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**Decolonization Through Artistic Self-Expression:
Addressing Racism in the Secondary Art and Design Classroom with
Fanon and Pinar ¹**

Benjamin Tellie, The George Washington University
Elliott Schwebach, Independent Scholar

Abstract

The authors outline their approach towards addressing topics of race and racism in the visual arts classroom. They use the psychotherapeutic and decolonial theory of Frantz Fanon and William Pinar's explorations of *study* to extend conventional models of self-reflection and self-expression in art education. The authors find that conventional approaches are insufficient for providing a basis for students to grapple with and redress racist social realities. Specifically, they often fail to "consciousnessize," to use Fanon's language, the social-structural nature, sources, and workings of racial oppression. In their collaborative work within high school Art and Design classes, the authors provide a basis for consciousnessizing racial oppression by defining race conceptually, tracing its historical construction and contemporary legacies, exploring the psychology of racism and the violence undergirding white privilege, centering marginalized voices, and working to acknowledge and safely hold racialized defenses. We find that this functions to deepen the self-reflective artmaking experience.

Keywords: Fanon, Pinar, Art education, Racism, Antiracism, Artmaking.

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Decolonization Through Artistic Self-Expression: Addressing Racism in the Secondary Art and Design Classroom Through Fanon and Pinar

Introduction

As educators and scholars, we agree with those who insist that racism and racial injustice can and must be confronted in the classroom (Berry & Stovall 2013; Filbin, 2021; Kinloch, 2010; Knight, 2013; Love, 2019). Therefore, as collaborators focused on spaces of art education, we call on arts educators and artists more widely to incorporate anti-racist ideals into the discussions and art-making projects they facilitate.

To have conversations, projects, and learning experiences about race, racism, and social justice is paramount for every teacher in every classroom setting—Pre-K-12. As Kinloch (2010) says, “to do otherwise is to ignore the opinions and lived experiences of many of the students who walk in and out of our classrooms on a daily basis” (p. 79). By avoidance, silence, and inactivity, educators further racism and oppression (Kumashiro, 2000). To facilitate difficult conversations, projects, and assignments that are necessary to genuinely counteract racism, art educators must confront their own conscious and unconscious biases and help their students to understand how racism operates internally, as beliefs and attachments operating below the level of conscious awareness. This is to say that combatting racism requires what Fanon (1952/2008) calls the “consciousnessization” (p. 80) of internalized racial assumptions and biases.

For white teachers, anti-racist teaching and curriculum planning also requires an avowal of white privileges and power, an acknowledgement that whiteness is the embodiment of a racialized experience (i.e., that race is not something that only people of color “have”), and a continuous and open commitment to learning from others about the histories and lived experiences of racial oppression. In addition, art educators can strive to not just teach about race and racism during Black History month or as an “elective” subject in their curriculum. This format is harmful to BIPOC students as it compartmentalizes their experiences into a “heroes” and “holidays” curriculum, making students’ learning experiences extremely transient, inadequate, and short-lived.

As will become clear as we describe our research project below, Fanon and Pinar represent the main theoretical bases of our approach and contribution. However, anti-racism and decolonization already represent significant themes in the extant education and art education literature. In their towering essay “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that decolonization requires the unsettling of colonial and Eurocentric frameworks, including in curricula and pedagogy, in ways that unequivocally reject white supremacy and advance (rather than erase or hybridize) Native futures. “Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based

approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one" (p. 36). Dewhurst (2014) applies a similar social justice perspective to arts education, unpacking the processes of "connecting," "questioning" and "translating" as integral to the creation of activist art, or art that aims to unsettle and disrupt. Desai (2019) also grapples with what a pedagogy of activist artmaking entails, taking students from classrooms to the streets and shifting focus from individual objectmaking to collective political intervention.

In social justice art education scholarship, the importance of high school students confronting racism and racial injustice through artmaking practice and self-expression is highlighted through various scholarship. More recently, Shin, Bae, and Song (2023) encouraged art educators to address anti-Asian racism in art, visual culture education, and media with their students. The authors examine the rise in anti-Asian racism and violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasize the role art educators play in addressing racism through discussion of contemporary Asian artists' work such as Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, and Monyee Chau, and artmaking, which can foster awareness and develop empathy among students. They propose that visual artmaking within visual cultural and art education curricula can serve as a powerful medium for self-expression and an agent for social change, enabling students to better respond to and process experiences of racialized violence.

Rolling (2020a, 2020b, 2022) advocates for art educators to actively challenge the whiteness, patriarchy, and Eurocentrism embedded in the traditional art historical canon, classroom practices, and museum spaces. Rolling emphasizes how art educators must critically examine how these structures can perpetuate racism. Rolling highlights visual arts power as a form of self-expressive action, arguing that art and museum educators should engage, dialogue, and create with diverse artist narratives and cultures to allow their students opportunities to confront racial injustice and violence, envisioning possibilities of transformation within art education curricula. Similarly, Filbin's (2021) study positions high school art students working through inner experiences via artmaking. Filbin (2021) explores her racial identity as a White, middle-class female teacher working in an urban Title I school in Chicago, conducting a case study of two Black high school art students and their encounters with racism. In their self-expressive artwork, the students draw upon their inner feelings of gun violence in their Chicago neighborhoods, racial oppression, and "insecurities about money, identity, and family" (p. 23).

Our intention is to supplement this existing literature by evidencing how a sustained, prayerful exploration of racism through art instruction and student self-expression meets criteria that are consistent with Fanon's militant, anti-racist politics and Pinar's conceptualization of "study." We believe the art classroom, and aesthetic encounters and experiences in education more broadly, can serve as important sites and plat-

forms for furthering an anti-racist mission, even in the decolonial and psychotherapeutic sense that Fanon conveys it.² This paper presents the work of high school art students as they were asked to explore race and racism in an integrative class unit aimed at “consciousnessizing,” and then working to confront and undo, racial oppression. We spent approximately a month with students in March 2021 at a Jewish Day School, working with our high school Art and Design students. We worked with students collaboratively in four, fifty-minute class sessions in Art and Design classes and held extended share discussions of artworks to process the students’ self-expressive and self-reflective experiences in making them.³ Many students then continued to process and make artwork in response to racism for several classes after our collaborative unit ended. In addition to providing opportunities for artistic self-expression, this integrative unit included meaningful discussions, lessons, and lectures on the colonial history of race and racism, the conceptual nature of race, the psychology of racism (including its negative psychological effects but also the expressions of resilience, resistance and empowerment manifested in opposition), the contemporary legacies of colonial domination, and race and racism as they operate within the social structure.

Pedagogically, our objectives in facilitating this integrative project (and aligning it with Fanonian anti-racist visions) coincide with the educational philosophy of Pinar (2005), who argues that it is only through deep and sustained “study,” (p. 68) wherein students can develop self-awareness and critically examine dominant assumptions, that meaningful change can take place. Our objectives were also consistent with Britzman’s (2003) call for educators to *unlearn* our past experiences in education and *re-educate* ourselves about what we have not been taught. Along these lines, we endeavored to foster a deep and sustained study not only through the dissemination of our knowledge as

² We use the word “decolonize” because we believe it is consistent with Fanon’s political and psychotherapeutic project, and because we believe it is important to avow both the political nature of our unit and the colonial sources of our political target. However, we also acknowledge that while racial oppression is rooted in colonial domination, *decolonization* is not commensurate with or identical to *anti-racism*; decolonization is a broader phenomenon and ambition. One aspect of decolonial politics that we did not incorporate in this unit is the effect of settler colonialism upon Indigenous subjectivity, values, knowledge, sovereignty and experience. We acknowledge that while Indigenous bodies and values have been racialized in various ways, there are also distinct patterns of theft, invisibilization, and erasure that accompany colonial domination over Indigenous political life. We realize in retrospect, with gratitude to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to the importance of this fact, that we can be more sensitive in future projects to avow this distinction in our classroom discussions, particularly so that we give voice to the unique experiences of the students in our class who may have Native heritage or Tribal status, and thus so that we do not reproduce a settler colonial erasure of Indigenous subjectivity in our framing of decolonization.

³ This collaborative unit was designed by the authors as part of Ben’s visual art curriculum on *Difficult Histories and Events in Our Lives*, which played a role in his ongoing dissertation research at The George Washington University.

scholars and educators, but also by opening spaces for and bearing witness to the personal meanings that race holds for our students, their identities (Tatum, 2017, 2019), and their neighborhoods and communities (Kinloch, 2010). In addition, we resist an authoritarian and instrumentalist pedagogical methodology and an objectivist epistemology. We therefore consider the extent to which anti-racist education may *not* be, as is so commonly invoked, a process of “illumination” (i.e., of objective knowledge, transmitted neutrally from teacher to student) as it may be a process of *incubation* (of anti-racist consciousness) and/or *integration* (of fractured affective experiences).

Difficulties that Undergird the Classroom Conversation of Race

Though student voices can be left marginalized or racial violence can persist as a result, there are, generally speaking, many reasons why art teachers and other educators may not deeply approach the topics of race and racism with their students. At a broader curricular level, standardized testing for art fundamentals classes, large class sizes (crammed schools) in public school education classes, implementation of technologies in curriculum, and an art curriculum mandated by public school and county supervisory boards leaves art educators struggling to adapt students’ learning needs in an overloaded curriculum without focusing on the inner life, emotions and feelings, and lived experiences of students (Pinar, 2015). As a result of crammed schooling and national education policy, teachers are worried that they must “teach to the test” and “get the right numbers” rather than putting students first, preventing authentic moments of instruction and mindful curricula. Furthermore, education on racial topics is often wanting overall, leaving teachers themselves insufficiently equipped, and (especially for white teachers) it can be uncomfortable for art educators to discuss race and racism, leaving many unwilling or unprepared to do so (DiAngelo, 2018, 2021). According to Nieves (2011), schools have also created a toxic climate of othering “that often stifles cultural expression through language...” (p. 102). Oftentimes the language of students of color is corrected by teachers in the classroom and other school spaces, pressuring students to conform to a white cultural standard. And there may be fear of backlash from colleagues, parents, and administrators or political or ethical uncertainties about how to address race, racism, and anti-racism with students.

We believe that students greatly benefit from artistic self-expression and aesthetic forms of investigation because of art materials’ therapeutic and educative qualities. The exploration of those materials affords students to begin to understand their inner world more deeply. Self-reflective and self-expressive models and movements of art education that were prominent in the early 20th century, such as *creative self-expression*, taught by progressive educators like Florence Cane and Natalie Cole, and 21st-century models like *Studio Habits of Mind* such as *Express* developed by Harvard Project Zero,

prove to be beneficial in today's 21st-century classroom. Such models encourage students to explore art and wellbeing, mindfulness practice, intrinsic and intuitive drawing, drawing and making art from personal experience, releasing feelings and emotions in a general way, responding to self-identity topics, and more. However, we found that when it comes to the topic of race and racism specifically, models that ask students to express what they feel without simultaneously facilitating a deeper study of racism's nature and operation can cause learning and understanding to deteriorate. This is especially true if students do not already have awareness of or personal experience with the violence that undergirds racial privilege, such as many white and white-identified students; however, it may also be true for Black students and students of color who have been socialized by a racist society into racial ignorance and/or silence, into repressing the inferiority that is racially assigned to them, and/or into conformity with White norms and standards.

Reflecting on Whiteness

"White privilege is a form of domination; hence it is a relational concept. It positions one person or group over another person or group" (Amico, 2017, p. 2). It is critical for white art educators who are entering into the conversation of race and racism with their students to recognize and affirm how they benefit in society (including within their histories and positions as art educators) because of the color of their skin. Avowing whiteness in the classroom allows white educators to model the internal work of consciousnessization: of becoming aware of privileges afforded to one's whiteness, of the social histories, rooted in colonial domination, carrying these privileges into the present, and even of the unconscious biases and defenses that may remain a part of the white psyche long after the work of consciousnessization is undertaken.

As two white teacher allies and advocates, we have reflected upon what it means to "decolonize" our art classroom, including the limits and stakes of this endeavor. It has been important for us to acknowledge, on the one hand, that we exist as teachers in an educational landscape that is not often looking for critique, where Black and Brown folks will often get met with violence for standing up or offering analysis and perspective. Education claims to want to produce "critical thinkers," but education does not often wish Black and Brown folks to critique education. We therefore strove toward humility, as best as we could embody it, by reminding ourselves that classroom conversations do not "belong" to "us" as white, male, cisgender teachers. On the other hand, it has also been important for us to not ask students to speak "as" (i.e., on behalf of) their racial identity group, which puts students "on the spot," contributing alienation and undue attention, particularly for students of color. We therefore opened a space for all students to participate in discussion according to their own agency and comfort level,

and we encouraged them to participate through listening and reflection if they did not want to participate by speaking.

Below are examples that represent how we have practiced avowing our whiteness in the space of the art classroom.



(Figure 1). Author 1, *Study of my Whiteness*, Mixed Media, 9" x 12", 2021.

Ben Tellie: The artwork above is an aesthetic personal reflection about my race that occupies a journal addressed to my son, Brighton, in the form of notes and letters that trace his development and my own, an autobiographical document. I cut up a reproduction of Winslow Homer's painting, *Schooner at Sunset*, 1880, and manipulated the dominant hold (i.e., maleness and whiteness of a famous American landscape painter) Homer has had on the art historical canon. Enveloped are other found landscape scenes. A layer of white acrylic is dry brushed on top to represent my skin color. I used Photoshop to digitally manipulate the surface further to avow my whiteness and maleness.

The piece is about how racism has played a role in my youth, home and school community, and education and the processing of how my antiracist efforts fill my teaching spaces today. The piece expresses emotions that reflect my whiteness and maleness, how my skin color occupies vertical structural spaces representing “height” and “weight” within the context of my lived experiences by having white and social privilege—for example, having access to travel, institutional academic material and knowledge, education, homeownership, and opportunities in my art and diversity training and education.

As a young adolescent youth, my gender identity as a cisgender male, white skin, and name have provided me with many opportunities in the workforce—working at a restaurant, book manufacturing plant, an airport toll booth, and a department store. I believe my whiteness allowed opportunities that people of color sometimes cannot obtain. I never had to enter difficult conversations with my parents about behaving a certain way in front of police as a child or worry about acting a certain way when I go into my school building to teach art each day or when shopping and being surveilled. I was exposed to many examples of my race in art history books, through various media, toy design companies, and marketing in art education. I must go out of my way to find literary stories, art historical narratives, and books to decolonize my art library. As a young person, I never questioned why my race was so dominant in any of these capacities.

Elliott Schwebach: On a daily basis, social privileges accrue to me as a result of my white skin. This is especially the case in Baltimore, the city where I live, where racial disparities are large. Because of my whiteness, I am able to interact with the police without fear of physical harm or loss of life. I do not find myself surveilled in public spaces to the extent that non-white others are. I am able to gather with other young, white individuals in spaces such as the Inner Harbor without being accused of loitering or gang-like activity. I can walk in and out of university campus spaces without being questioned as to whether or not I “belong.” I am also becoming more self-aware of the extent to which my skin color has allowed me, throughout my life, the privilege of making mistakes, messing up, and learning from inappropriate or transgressive behavior where the same experiences for those with non-white skin would have been extremely costly. And I benefit from not having to experience the double consciousness and internalized patterns of self-questioning that mark the experiences of people of color in a racist society. Finally, I find myself slowly learning how to better hold and process feelings such as anxiety and guilt that might arise, to my discomfort, in response to racialized situations, thoughts and memories, by understanding their origins in social patterns of oppression.

Frantz Fanon's Decolonial Theory and Pinar's Concept of "Study": A Self-Expressive Project Model to Address Racism

Frantz Fanon's Decolonial Theory

Fanon was a midcentury Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial revolutionary, assisting the Algerian National Liberation Front in their independence struggle and publishing decolonial theory and strategy. Fanon understands colonialism to constitute the primary organizing logic of contemporary global patterns of oppression, and emphasizes the significance of racism as it functions to secure and reproduce colonial privileges and harms. Although colonization of the Global South by European states is formally abolished, decolonization cannot be complete until its legacies, including racism, are thoroughly uprooted from societal institutions and worldviews. In framing liberation, Fanon therefore strove not merely for formal state independence, but also the creation of new ways of being in and thinking about the world (Fanon, 1952/2008).

As a Black psychiatrist in the colonial context, Fanon both experienced and continuously witnessed the psychological damages that racism engenders. However, he observed that traditional, clinical psychotherapeutic methods were insufficient for healing and empowering people of color. Because racism exists at the societal level, and because it therefore surrounds, pervades and continuously retraumatizes people of color outside of the hospital or counseling room, Fanon (1964/1967, p. 52-54) reasons that mental health is not possible until decolonization occurs. In this way, psychic healing becomes intimately bound up with a political imperative: i.e., anti-racist resistance becomes synonymous with therapy.

Discerning that racial trauma largely operates unconsciously, with physical, bodily effects, Fanon posits that the first step towards healing and uprooting racism resides in "consciousnessizing," or coming towards a conscious understanding of, the (colonial) sources and (social-structural) nature of racial oppression (Fanon, 1961/2004). Then, Fanon argues, one must direct their energies – including most prominently internalized aggression, a virulent consequence of oppression – towards eradicating it: "As a psychoanalyst I must help my patient to '*consciousnessize*' his unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification, but also to act along the lines of a change in social structure" (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 80).

Fanon (1961/2004) identifies revolutionary, violent resistance, which he claims to be "disintoxifying" (p. 51) for the colonized psyche, as a means by which this can occur. Given its conscious aim at social transformation, violence against the colonial regime is therapeutic *both* because it "directly confront[s] the source of [one's] dehumanization" (Bulhan, 1985, p. 147), *as well as* because it alleviates "tension" (Fanon, 1961/2004, p. 15) in the subjugated body through cathartic, affective release. Indeed, it is therapeutic because it does both at once.

While this framing most significantly helps readers to understand healing and empowerment as they emerge from decolonial resistance for people of color, Fanon also emphasizes that racism harms everybody, White and non-White alike (Fanon, 1961/2004). White people also have negative emotions pertaining to their racial identity and lived racial experiences, often disavowed or lurking beneath the surface: these might include guilt or denial of White privilege, and fears or anxieties about Blackness. Fanon (1952/2008) suggests that these states of being are also constructed by racism, rather than a reflection of an essential self, and that decolonization necessitates releasing all members of society from racial burdens, writing that “the black man [is] slave to his inferiority, and the white man [is] slave to his superiority” (p. 42) and that “any unilateral liberation is flawed” (p. xv).

We argue that artmaking can serve a decolonizing and psychotherapeutic function according to Fanonian criteria. This is to say that artmaking can meet the criteria that Fanon establishes for revolutionary violence, lending the process of artmaking a militant character without creating bloodshed. If it emerges within an educational environment that accurately explains the conceptual and historical nature of racial oppression, and that safely holds students’ racial traumas and defenses as they learn to contextualize them, artmaking can allow students the ability to creatively represent their emotions and experiences as they pertain to dynamics of racial privilege and disprivilege, the power to confront racist social realities, narratives, and ideals so as to recreate the world, and the freedom to release inhibited affect in a cathartic and meaningful way.

William Pinar’s Exploration of “Study”

Pinar’s (2005) exploration of study as a concept in curriculum and instruction, through his taking up of work from Robert McClintock (1971) and Alan Block (2004), correlates to Fanon’s theorization of consciousnessizing racial oppression. Building from McClintock (1971), Pinar (2005) points out a worry—that if students just rely on their teacher for educational knowledge, students can become apathetic, moving away from “self-engaged labor of discovery” (p. 69). He writes that “[n]ot instruction, not learning, but study constitutes the process of education” (p. 70). Study is about “self-formation” (p. 69) and “self-reflection” (p. 69) and is important because it allows a person to develop their inner consciousness, being, and understanding of their “ontological call to ‘be here’” (p. 70). In Block’s (2004) view, grounded in Judaism and Torah study, “study” could also transcend to a level of spiritual understanding and enlightenment. Block therefore argues that study is a “prayerful act” (Pinar, 2005, p. 71), and that the classroom is a sacred space where spiritual transformations can occur. The lost world of ‘study’ is important to stress here for students’ learning about race and racism, for without the fuller consciousnessization of racialized experiences that Fanon advocates (i.e.,

of the origins, mechanics and nature of racial privilege and oppression), discussions of race will continue to replicate unconscious patterns of trauma and denial. For educator and student both, unpacking the social history and unconscious lives of race and racism can allow for a mindful development of study that furthers both anti-racist and educational goals.

Respecting the fact that we are collaborating in a religious school setting at a Jewish Day School, we aim to integrate our anti-racist work with a vision of classroom instruction as a sacred act. In our project, we therefore voiced the school's core value of Tikkun Olam – essentially: repairing or making reparations to the world – and tied this value to our study and artistic confrontation of racism and racialized violence with our students. Having students think about social justice in the art classroom and create visual art to understand and process their own emotional experiences, feelings, sensations, and personal stories to work through race and racism can bring them to a heightened place of awareness, which has a direct effect on their perceptions and attitudes towards learning about the contents, details, and peculiarities of racialized violence.

A Self-Expressive Project Model to Address Racism *School Site and Project Description*

During the spring semester of 2021, our project was given to students during the COVID-19 pandemic when still in the mode of “distance learning.” We co-taught the project over Zoom with the students in-between the twin pandemics of racism and COVID-19 with emotions high from stress, anxiety, and a push and pull between worlds. We were privileged as the school, a private Jewish Day School where one of us holds a full-time position, was open to our experimental art education pedagogy. At this school, visual art teachers design their curricula, which makes the school and program unique. We have the freedom to address emotionally charged subjects through art, such as complex current events and histories shaping the national and global world. The racial breakdown of the school community is predominately white. There is a small number of students of color and Israeli students.

Looking to the outsides and undersides of Enlightenment-era notions of objectivity, value-neutrality, and the importance of the written word, and incorporating the voices of authors, artists, activists, and literary figures of color, we sought to better open up to and champion Black experience, deconstruct racist social realities, and confront America's colonial histories and legacies to deepen students' learning, knowledge, and study. We believed that if students were challenged to engage the history of race and racism mindfully, bring racialized defenses and preconstructed thoughts to conscious awareness, and to develop a tolerance for authentically identifying and addressing racist realities, they might embody more mindful frames for experiencing empathy, en-

hance artistic self-expression, and more accurately understand psycho-social realities. We hoped that this would function to grant students agency and further “self-formation” (Pinar, 2005, p. 69) in the classroom, as well as to decenter authoritarianism in curriculum and instruction and lend artistic self-expression a simultaneously decolonial and therapeutic function.

Art Prompt

“Your focus will be on creating a mixed media piece as a journal entry in your sketchbook using three distinct media processes: 1. Collage; 2. Text; 3. Drawing. The mission of our project is Tikkun Olam and thinking about how we can both repair the world and behave and act constructively and beneficially towards achieving anti-racist ends. Find a contemporary news article that discusses a racially charged incident, and with a special emphasis on the social aspects of the racism and/or your personal racial identity, discuss your feelings and reactions to this piece through artmaking (e.g., “Woman in Racial Central Park Confrontation Is Fired From Job, Gives Up Dog”). Visually respond to racism within the article. What are you learning about yourself after engaging in this material of discussion?”

Students were also asked to craft an artist statement that walks the viewer through their art piece: “Write about the social aspects of racism involved in the article and how you responded visually. Discuss the article you choose and your artistic process and insights. What did you learn about your racial identity from this project? Write and reflect on your own racial identity.”

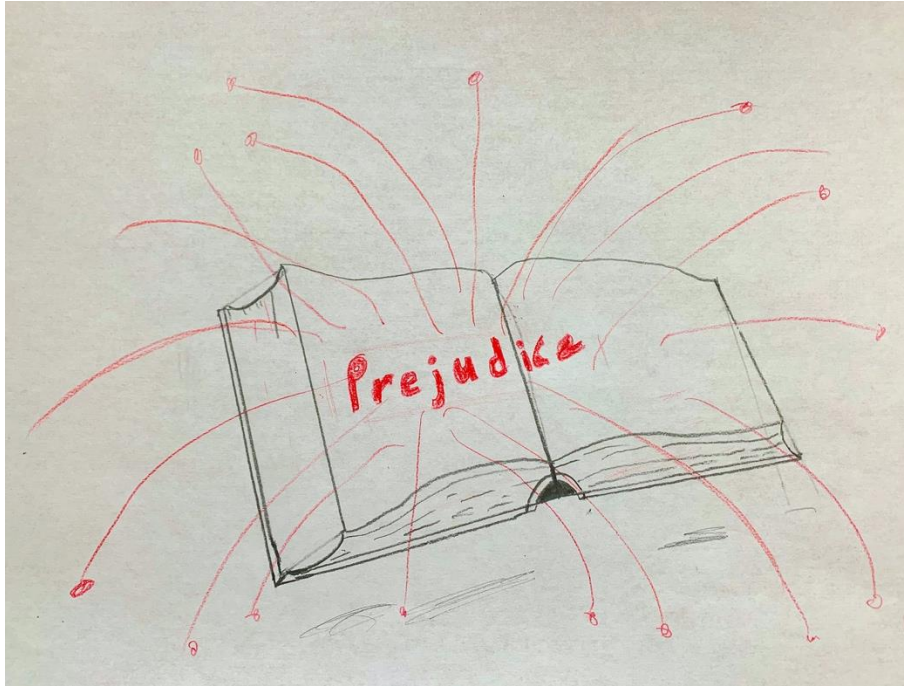
Student Artwork Examples

For the purposes of this article and to protect student’s privacy all students are assigned a pseudonym.

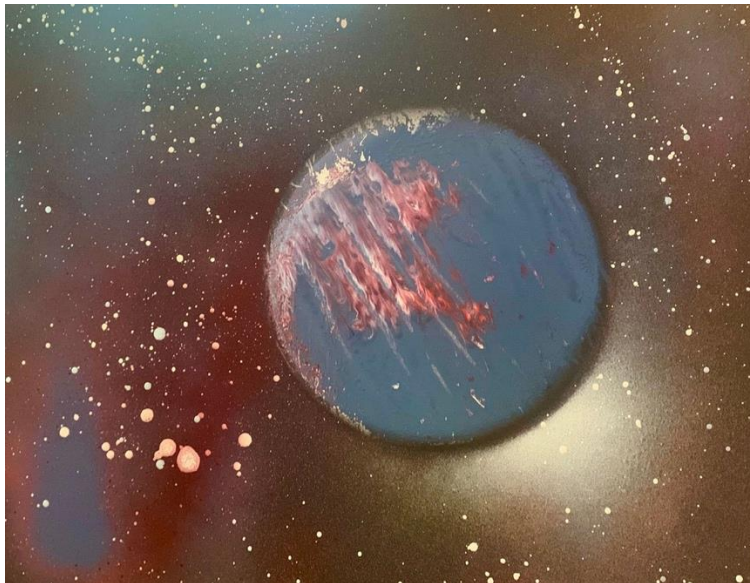


(Figure 2). Student A, grade 11, *Flames*, marker on paper, 2021.

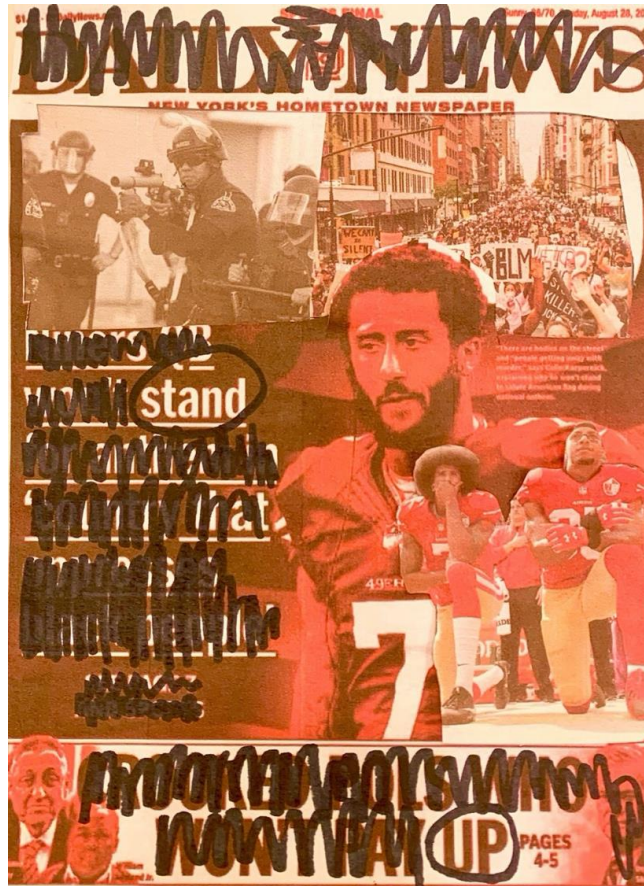
Student A, a white female art student, represents an ambiguous silhouette. The student, in her artist statement, describes “a reflection in a mirror [the figure of which] is black,” focusing on epidermal appearance and its importance within a social context conditioned by race. Because in our classroom lecture and discussions, we (the authors) invited students to think about the psychological ramifications of a society that privileges whiteness, we see this artwork as representing a person of color whose self-understanding is conditioned by what society (symbolized by the mirror) reflects back: the fundamental and inescapable status of inferior racial identification, which overtakes and distorts all other features of self. Perhaps invoking the emotional turmoil or “chaos” of this situation, the student adds: “I added the fire because this is a chaotic topic with a lot of different ideas just like a fire has a lot of different movements.”



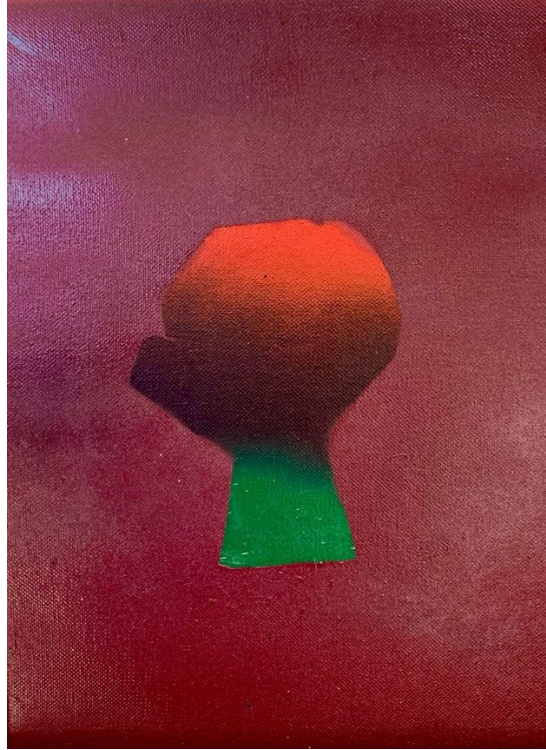
(Figure 3) Student B, grade 11, *Prejudice*, pencil and pen on paper, 2021.



(Figure 4). Student B, grade 11. *Study of the world*, spray paint on canvas. 2021.



(Figure 5). Student B, grade 11, *Study of Colin Kaepernick*, mixed media collage on paper. 2021.



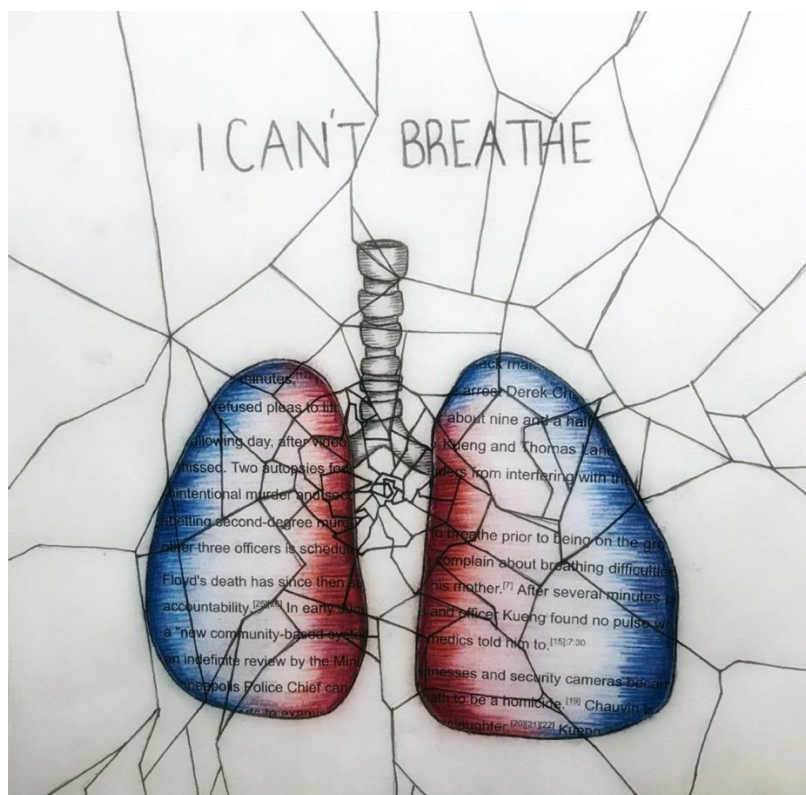
(Figure 6). Student B, *Study of BLM*, spray paint on canvas. 2021.

Student B, a Black male art student, represents how racism is not a natural phenomenon, but is rather learned, or something that we are socialized into. To express this, student B portrays an open book with its page turned to “prejudice,” (see figure 3) depicting blood-like lines of influence spilling out into society. In his discussions in our Zoom classes, Student B expressed that this class unit was personally meaningful and motivated him to produce several other artworks in response to societal racism. In this way, Student B appears to be embodying the value and struggle of study as Pinar (2005) represents it—as a door which opens to continued self-exploration, discovery, and grappling with the difficulties of the subject. Student B discovers a *continual didactic re-opening*—a pursuit of independent self-knowledge through his own lived experience, subjectivity, and confronting racist realities of society. This unit provided him with an aesthetic vehicle in which he can proceed forward.

Student B takes his study further outside the classroom and begins to create other works of art that relate to the global issue of social injustices (see figures 4 and 5). He references articles in the New York Times about George Floyd’s murder. He continues in another piece of writing, “I decided to continue on our racism unit and focus on a few big moments. I made a collage. In BLM I used a newspaper of Colin Kaepernick and also put in a photo of him and another player kneeling. I also cut out part of the background and put in a

BLM protest and police officers. I put them there to show what Colin was protesting and the people who had his back. I also did a little newspaper blackout with a play on words. I crossed out everything, but Stand and Up making stand up. It is a play on words because that is what a lot of people were telling him to do when he and other players were kneeling during the anthem. He was able to stand up for himself and the black community without literally standing up (see figure 5). Student B says, "This piece I made for me represents black power and strength and that if black people are being wrong[ed] we should stand up to our oppressors" (see figure 6).

In another example from the project, *I can't breathe*, Student C (a white female art student) explores George Floyd's murder, bringing attention to the ongoing problem of police brutality in America. In her artist statement, she describes her artistic process: "I cut out an article about George Floyd in the shape of lungs and have the words 'I can't breathe' above because those were his last words. I also have broken glass with the impact area where the heart would be to show how George Floyd's death shattered the media and the world."



(Figure 7). Student C, grade 9, *I can't breathe*, mixed media, 2021.

Anti-Racist Significance of Student Artworks

These artworks, alongside others created during this unit, demonstrate not only a deepening of study in the sense indicated by Pinar, but also, we believe, the development of anti-racist consciousness as Fanon models it. This is evidenced in a number of ways. For one, they demonstrate a consciousnessization, or a coming to conscious awareness of, racism's conceptual nature. Student B's depiction of a book and its influence, for example, represents the *learned* or fundamentally *social* nature of racist ideology. When asked at the beginning of our unit, many students were unsure whether race was natural (i.e., given at birth) or socially constructed; and many others leaned towards defining race as a social construct but were unable to articulate why or how. After our exploration of race's conceptual emergence at the dawn of European colonialism, and the assumptions that race conceptually entails (e.g. essentialism and civilizational teleology), students were more confident in their understanding of race and the means by which racist privilege and disprivilege operate.

For another, these artworks depict the *violence* which accompanies racist ideology, demonstrating an awareness of the fundamentally violent nature of a social regime still shaped and characterized by racial assumptions. Student A's artwork, for example, depicts a moment of what Fanon calls "epidermalization": the reduction of identity to skin color alone, and for the person of color, the psychologically agonizing process of identifying with the symbolic inferiority attributed to non-white skin (Fanon, 1952/2008). The symbol of a *mirror*, importantly, implies that the racist violence done by epidermalization is not a function simply of the personal hostility of "bad people," but rather of an impersonal structure.⁴

Student C's artwork is also about racist violence, and specifically the police brutality which took the last breath of George Floyd. As does Fanon, Student C encourages her audience to reflect upon the relationship of racism to both the *body*, as well as to the *nation*, suggesting (through the use of red, white and blue colors within the pair of lungs, situated alongside Floyd's final words) that the democratic virtues and ideals which allegedly characterize American life become empty and lifeless with every racist act.

Additionally, these artworks function to *directly confront* racism, and therefore to decolonize and transform. At times, student artworks directly instill in their viewers the demand to resist racist worldviews or policy, such as in Student B's brilliant reduction of a *Daily News* headline to the imperative: "stand UP." However, even when the message is not overtly about resistance, these artworks all recognize the stakes: in Fanon's (1952/2008) words, "a society is racist or is not" (p. 66). By directly acknowledging and admitting the racism which pervades broader social life, and aligning themselves unambiguously against it, these artworks take a side and a stand.

⁴ The inclusion of vines and flames serve metonymically to further characterize this social violence (perhaps as complex, active, terrorizing...) in abstract ways.

Moreover, the act of *creating* these artworks allowed our students the capacity for an *affective* experience, which (as Fanon the psychiatrist affirms) grants the individual a means of consciously releasing and transforming the negative emotions that otherwise unconsciously pervade the subjects of a racist society. Again, this is the case not only for those artworks which symbolically bespeak a message of empowerment (such as Student B's *Study of BLM*), but for every artwork that results from a student's consciously-directed, anti-racist energies.

In this way, artmaking meets the decolonial and therapeutic criteria that Fanon assigns to revolutionary violence. It allows students to clear-headedly – and with newly-created distance from internalized trauma, inferiority, denial or guilt – confront the social violence of racism so as to establish more genuinely democratic values and creatively transform the world. This is all the more remarkable considering that artmaking as a 'militant' act nonetheless circumvents human bloodshed. Artmaking becomes a revolutionary tactic which can not only foster student growth in the classroom but catalyze radically transformative effects that extend far beyond classroom and gallery walls.

Finally, by explicitly aligning student artmaking with both *affective experience* and *anti-racist goals*, this unit radically destabilizes conventional western pedagogical emphases upon objectivity and teacher value-neutrality, two assumptions which emerge from the very early-modern conceptual constellation as that which birthed race. As such, anti-racist arts education may be less about "illumination" than it is about *incubation* and *integration*. Anti-racist artmaking does more than refuse objectivity and value-neutrality as methods or approaches; it outright denies their existence. As Fanon (1952/2008) claims, "I found it impossible to be objective" (p. 67). Anti-racist visual art units can therefore not only extend traditional models of self-expression in the arts classroom, which tend to normatively value an apolitical equity of expression, but they can further help us to transform, in a decolonial fashion, the way we collectively approach our educational endeavors. And in its move from instructional authoritarianism, anti-racist arts education compels students to continue their study outside of the classroom, embodying self-expressive exploration with choice, agency, and reflection.

Concluding Remarks

This study builds upon and extends existing research on anti-racist and decolonial education in the arts by intertwining Fanon's concept of "consciousnessization" with Pinar's concept of "study." Prior scholarship has emphasized the role of self-expression and historically accurate instruction in the capacity for arts education to foster awareness of racial injustice (e.g., Dewhurst, 2014; Rolling, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022; Shin, Bae, & Song, 2023). We have attempted to advance this work by demonstrating how a sustained, psychotherapeutic engagement with race – one that acknowledges the affective and unconscious alongside the social-structural elements of racism – can both

deepen students' understanding and direct study toward liberation on students' terms. This is consistent with extant literature – such as Pinar's (2025) reading of McClintock (1971) on Montaigne – that frames study as involving a "continuous heightening of consciousness" (p. 161). However, by integrating insights from Fanon, our findings position study not as solely a private endeavor but as a dynamic learning process that can be collective and worldmaking (consider the work of Student B, who extends our curriculum outward to address concerns about social and racial injustice).

Thus, study through racially focused aesthetic investigation can place students within an ongoing process of self-reflective work that allows for the capacity to remake (and thus decolonize) the relationship between self and social world.

Helping our students conduct a deeper study of race and racism and viewing the art classroom as a sacred space for learning was also consonant with our school's mission of *Tikkun Olam* – "passionate desire, active engagement, and individual/collective commitment to repair the world and make it more compassionate, just, and peaceful" (School Mission & Values statement, 2021, p. 1). Bringing to consciousness America's colonial historical past and the legacy of racism grounded their thinking towards this end, as was encouraging students to sit with and process feelings of discomfort and pain. We allowed students to leave space for racialized thoughts and feelings as they might emerge during artmaking or discussion, challenging them to question their social-structural origins and purposes. Defining and exploring the bedrock assumptions of essentialism, teleology, and epidermalization allowed students to grapple with the nature of racism, and attuning to racism's psychological operation further directed attention towards internal and personal responses towards topics pertaining to race, granting a fuller consciousnessization of previously unconscious forces.

Even if others do not approach race and artmaking in precisely this way, we do encourage art teachers to acknowledge if and how they personally benefit from white privilege, and to similarly help their students begin to talk about race and racism from an "I" perspective, providing space for all. It is helpful to remember and to remind students that proclaiming "colorblindness" or simply saying "I am not racist" can be a means of perpetuating racism by drawing attention away from its systemic, social sources (Rolling, 2021). In addition, in discussions of race, uncomfortable defenses and feelings may arise that can cause shame and guilt, if not trauma or aggression. It may be helpful to remember Fanon's insight that it is by bringing such internalized feelings to consciousness that racism might eventually be transformed. Art educators can help students begin to feel comfortable in acknowledging racial defenses or traumas when they arise, in holding them in mind, and teachers can persuade students to begin associating the origins and operation of these defenses and traumas with social logics of oppression.

In addition, educators can invite students to consider how white privilege or racial disprivilege may coincide with other vectors of privilege or oppression, such as religious, gendered, sexual, class or nationalistic. Students might be multiply oppressed or privileged in different ways; they may benefit from class privilege and simultaneously suffer consequences of racial discrimination, or may benefit from white privilege while remaining victim to patriarchal, religious and or class oppression, etc. Each student's multifaceted experience with oppression is valid and important to tease out.

Going forward, we seek to develop further and complicate the topics of *spirituality* and *sacredness* in classroom learning at school settings, religiously affiliated or not, to deepen our understanding of racism and anti-racist pedagogy. How do anti-racist agendas interface with religious or secular ethoi and sacred practices? How is the spiritual hampered or kindled by different kinds of classroom activity, artmaking or discussion? And how might our understandings of the spiritual or the sacred themselves be racialized or prone to racist inflection? We encourage scholars and educators to enter into this conversation and challenge us to expand our thinking in this regard.

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