are also gatekeepers who can have a significant impact on students’ high school and college experiences—their lives.

Many of our students speak of the way racial microaggressions are often even leveled in the form of compliments. On the forum, a law student shared an example. One of his professors told a Latino student that she was proud of how far he had come since being in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. This student had never been in ESL classes since his primary language was English, but the law professor assumed he was a former ESL student because he is of Mexican descent. Again, this example shows us the way in which racial ideologies shape our understandings of the people who surround us. This professor was actually proud of the student and wanted him to also be proud of himself, but her pride emerged from a set of assumptions she had made that she had learned without questioning, affecting her expectations for her Latina/o students and likely the opportunities she made available to them. As our high school students explain, these compliments often go unnoticed by them at first. They also play an insidious role in communities of color because these compliments tell people of color that they are better than their community, than where they come from, almost asking them to make a choice. Students often hear the subtext to these compliments as: “Leave that community behind so that you can receive more compliments and rewards, or face our disappointment and disapproval for being like the
rest of them." These are the internal choices students of color often feel forced to make, and they are overwhelming. As the high school students make apparent, the complexities of these experiences are hard to break down. This example of a law professor who is unable to process these realities suggests just how hard this can be for a teenager. When young people have these experiences repeatedly over the course of their formative years in school, it can be debilitating since so many do not have an understanding of racial microaggressions or their cumulative effect: Racial Battle Fatigue.

The lessons from the posts on this page have been revealing. The stories shared, from Latinas and Latinos in different parts of the country, expose a need for people not only to be able to share them but to be heard and understood. The storytellers are asking for a space in which they can be acknowledged, where their understandings of these experiences can be seen as legitimate. They are seeking a space in which the analysis of CRT and CS, and that developed in this chapter, are not seen as playing the race card but are recognized as serious intellectual work. These contributors, who have all completed graduate degrees, demonstrate the challenge of making meaning of the complexities of racialization in their lives. They explain the challenges they faced in processing these experiences and suggest the importance of having the tools to do this work when these events happen. In essence, they are asking for the tools we are using in CRT and CS for Latina/o youth so that when these racialized realities become apparent in their lives and they are first confronted with the power of racist ideology in their schools, they can develop strategies that allow them to continue pursuing their dreams of success. This is the next phase in our work—to begin to demonstrate the effect of such interventions on the experiences and trajectories of our young people across the United States.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this chapter has been to construct a complex analysis of the historical and contemporary forces that shape our racial realities so as to provide tools for those who are the targets of today’s dominant but unspoken ideology of white supremacy. The bulk of this chapter provided an analysis of U.S. racial history and its modern manifestations based on the work I do with students, and the ways in which I have learned that students experience race and racism in their daily lives and through their schooling. As I have seen in both college and high school classrooms, most students never have the opportunity to deconstruct the racialized experiences that often define critical aspects of their lives, such as their academic identities.
and educational opportunities. This is because the complexity by which race has evolved and racism has become woven into the fabric of daily life and schooling in the United States makes that racism almost untraceable for most, despite that students of color know something is going on that is not right. The popular misreading of racial history and racist ideology today prevents us as a nation from constructively confronting these realities in ways that allow us to meaningfully address issues like the unconscionable educational achievement gap. My hope is that this analysis helps readers see racial history through the lens of ideology, considering the ways in which our beliefs have evolved often distinctly from our laws and policies.

These challenging times require a complicated and sophisticated analysis to deconstruct. Because of the way in which we have subconsciously learned white supremacy in the United States, it can be difficult to reconcile what seem like two incongruent realities that coexist: (1) racism can continue to exist (2) when the vast majority of the public abhor racism and when we see evidence of our national, public acceptance of people of color, such as the end of explicitly discriminatory policies or the election of an African American president. This chapter has sought to demonstrate how these two seemingly mutually exclusive realities can exist at once. We do believe in the importance of racial equality and justice, and yet we also have learned racism and white supremacy in typically unacknowledged ways that shape our thinking about so many social issues and, in turn, our behavior in our daily lives, further propelling racial inequality. These two coexisting realities expose the fact that so many of our daily experiences with racism and white supremacy have nothing to do with people demonstrating these beliefs and subsequent behaviors intentionally or overtly. As the students discussed in this chapter reveal, racial microaggressions are often exhibited by people (both whites and people of color) who believe they have the best of intentions for people of color and who are unconscious of the ways in which they have learned and internalized white supremacy. Tracing the historical trajectory of white supremacy helps us move from a place where those who learn to adopt these beliefs are made to feel guilty or are demonized, as we strive to create spaces where we can honestly uncover the way in which these histories live within each of us and how we can attack, uproot, and replace them. Finally, my hope and that of so many Latina and Latino students is that these kinds of analyses can be shared in communities of color and become the tools by which those communities can decipher the experiences that shape life there and begin to reframe the popular story of schooling, opportunity, race, and meritocracy—going beyond the historical confines of race in America.
18. A 2012 poll found a 29 percent gap in Latina/o partisan leanings between the Republican (23 percent) and Democratic (52 percent) Parties. Percentages include political leanings toward either party; also finding that Latina/o immigrants were more likely to lack a political attachment (Jones, 2012).

19. Counting those who identified as strong conservatives, conservatives, or conservative leaning (Fraga et al., 2012).


21. See Bender (2003:63), suggesting these advertisements derived from a letter Villaraigosa sent to then President Clinton on behalf of a convicted Latino cocaine trafficker, whose sentence Clinton eventually commuted.


24. Remarks of party co-organizer José Angel Gutiérrez (Bender, 2008:73).

25. Named by only 7 percent of respondents, the most identified Latina/o leader was Justice Sonia Sotomayor (Taylor & Lopéz, 2010).

26. See Sánchez (2013), suggesting this outreach may have occurred mostly in swing states rather than in states of more significant Latina/o population such as California and Texas.

27. Afro-Caribbean origins of Puerto Ricans, a substantial population in New York, have forged a cultural and political solidarity that helps explain the New York vote (see Beltrán, 2010).


29. First-generation immigrants are born outside of the United States (parents also not born in the United States), second-generation immigrants are born in the United States to one or both immigrant parents, and third-generation were born in the United States to U.S.-born parents.

30. The journal, *The Black Scholar*, had a special issue on Barack Obama’s presidency and its impact on and reflections of U.S. race relations. This compilation of articles provides a complex analysis of the meaning of the election of the first U.S. black president. In that issue, Burnham (2008) develops a particularly helpful overview of the manifestations of racism in what some describe as the post-racial United States Adjei and Gill (2013) analyze popular discourse on race in the Obama era, covering related themes in depth.

31. A brief note on my approach to this chapter: as I have witnessed my students in the university and high school struggle to make sense of the
complexities of race in contemporary society, I have begun to focus my writing on their experiences, questions, and needs. Because of this, I also use students' understandings and experiences as examples to make it easier for them to make sense of the writing and analyses. In this chapter, I base the narrative on my work with thousands of students and their teachers over the last two decades. I emphasize understandings that are shared by almost all of these students, often in their classrooms, and provide examples that come from real-life experiences.

32. Robinson (2010) provides an overview of research on white guilt that includes helpful background on the topic. Dottolo and Stewart (2013) add to this overview and include an example from their own research on the way in which white guilt affects people's lives.

33. Richard Delgado's trilogy (1995b, 1996, 1999) provides a complex analysis of the recent evolution of racial politics in the United States. As one of the founders of Critical Race Theory, his analysis is helpful in creating a foundation for understanding the intricacies of race and racism in the late twentieth century.

34. Delgado (1996) provides a thorough analysis of the way in which policy changes like affirmative action were later used as supposed evidence of the end of racism and the rationale for undoing those same policies.

35. Gary Orfield's ongoing research with the Civil Rights Project analyzing the re-segregation of schools has exposed the nuances of these processes and the fact that U.S. schools are now more segregated than they were prior to the 1954 Brown desegregation ruling (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012).

36. Ronald Takaki's (2008) and Howard Zinn's (2010) works provide a detailed overview of the evolution of racism over the course of the history of the United States. Many others have developed analyses of specific facets and periods of U.S. racism. Almaguer (2008), for example, analyzes the complex evolution of white supremacy in early California.

37. San Miguel, Jr. (1987) gives an in-depth historical analysis of these processes in Texas, and Valenzuela (1999) demonstrates how this legacy then shapes the beliefs and practices of teachers in Texas schools in the late twentieth century as she exposes the ways in which the schools attempt to subtract students' cultural strengths, often leading to significant challenges and even failure in school.

38. Valencia (2010) explains the history of deficit models and deconstructs these processes in greater depth.

39. López (2006) develops this analysis through his investigation of court cases that expose U.S. conceptions of whiteness while also connecting this to popular thinking and behavior related to race.

40. As mentioned, Takaki (2008) and Zinn (2010) develop sweeping overviews of these historical processes, while Menchaca's (2001) analysis of
the racialization of Mexican Americans specifically focuses on the unique ways this played out in the Southwestern United States.

41. This belief is also held by Latina/o students and teachers, although not as commonly.

42. A body of research debunks the myth of low Latina/o parental aspirations for their children. Ceja (2004) provides an overview of this literature and explains his own research findings about the powerful role of parental aspirations in Latina/o families, while Valencia and Black (2002) completed a thorough analysis of this myth and the research that debunks it.

43. Gould makes statements throughout the thesis that, for her, demonstrate the inferiority of Mexicans without providing any evidence, clearly backed by her confidence in her belief that these are commonly accepted “truths.” The USC faculty who approved her thesis and granted her a master’s degree based on this sub-standard work affirm this acceptance.

44. Ironically, despite the fact that these policy and legal shifts did not address racism and inequality in any substantive way, a generation later, many of those very changes were attacked by the right under the guise of pursuing equality through color-blind practices. These new shifts (removing affirmative action and bilingual education, as examples) reflected the further evolution of racism as the belief in the end of racism became so strong that previously developed policies to attack racism were challenged as unnecessary and also as reinforcing race-based thinking, which we could now safely remove from our lives because race no longer mattered. This complex analysis deserves greater exploration; see Delgado (1996) for one of the earliest and strongest critiques of this kind of thinking.

45. It is essential for us to realistically frame the construct of white supremacy. In popular discussions, the term refers to extremist racist groups that are involved in hyper-offensive discourse and attacks against people of color. This chapter strives to unveil the ways in which white supremacy is much more common and unacknowledged in the evolution and daily practice of racial interaction and understanding in the United States.

46. My forthcoming work (Pizarro, 2014) analyzes the processes of normalization, individualization, and internalization of failure that many Latina/o students experience.

47. The previous note references research that develops a deeper analysis of the processes leading to Latina/o student outcomes. For many, they begin school excited and engaged; through persistent exposure to low expectations and inferior educational opportunities, they become disengaged, and they and their teachers frame this disengagement as laziness.
which, by the time they are in high school, often becomes the primary means of explaining their school performance. Latina/o students’ poor academic performance is rarely considered disengagement or the result of a complex process that has been at work over a number of years.

48. The examples from this website do not include much background because the posts are typically fairly short and to the point.

49. Projections for 2008 had broadcast television taking in $51 billion and print ads in newspapers taking in $47 billion (see MediaBuyerPlanner, 2008).


51. Neoformalism is an analytical method in film studies developed by Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell. By close readings of film texts, it seeks to describe cinematic style and storytelling techniques in order to understand how they function.

52. Of course, many Mexican Americans can trace their Mexican ancestry back to a time before northern Mexico was ceded to Texas and the United States. But at some point, they or their ancestors likely migrated from some part of southern Mexico, making the northward journey across desert or semi-desert terrain to arrive in the northern Mexican states of Tejas, northern Sonora, Nuevo México, or Alta California. Thus, the foundation myth for most if not all Mexican Americans is a narrative comprised of some if not all of these core experiences: northward migration across an arid landscape, possibly including a river crossing, followed by settlement and development of a “new empire.”

53. For an illuminating discussion of Medieval foundation myths and how they are duplicated in the narratives of modern corporate organizations, see Rippin (2006).


REFERENCES


Ari, S. (2013). *In the U.S. 49.7 million are now poor, and 80% of the total population is near poor*. Available at: http://politicalblindspot.com/us-poor/.


References


References


References


References


González v. Arizona, 677 F.3d 383 (9th Cir. 2012).
References


of Vocation

Publishing

career as a

es and mate-

and valida-

terface of

Research in

S. Depart-

S. Depart-

pedia (2nd

e and space.

LA Times,

wning, A.

a: A critica


Latimer, B. (2013b). *Immigrants have added $3.7 trillion into housing market, says study*. Available at: http://nbclatino.com/2013/06/20/immigrants-have-added-3-7-trillion-into-housing-market-study-study/.


References


References


Podgers, J. (1994). Chasing the ideal: As more Americans find themselves priced out of the system, the struggle goes on to fulfill the promise of equal justice for all. *ABA Journal*, August: 56–61.


References


Terrerro, N. (2013b). *Number of Latino television writers is at all-time high.* Available at: http://nbclatino.com/2013/03/29/number-of-latino-television-writers-is-at-all-time-high/.


References


