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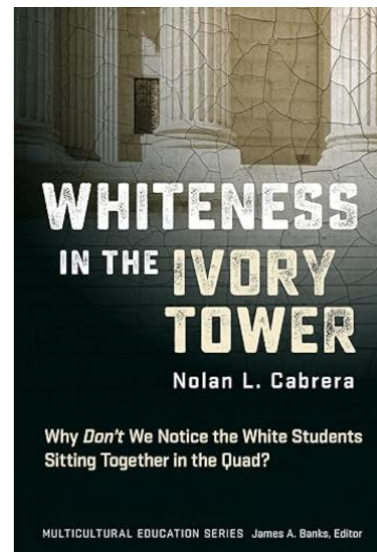
Cabrera, N. L. (2024). *Whiteness in the ivory tower: Why don't we notice the white students sitting together in the quad?* Teachers College Press.

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When I learned of the publication of *Whiteness in the Ivory Tower: Why Don't We Notice the White Students Sitting Together in the Quad*, I was eager to perhaps find out why what I've experienced in higher education, both as a student and as faculty and administrator, was the way it was for me and the people of color who were my students or colleagues. I also hoped to gain some actionable insights into how to make things in higher education better. This book was not disappointing. It is organized around eight themes, and each theme's argument sheds light on taken-for-granted assumptions about racism and anti-racism in higher education. The book is dense; it covers a lot of territory and is supported by more than 450 references. Interspersed throughout are illustrative cases that report higher education's harm to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). In this review, I attempt to highlight some of the main points of the book.



The author, Nolan L. Cabrera, is an associate professor in the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. He has delivered hundreds of lectures and conducted many trainings on racism/Whiteness, creating inclusive college campuses, and expanding ethnic studies programs. Cabrera is an award-winning scholar whose writings have appeared in many of the most prestigious journals in education and racial studies. Furthermore, he was the only academic featured in the 2015 MTV documentary “White People.”

Introduction. Whiteness in Higher Education: Racism Hidden in Plain Sight. Land and labor acknowledgments are reminders that institutions of higher education exist on land stolen from Native American people and were built using the forced labor of slaves. However, higher education has historically privileged White people at the expense of both groups (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). The three-headed snake of capitalism, colonialism, and White supremacy is at the source of this injustice.

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Studying Whiteness critically as a social construct and not a culture (Leonardo, 2020) clarifies it and promotes thinking and action to eliminate it, driven by both the heart and the mind.

Chapter 1. Toward a Unified Theory of Whiteness in Higher Education. The Unified Theory of Whiteness in Higher Education persists in higher education. From macro to micro, the concepts of each of three levels of this theory are: (1) structural and ideological concepts, such as White supremacy, Whiteness, Color blindness/Race evasiveness, White racial frame, and (Academic) racial capitalism; (2) organizational concepts, such as White institutional presence, theory of racialized organizations, and ontological expansiveness; and (3) individualized racial concepts, such as White privilege, White immunity, White fragility, frontstage/backstage performance, White rage, safety/pedagogy of fear, racial apathy, White complicity, epistemologies of ignorance, and White emotionalities. Collectively, these concepts both normalize Whiteness and oppress BIPOC.



Nolan L. Cabrera

Chapter 2. Why Don't We Notice White Segregation? Whiteness, Invisibility, and Racial Exclusion. Dedicated space on campus for Black, Asian, Latinx, and Native American students is rare, and there is total disregard for the profound ways that White students, in general, and White male students particularly, create racially exclusive campus spaces that normalize Whiteness. White social dominance is at the core of why we do not notice the White students sitting together in the quad and why we misperceive BIPOC self-preservation as self-segregation. This reality may be a hard pill for many White people to swallow. However, it is important to remember that it is far more difficult for People of Color to survive racial oppression than it is for White people to educate themselves about it. It is for this reason that disrupting the normalized Whiteness is necessary, because Whiteness hegemony is the root of BIPOC oppression (Cabrera, 2019).

Chapter 3. White Knowledge? It's Complicated. Academic freedom is actually *White* academic freedom, and BIPOC scholarship is generally devalued and harms BIPOC communities (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Why this would be the case when higher education owes a deep debt to BIPOC communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006), whose labor they stole, is an open question. Unlike White scholars who are encouraged to engage in controversial research as a means toward tenure, BIPOC scholars receive messaging that one must delay controversial work until after earning tenure. Non-White knowledge, though publicly ridiculed and demeaned, is still as valuable as White knowledge. "A lot of the work for the promises of academic freedom relies on BIPOC communities to reimagine critically what scholarship can and should look like" (p. 64).

Chapter 4. "It's All Part of the Plan": Whiteness, Race, and Organizational Structure. The college ranking competitions perpetuate the myth of meritocracy. Higher education's plantation politics (Williams et al., 2021), i.e., higher education's historical policies, practices, and discourses and their new iterations, control, exploit, and marginalize People of Color. The Matthew Effect (Trow, 1984) prevails: "Whoever has will be

given more, and he will have an abundance” (Matthew 13:12). Later in the book, Cabrera proposes that perhaps Luke 12:48 would serve better: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” “The issue is not excellence—the issue is using racist, classist, sexist, heterosexist, and other social norms (1) to measure excellence and then (2) to justify the inequitable allocation of resources under a logic of (academic) racial capitalism” (p. 81). These arrangements, along with debates about affirmative action and lack of debates about legacy admissions are “part of the plan.” The “plan” needs to be disrupted by refusing meritocratic norms (Carnevale et al, 2020; Guinier, 2015; Sandel, 2020).

Chapter 5. White Guys (Still) in Charge: Whiteness and Higher Education Leadership. White men continue to be overrepresented in higher education presidential leadership. Higher education leaders have become less champions of knowledge production and more like CEOs of multinational corporations, causing leadership focus to shift from racial justice to crisis management and fundraising. The political landscape of the institution’s locale also makes it difficult for a leader to promote social change. Educational norms are rooted in Whiteness, including the assumption that BIPOC are best served by White institutions. Instead of acknowledging the limits of White scholarship, leaders claim that non-White scholarship is ideological and not academic, thus ignoring the fact that a great deal of academic work has political implications. To rehabilitate higher education leadership that values non-White scholarship requires a decentering of Whiteness and infusing of antiracism into leadership search committees.

Chapter 6. Whiteness Means Never Having to Say You’re Sorry. The Anatomy of a Racial Non-Apology and Apology. Though apologizing for harm done to BIPOC scholars is an important start, apologies by themselves do not lead to racial justice. Molinsky’s (2016) definition of a proper apology is that it: (1) describes the issue; (2) acknowledges that harm was done; (3) sincerely apologizes for the harm caused, owning responsibility for it; and (4) offers steps to be taken to correct future behavior. However, this formula is not enough. First, one needs to know why he or she is apologizing. When done properly, racial apologies acknowledge the truth. Then it is possible to explore avenues to reconciliation. Apologies link to accountability, which is central to building and maintaining coalitions. Coalitions lead to anti-oppressive structural transformation, and anti-oppressive work is a process of rehumanization, which relies on interconnectedness. Harm is inevitable, and when it happens, apologies are once again necessary.

Chapter 7. Centering BIPOC Communities, Divorcing From Whiteness, and Institutionalizing Antiracism. Antiracist higher education must focus explicitly on public service and the common good and divest itself from Whiteness. Meaningful transformation of social oppression through both critique and building structures for liberation will make White people uncomfortable, but it is within the mission of higher education to cause discomfort. Through discomfort people learn and become aware of their ignorant bliss. Academics must divorce themselves from the logics of Whiteness and engage in an ethic of academic responsibility to do no harm. Real education, as W. E. B. DuBois framed it in 1968, should be about learning, but not just learning in and of itself so that BIPOC students grow up to be exploited, marginalized servants to capitalism, colonialism, and White supremacy. What appears

to be an impossible process toward institutionalizing antiracism in higher education will require a great effort over a long period of time. As Loeb put it in 1984, “The impossible will take a while.”

Cabrera has made a major contribution to a distinguished library of literature on equity in higher education. The book fills a void in its examination of a variety of impediments to equitable higher education. It not only documents how and why racism manifests itself in higher education, but it also provides a theoretical framework from which to begin to understand racism in higher education and offers guidance for possible remedies. For a variety of reasons, the ideas in this book will be difficult to digest by some readers. Other readers might find inspiration in this book and take leadership in addressing these problems. Though geared specifically to higher education, readers from non-profit organizations of all kinds might also benefit from this book since many share similar histories of racism.

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About the Reviewer



Elsie Szecsy is emerita research professional at Arizona State University, where her research interests were on intersections among teaching, learning, and leadership, with institutional, organizational, and instructional arrangements in linguistically and culturally diverse education settings. She was involved in several documentation research projects in metro New York and metro Phoenix, Arizona, that aimed to improve Latino representation among high school and college graduates and among faculty and administrators in K-12 and higher education. Her research interests have since expanded to include humanities-based approaches to discover racial and other injustices in schools and other educational settings. Elsie holds an Ed.D. in educational administration from Teachers College, Columbia University.



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