Collective Turning and Modern-day Persons Unknown
An Ideological Critique of White Supremacy in Public

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I COME FROM A PLACE WITH A LEGACY of a peculiarly southern style of violence regarding symbolic, psychic, and physical attacks on black people. This violence, not unlike the violence we witness today, was cloaked in an historically constructed veil that lent itself to the perceived invisibility and neutrality of whiteness. Ideologies, and the social practices they inform, that historically and uncritically situated my white identity as "good" (Tanner & Berchini, 2017) structured my parents' racism, their parents' racism, and my own as I was socialized through a discourse of difference and superiority in the rural Georgia town in which I was raised. There, I learned that my superiority was a given. Sometimes these lessons were explicit, and other times more covert—through codes of conduct that situated segregation and ambivalence (Lensmire, 2017) as simply "normal." I was never asked "to get smarter about how white people grow into and embody their whiteness, how [I] came to think and feel as I do" (Lensmire, 2008, p. 300); however, since my parents didn't have the opportunity to attend college, it was important to them that I did, and it was while studying to become a high school English teacher that my whiteness became visible (Marx, 2006) and worthy of interrogation. In a course dedicated to exploring literature of the Civil Rights Movement, I first began learning about whiteness as a referent to histories of oppression and, through that course, "making better sense of becoming white with black materials" (Lensmire, 2017, p. 21). Even still, I was not called upon, as Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) demands, to explicitly examine my own white identity—how learning to be white (Thandeka, 1999) was embodied, enacted, and entrenched in histories of violence or how my ideological investments in whiteness threatened my pedagogy and practices as a white teacher, researcher, and activist with an antiracist agenda.

Educational privilege did make it possible for me to gain a more intimate knowledge of historic and systemic racism in America, to learn from the experiences of those I had been trained to imagine as other, and for my subsequent anger, frustration, and a desire to complicate my own complicity in structural violence to become possible. As a pre-service teacher, I wondered why I

had not received a more robust education concerning the anti-blackness that has been constructed in the wake (Sharpe, 2016) of American slavery. I—much like the white pre-service teachers I currently teach—experienced guilt-feelings upon becoming conscious of my whiteness and the legacies of white supremacy in this country. Through educational experiences, my initial feelings of shame (Thandeka, 1999) were contextualized—my guilt transformed into feelings of betrayal by my white community—and the anger produced in this space was generative as it transformed into responsibility and a pedagogical commitment to recognize the violence of whiteness. Grappling with the absences in my education relative to histories of racial violence, I left the South for the Northeast to pursue a master's degree in African American Studies. My family did not understand or support this pursuit, and the risks of abandonment from my white community became realized (Thandeka, 1999), but the potentiality of abandonment also fueled an exploration of, in the words of James Baldwin (1984), the price of my ticket for becoming white.

My intimate relationship to whiteness, which was born from historically rooted hatred and fear and was concerned with sustaining power and domination on behalf of a white collective that I am inescapably akin to, became articulable and undeniable and even more complex. Thandeka (1999) teaches that learning to be white requires an injury to white children's sense of self and requires that the child fall into step with racial ideals modeled and policed by her earliest caretakers. The notion of "caretaker" is a rich analytic lens relative to my experience of becoming white, and the following narrative offers insight into the dynamic space of this becoming:

> I was seven, and Ms. Adelaide was in her mid-twenties when my parents hired her to care for my siblings and me. What I knew of her was this: she lived in the rural community next to my hometown; she arrived early every morning and began cleaning, drove me to practices, often made dinner, and went home only to return the next day to begin again. My parents worked late at my step-father's car dealerships, and she was tasked with raising us in their absence. Ms. Adelaide was an exception: the only black person to sit on our couch, at our dinner table, or whose car I was permitted to ride in. My step-father, who raised me, had made it explicitly clear that I was not allowed to have black friends, and my community had made clear that white people who were in relationship with people of color were deserving of shame, ridicule, and alienation. As caretaker, Ms. Adelaide was, of course, different because she was a black woman; however, the ways she was distinguished from my white caretakers were plenty. The truth of my childhood is that care itself was a wounded landscape littered with violence, enforced silence, and fear-based control at the hands of white men, but I was a child then. Ms. Adelaide emerged as the only caretaker who recognized me as a child and offered room enough for my feelings to find language and for me to be tenderly supported and nurtured.

> Despite the prevailing "rules" established by my white community, Ms. Adelaide's gentleness was the only intervention in the pain of violence that my white caretakers facilitated and denied. Thandeka (1999) explores the injury the white child survives relative to the fear of abandonment by her white community, but my white community's failure juxtaposed with Ms. Adelaide's style of caretaking incited *a desire to transgress* the controlling parameters of whiteness (and masculinity) out of a responsibility to justice— and, importantly, to her.

I wonder how I might've made sense of care, of loyalty, of my identity within the space of ambiguous and explicit parameters of what being white requires if I had not had the educational experiences I did. These facts of my learning to be white through an inheritance of violence were never addressed, and what became clear is that I was a product of whiteness that forgave itself without ever getting to know itself. Despite the modern packaging in which white supremacy was delivered to me as a child, I knew that not being allowed to hug Ms. Adelaide in public *felt* confusing. Through a combination of educational exposure, interrogations of the emotionality of whiteness, and critical reflection on my earliest relationships—I experienced the dissonance that has motivated me to become more intimately familiar with histories of racism, my unearned privilege, and, eventually, the violence that whiteness itself embodies. My investment in this work is deeply personal, political, and pedagogical and continues to be dedicated to a desire to acknowledge violence, refuse silence, and cultivate accountability for the care that shaped my earliest experiences. Therefore, this project and the conceptual concerns within take root in the violent past it interrogates *and* grow towards the possibility of complicating whiteness through education. This project remains devoted to *possibilities* for racial justice, critical dialogues, and human relation despite the recognition of ideological forces that have socialized us and continue to work towards violence, distance, and difference on behalf of the whiteness it serves.

Specifically, this project thinks through the inheritance of violence by engaging in an ideological critique of white supremacy that examines sites and practices of 20th century spectacle lynching as a public pedagogy of terror. Establishing this site of terror as a foundation, I move into another site of violence—the contemporary classroom—to draw connections between the ways in which educational policies and practices become complicit in sustaining white supremacist ideologies. By first establishing how ideology is conceptualized within this this undertaking, I point out that spectacle lynching—as public pedagogy—functioned in particular ways to crystallize communal identities rooted in racial dominance and violence. I then move into a critique of contemporary classroom contexts in which histories of racial violence are decontextualized and avoided. Connections between historical and present-day educative experiences and ideology illuminate the ways in which the core curriculum of those past learning and teaching moments— white supremacy—is sustained through contemporary (mis)handling of our nation's racially violent past within present educational settings. These analyses make use of a Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) framework (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016; Lipsitz, 1998) that requires a more complex interrogation of the structure of whiteness, the process of becoming white, and the feelings historically and individually aligned with those who believe themselves to be white.

This work makes the connection between historical and contemporary practices of white supremacist violence clear to illuminate the danger in denying the presence of racial violence in our contemporary society and schools. In this project, the personal and pedagogical intersect within a dynamic space of ideological critique with aims to: thoroughly complicate the nature of whiteness as a violent structure; illuminate the ideological groundwork embedded in the process of becoming white; and deny both whiteness and ideology the invisibility that gives them power. It is a calling out of the *structures* that make white supremacy and the denial of it possible so that educators can more critically attune to the ways in which their own complicity in these structures may continue to evade reckoning with justice long-denied.

Ideology Unpacked

Since CWS demands critical interrogations of psycho-emotional processes of becoming white that account for the historical, political, and personal, ideological critique is useful in examining socio-historical and cultural preconditions of beliefs systems that saturate individual and collective consciousness and indiscernibly inform signifying practices (Althusser, 1971) and understandings of power within lived social relations (Eagleton, 1991). CWS recognizes that racism's insidious lessons begin in childhood and that these norms become "internalized adult ideologies (Sullivan, 2003, 2006) if they are not questioned, challenged and changed" (Miller, 2015, p. 138). The use of personal narratives within this work are meant to explore and expose my own recognition and experiences of internalized racism and to model how interrogating subjectivities constituted in childhood can be examined through the lens of whiteness and violence. Theoretically, I rely on scholars who have considered material implications of ideology and their relationships to our social, racial, and cultural common-sense understandings of the political world(s) we inhabit. That is to say, I am mostly interested in how ideology informs white individual (and group) understandings of themselves in relationship to systems, structures, and their own beliefs/actions.

Louis Althusser and Slavoj Žižek provide useful conceptions of ideology for this analysis. Reconsidering Marxist articulations of ideology, Althusser points to two mechanisms through which the state ensures ideological production: the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus [ISA] (Althusser, 1971). He argues that schools, families, and communities function as ISAs to disseminate beliefs that represent our imagined relationships to real conditions of existence. In doing so, he acknowledges that the many ideologies that work to invisibly guide us do, in fact, have material existences and implications. There are many ideologies to which individuals subscribe and which we must constantly navigate, but in accepting an ideology—by nature unconsciously—an individual's thoughts and actions become governed by it. Ideology, for Althusser, requires culturally- and context-specific decoding precisely because the material social realities it structures are experienced as spontaneous or natural events, thoughts, attitudes, etc., ones which individuals are endlessly at stake in creating (and being created by) within the larger project of making sense of what and how it means to be themselves (Eagleton, 1991, p. 19). Althusser's emphasis on the ways in which our conception of self is endlessly bound up in ideological structures that we never name, but that we nonetheless help create and sustain, lends itself to better understanding how collective identities, specifically inculcation into white identities, are constituted.

Contributing to Althusser's argument regarding material realities of ideology, Slavoj Žižek argues that ideology is not merely "false consciousness" or illusion as presented by Marx, because ideologies are inscribed within individuals' actions (and, therefore, situations) themselves. Situations, within this discussion, refer to a systematic set of problems and constraints (De Lissovoy, 2007). Žižek understands ruling ideologies to function in an anticipatory manner, meaning, in part, that dominant ideologies have already "accommodated for the fact that we might be skeptical" of them (Eagleton, 1991, p. 40) and, in this anticipation, have reorganized their discourses accordingly so that, even if individuals do not consciously invest in ideas or beliefs, their actions of *disinvestment* still lend themselves to the sustenance and strengthening of dominant ideologies. I take up Žižek's (2008) consideration of ideology, because like Althusser, rather than arguing that ideology works as an illusion to distort reality, he suggests that it is coterminous with reality itself. Not only arguing that it is real insofar as it governs individuals' thoughts and actions,

he claims that ideologies are inherent in institutions, modes of life, rituals, and group cohesion rather than simply our perspectives on them. Ideology, in other words, is not what we think of a situation, rather it constitutes the situation itself (Žižek, 2008) and is sustained not because of individuals' conscious beliefs, but rather through actions we (individuals in lived situations) take regardless of beliefs we consciously hold. These actions ultimately work in support of dominant ideologies and this consideration of white supremacy.

Racialized Ideologies: What is Whiteness/White Supremacy?

Ideologies that constitute racially based frameworks for justifying the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 9) can be referred to as "racial ideologies." Racial ideologies have been (and are) active in the process of normalizing whiteness and constructing worldviews that center white as superior. Evidenced by my own lived experiences, the ways in which superiority is taught as unquestionable, the habits of being that white children are taught to abide by become second-nature, become the natural order of thought, relationality, and sociality—in other words, ideology. In order to interrogate racial ideologies and the sites of learning that taught (and continue to teach) power and violence as a part of a larger project of racial domination, it is necessary to illuminate the ways in which whites have created "dominant images of the world" without acknowledging the ways in which they continue to "construct the world in their image" (Dyer, 1997, p. 6). To that end, this argument calls upon a discourse of white supremacy as ideology instead of white privilege (Lensmire, et al., 2013). Discourses of privilege can have the consequences of "masking history, obfuscating agents of domination, and removing the actions that make it clear who is doing what to whom" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 77) and, through a simplification of essentialized whiteness, can work in opposition to the goals of CWS.

Whiteness itself has been theorized as a socio-historically constructed form of consciousness (McLaren 1997), a set of particular power relations (Mills, 1997), a model of cultural and social behavior by which others are judged (Giroux, 1997), and as legal or cultural property (Harris, 1995). These definitions intersect discursively to situate whiteness as subjective, personal, cultural, historical, and structural. Taken together, whiteness exists as a collection of qualities including cultures, histories, experiences, discourses, feelings, and privileges that are shared, but unacknowledged (McLaren, 1997), and persistently enacted and condoned by whites. Through this understanding, an ideological grammar of domination and subordination emerges—white supremacy.

White supremacy, as a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 9), functions to protect unacknowledged privileges of whites and maintain whiteness as status quo, all the while giving "whites greater protections and material advantages" (Lipsitz, 1998, and McIntosh, 1997, as cited in Allen, 2004, p. 124) and protecting, often violent, territorial practices without acknowledging the existence of a territory (Allen, 2004). If the "racial mind…is ideological" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 30) and ideology is integral to and invisibly rooted in the depths of our consciousness, then as an integral part of white consciousness, white supremacy has enabled whites, regardless of class, to maintain a sense of racial superiority—a superiority that extends beyond individual and social formation and that has long been active in shaping legal, political, and national governmental structures (Bell, 1999) that are veiled by equal opportunity mythologies (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1380), which rationalize racial oppression and create "racial blind spots" (Mills, 1997) within a larger neoliberal, colorblind ideology of merit and ahistorical conceptions

of equality. Regardless of context, white supremacist ideology (and every system founded upon it) has reimagined and reconstructed itself in a mythologized understanding of a post-racial America ever since the end of legalized segregation (Wiegman, 1999).

The work of CWS demands an approach to interrogation that complicates whiteness as a recognition of its inherent power that manifests in its invisibility. To take an anti-racist stance and do the work of interrogating white supremacy, we must begin from the recognition that "all actors in a racialized society are affected materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pp. 15-16) and that our racial structure is one that has always enfranchised whiteness at the expense of non-whites. This work first begins with white individuals making a commitment towards deconstructing how they were—how I, as a white woman, was—hailed into simultaneous practices of brutality and alleged innocence.

Teaching Terror: Lynching as Public Pedagogy

Understanding preconditions of contemporary white supremacy requires an examination of historical legacies that shape the present. Slavery provided foundational logic for American racism and in doing so gave rise to the legitimacy of whiteness as a relevant racial category (Lipsitz, 1998)—one that was constructed as socially, biologically, and legally superior.[1] Bringing ideological critique to bear on historically-informed processes of racial formation is best done by locating specific historical situations. Bearing this in mind, this project turns its attention to 20th century lynching practices as a public pedagogy of white supremacy as an opportunity to explore the dynamic space of complicity.

Spectacle lynching, while not isolated to the South, by the end of the 19th century had become a mostly southern phenomenon "as white southerners sought to restore their dominance in the face of emancipation and the threat of black enfranchisement and social autonomy" (Wood, 2009, p. 3). Lynching, as state-sanctioned terrorism, became "public theater, a participatory ritual of torture and death, a voyeuristic spectacle…for the benefit of the [white] crowd" (Allen, Als, Lewis, & Litwack, 2000, p. 13). Furthermore, the public exhibition of brutality was ideologically crucial and politically strategic in regard to the maintenance of white supremacy. The most recent data on lynching comes from a 2015 report by the Equal Justice Initiative. Their work documents 3,959 lynchings of black people in southern states between 1877 and 1950, documenting the most victims (578) in my home state of Georgia (p. 16), offering another undeniable material reality of my personal inheritance relative to the social and cultural histories that structured my whiteness.

Spectacle lynching became an event for the entire white family to attend, and it was within this situation that lessons were taught as part of an historical curriculum that reconstituted power into the minds, hands, and hearts of whites. Through a violent, public articulation of white cultural identity and social practice, what became widely understood as an ideological grammar of white supremacy was crystallized. Lynching became so embedded within white cultural practice, in fact, that sometimes thousands of people would congregate to witness the torturous events, take victims' body parts as souvenirs, and pose in photographs that were taken and made into postcards to be distributed (Allen et al., 2000). Ideology inscribed within the social and cultural activity of lynching, for many whites, constructed basic ways of understanding their place within a racially-structured society as superior (Markovitz, 2004), while also serving as a fear-based control tactic to threaten those whites who entertained thoughts of transgressing the larger white collective. Through a Žižekian lens, lynching as spectacle and cultural practice was the situation into which

white supremacy was itself inscribed. Even if participants in attendance didn't necessarily agree with violent torture, their presence and, more pertinently, their *whiteness* itself structured (and was simultaneously structured by) the ideological beliefs that justified the violence that was enacted.

Lynching, "both as white supremacist practice and a form of social control" is not only impressed upon white consciousness and collective memory as a signifier of sanctioned domination, but also upon the consciousness of African Americans (Leonardo, 2009, p. 31). As signifier, the lynch rope itself symbolized a panoptic power of whiteness (Wiegman, 1999)—a power, in true ideological form, that was always present but not visible. Using Althusser's concept of interpellation—the ways in which individuals are hailed into situations inscribed with beliefs and values only to come to understand those values as their own—is useful when considering how lynching as "cultural pedagogy" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997) normalized systemic racism and violence against black people in the form of ideology. The event of a lynching "interpellated *every* human individual into a racial order and formation…that directly translated to self-recognition" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 37) within the larger social formation. Thus, the power of whiteness depended on the existence and simultaneous interpellation of the racial other. For members of the violent white majority, the act of witnessing a lynching "lent authority of both divine truth and irrefutable proof to white supremacist ideology and helped produce a sense of superiority and solidarity among otherwise different white southerners" (Wood, 2009, p. 4). In addition to superiority and solidarity, individuals were called forth and offered models of the selves they ought to become (or else) in counter-distinction to those they were meant to recognize as the inferior other.

Considered as a teaching act, spectacle lynching interpellated white children whose conception of self was, from a young age, forever linked to the moment they were hailed into belonging to the powerful white majority, which meant, for them, the right to publicly commit acts of terror against black people as well as the potential threats resulting from *not* aligning with the violent white majority. Understanding complicity as "the state of being involved in an event performed by someone else, but for which we are somehow responsible" (Rushdy, 2012, p. 17), this initiation into the signified embodiment of whiteness itself, if acknowledged as such, marks an historical responsibility of acknowledgment and complicity. Within this historical situation, lynching as pedagogy inscribed whiteness with certain codes of conduct that became crystallized within the white imaginary that "depended on the [domination of the] racial other for its own identity" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 75). As public pedagogy, community-sanctioned white on black violence articulated a fundamental grammar of white supremacy to members of the white collective who were active participants, complicit witnesses, and/or beneficiaries of the property of whiteness (Harris, 1995). Effectively, individuals who were recruited into violence as racialized subjects meant the cohesion of a sense of self (Leonardo, 2009) as well as sense of ideological cohesion from within the white collective. As a collective act, spectacle lynching created a situation for white attendants, both young and old, to be called forth into a larger structural practice of public terror that was normalized and accepted as the unquestioned way of the world, all of whom were complicit in solidifying terror into ideology inherent in political structures of governance, conceptions of racial superiority, and white supremacy as the right and true way of things.

Whitewashed Contemporary Teaching Contexts

Despite being outfitted for a more modern era, I contend that fundamental components of white supremacist ideology, rooted in the legacy of lynching, are inherent—if not in precise form, then certainly in structural function—in contemporary education practices. In fact, though they may no longer take place in a public lawn, the manifestations of white supremacist ideology that protect unacknowledged privileges of whites at the expense of people of color, maintain whiteness as superior and status quo, and offer whites more material advantages than non-whites are foundational to public education.

In an essay on ideology and race relations, Zeus Leonardo (2009) reminds his readers that "racist ideologies are driven by fear of, misinformation about, and distance from the other" (p. 33), and CWS scholars, inspired by black political thought (Ellison, 1986), have pointed out how white fear and white identity formation relies on threatening stereotypes of imagined racial "others" (Lensmire, 2017), which, from a critical education perspective, signals not only concern, but also the potential for education to intervene in crucially important ways. However, national education policies, practices, and official curricula, in habitual practices of avoidance (Apple, 2004), rarely offer instances for critical dialogue that problematizes "one-dimensional renderings of historical people, groups, or events" (Epstein, 2009, and Wineburg, 2000, as cited in King & Womac, 2014, p. 40). Thus, pedagogy regarding racial violence and racism that fails to interrogate stereotypes and how they contribute to sustaining white supremacy contributes to sustaining that fear, misinformation, and distance. This becomes increasingly problematic when considering the ways in which schools contribute to the construction of students' world-views and identities in relation to histories of disenfranchisement and racial violence in both curriculum and practice.

This is true of my past educational experiences. While I have no recollection of studying texts authored by people of color in primary or secondary schooling, or learning about the complex history of white violence and black resistance, I *can* recall the enactment of violent ideology and the embodiment of ideologically-rooted white innocence on my elementary school playground:

> Our playground abutted a cow pasture, and after extended rainfall, manure would trickle, creek-like, into the boundaries of our playing field. Velcro shoes tracked classroom floors with the smell of manure and mud—the common scent rendered our differences from the animals difficult to discern. My white playmates and I would clasp hands, skip with synchronicity in a circle, and sing: *Fight, fight, n- and a white. White don't win, we all jump in.* Laughter would rise from our eight-year-old animal tongues, and we'd collapse together. Fair skin in ¾ time, our filthy becomings, racial violence as child's play. Today, I hear this song's melody echoing through the time, and I envision eight-year-olds joining hands with past perpetrators and falling into a historical harmony of innocence imagined. Those shit-stained footprints tracking the classroom floor, footsteps meant to be followed, guiding us carefully into a community of violence.

What this vignette shows is that the work of ideologically-condoned practices in schools is not limited to formal content and that pedagogical moments can also stem from the *absence* of intervention. Acknowledging the ways in which social practices become enmeshed and contribute to institutionalizing racist ideologies, this memory illustrates my experience as a child, a student, learning that white violence was acceptable and that terror itself was literal child's play.

More formal structures, curricula, and practices also reflect the institutionalized nature of white supremacist ideology within schools. Critical Race Theories emerging from legal scholarship, as well as critical analysis of standards and assessment, offer insight into the ways in which racially inequitable conditions are maintained and legitimized through the school system as Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971).

For instance, policy decisions that disadvantage black students contribute to sustaining a sense of racial superiority in whites (Bell, 1999). Within the realm of education policy, this claim is illuminated through what David Gillborn (2005) names a "tacit intentionality" inherent in the ways in which education policy is conceived of and constructed. Gillborn notes that policy-making aligns with white supremacy precisely because policy-makers don't set out with the intentional goals of routinely privileging white students, but the implications of policy most often do. In conversation with Bell, the material implications of this tacit intentionally that structures education policy secures in students and teachers who live within these material realities a conception that differences in what are systemically recognized as achievement between white and black students are natural and, therefore, justified.

In addition to the ways in which policy supports white students' sense of racial superiority, accountability-based education reform and standards function in our contemporary education system to persistently locate, and often publicly announce, students of color at the bottom of achievement scales while also labeling schools whose populations are predominantly non-white as "failing." Neoliberalism, effectively infused in policy, government, common-sense, and, of course, public education, has rendered these actions nearly unrecognizable by normalizing such practices in the contemporary education climate. More particular implications are, on the one hand, the acceptance of meritocracy—those who achieve highest are most ambitious and, therefore, most-deserving (Apple, 2004; MacLeod, 1995)—which within such a racially-biased political system supports mythologies of blacks as inferior (Crenshaw, 1988) and, on the other hand, legitimizes white supremacist practices of ignoring the ways in which standards persistently disenfranchise students of color. Additionally, assessment practices that ignore routine and systemic socio-historical disenfranchisement of communities of color reaffirm whites' sense of superiority. The implications of such practices, argues Sleeter (2008), build allegiances among students to fall in line with the existing social order—in this case a racialized social order that privileges whiteness. Beyond assessment, standards reflect official knowledge, or what knowledge states' standards have deemed legitimate and worthy of teaching. Recognizing the construction of standards as both political and ideological, Vasquez Heilig, Brown, and Brown (2012) have shown how, through an "illusion of inclusion," the official knowledge of race, racism, and communities of color mandated by standards actually serves to marginalize these knowledges through over-simplification and decontextualized historical narratives. Through an Althusserian analysis, the public and political dictate lived experiences of students and teachers within schools and work to reproduce "submission to the rules of the established order…which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology" (Althusser, 1971 p. 135). Teachers and students are, of course, not without agency but are interpellated into a larger political system undergirded by white supremacist ideologies and rearticulated racist ideologies. Meanwhile, policy and reform do little to confront and uproot entrenched and systemic racism in American schools (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012) despite a language of progress or achievement.

Turning now to a more focused consideration of how curriculum contributes to the project of sustaining white supremacist ideologies, I will focus on how the lessons taught at historical sites of lynching continue to inform contemporary encounters with racial violence—specifically

lynching—from the purview of contemporary classrooms. Critical historians and social studies educators have critiqued approaches to history education for avoiding controversy, representing the past as one-dimensional or "objective, neutral, and authorless" (Segall, 1999, p. 367), rather than as constructions that are partial, political, and subjective (Brown & Brown, 2010; Epstein, 2009; Segall, 1999, 2014). The flattening of historical complexity and critical engagement is especially clear in historical lessons about race in America.

Much of the research on racial knowledge in social education points to the ways in which curriculum knowledge in textbooks is limited in regard to representations of race relations (Brown, 2013; Brown & Brown, 2015) and presents the past as objective facts. Within the popular, post-racial narrative, presenting race or racism as an issue of the past contributes to a denial of privileges granted to whites and resistance to acknowledging that race matters. It is little surprise, then, that in this contemporary climate representations of racial violence in curriculum fail to reflect historical complexities or invite students into dialogue that connects contemporary racial violence with historical conditions that systematically support white supremacist ideology. Specifically, discussions of lynching that support narratives of racism as an historical relic or of lynching as isolated acts of "bad men doing bad things" (Brown & Brown, 2010, p. 60) alongside avoidances or attempts to soften the teaching of "difficult histories" (Britzman, 2000) position white students to effectively distance themselves from the white perpetrators captured in lynching photographs and, thus, from a deeper engagement with the preconditions of contemporary white supremacy.

Generally, when faced with images of lynching, students place themselves at "comfortable distance" (Simon, 2014, p. 3) from the sites of injustice. The dangerous implications of avoidance, which manifest in teaching flattened and decontextualized histories of lynching, are that such practices facilitate seeing racial violence in a way that aids in viewing from a distance. Both the comfort and distance invite a disengagement that fails to recognize historical and contemporary ideological implications or summon a sense of responsibility for contemporary white witnesses. Addressing this dangerous comfort, Dora Apel (2003) suggests that Americans cannot afford to align innocence with these photos, because by refusing to see responsible actors within them, we accept historical understandings that whitewash the crimes of white supremacy. Within this whitewashed understanding, the "comfortable distance" becomes a dangerous comfort that allows for white witnesses to imagine their own innocence when bearing witness to a lynching photograph. This innocence is strengthened by the ways in which history is taught as authorless and decontextualized; whiteness itself as a violent historical structure isn't complicated, complexified, or examined through lenses of complicity. This, along with the functions of policy, standards, curriculum, and practice culminate in what I will call a "collective turning away." This practice of turning away from our past, rather than being called forth to witness or examine personal inheritance, is precisely the contemporary condition that sustains the historical form and function of white supremacy.

Ideologies are not fabricated justifications but are widely acknowledged chains of meaning or narratives that we draw from to explain our social existence (Lewis, 2001). By turning away from histories of racial violence, insofar as the turning justifies the terror, we are at once pivoting away from *and* sustaining racist ideologies. What would it mean for a white viewer to look at the photographs of violent, racially-motivated murders and seek familiarity with a member of the murderous crowd? What impact might it have on our collective memory of racial violence and our current understandings of ourselves as racialized beings if we were required to confront ourselves relative to our historical positionalities? Our old stories of white terrorism, and the stories we (fail to) tell about that shameful past today, function to detach socially and institutionally-condoned,

racially-motivated violence from our American identity by conditioning us to habitually turn away. The refusal of our national identity and systemic denial of white supremacy has a long legacy of allowing white murderers to remain innocent as the brutality against black bodies was committed "at the hands of persons unknown." By not seeing race or finding relation in lynching photographs, when white viewers fail to recognize perpetrators as historical kin, when curricula continuously build upon conceptions of racism and racial violence as isolated events or things of the past, we function within a hauntingly similar, ideologically-situated innocence. Essentially, the failure of today's witnesses to acknowledge these violent acts and their modern-day contingencies allows for ideological rationalizations of white supremacy to continue to be perpetrated "at the hands of persons unknown." This innocence, and violence, is carried forward by our institutionally-condoned, collective turning away from images of historical violence.

To more clearly frame processes of collectively turning away as a defining mechanism that sustains white supremacist ideology today, I'll return to Žižek's conception of ideology. Understanding that ideology is coextensive with our lived realities, inherent in institutions, behaviors, rituals, and group cohesion rather than simply in our perspectives on them, is not found in what *we think* of a situation but rather is inscribed in the situation itself and, most importantly, in our actions, I will illustrate, through a narrative inspired by a past teaching experience, how the action of "turning away" supports and perpetuates white supremacist ideology.

The Persistence of White Violence

To illuminate how contemporary failures to critically engage with histories of racial violence that are manifest in the action of turning away sustain white supremacist ideology, I'll offer an example informed by an early experience of teaching American Literature in a mostly white, wealthy, and liberal community in Massachusetts. Contrary to my upbringing in the overtly racist communities I have described, the majority of my students had been trained to understand themselves as "progressive" or "liberal" relative to race and sexuality, expressly in their eagerness to admit that racism was "bad" and that they were not racist. It was during this time that I recognized that the logic of whiteness, regardless of where we fall on the ideological spectrum (from explicit violence to "knowing better"), supports an uncritical relationship to historical inheritances of white supremacist ideology. These connections emerged in a lesson dedicated to exploring histories of racial violence, spectacle lynching, and the history of violent discourses in preparation for reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

> In a high school English classroom, without having been introduced to a critical history of lynching practices in the U.S., students were asked to view a photocopy from a history textbook with a photograph of a man named Rubin Stacy who was murdered July 19, 1935 (Allen et al., 2000), by a white mob. In the photo, Mr. Stacy, still in his overalls, has been lynched by the white mob surrounding him. His body hangs suspended from an Oak branch and is surrounded by onlookers—all white. Four of the attendants are young girls under the age of 13. A small blonde-headed girl is smiling and has her arms crossed at the wrists mirroring Mr. Stacy's arms, which are crossed and bound at his dangling wrists.

> Upon seeing this image, white students, not much older than the white children in the photograph, seem to immediately recognize objective brutality and express an

acknowledgment that such brutal and ceremonious murder is grotesque. They openly acknowledge that racism and racial violence are wrong. Some students describe the act as inhumane, some sit quietly covering their mouths in horror or express audible disgust at the brutality in the photograph. The most common response to this decontextualized image, however, is that my students turn their heads to avoid gazing upon the traumatic image.

While I am sensitive to the triggering impact of such images of violence, what strikes me is my students' self-identification as "not racist," as beyond the violent actions of white perpetrators in the photograph. Unlike my students, I wasn't taught to think racism was "bad," but like them, I *was* taught to not think myself a "racist." Our common lesson, despite the different ideological processes of becoming white, was that neither I nor they were required to consider how our whiteness aligns us with the mob rather than with the victim. The lack of contemporary accountability or recognition of complicity has, through adherence to color-blind ideologies, educational practices, and myths of racial equality, been rendered beyond the scope of the lessons we teach. Collectively, we seem to have acknowledged that racism is, in fact, "wrong" and that we, as a nation, have overcome it (Smith & Brown, 2014). We can determine, by looking upon the photograph of smiling women and children standing before the brutalized body of Mr. Stacy, that lynching is unacceptable and *un*human. Collectively, our educational institutions, through presenting students with uncritical histories or by excluding these artifacts of American history in our curricula, perform a symbolic and institutionally-condoned turning away. Even if contemporary viewers sustain a visual engagement and critically examine the photo, we often acknowledge, collectively, how awful the situation was.

We say to ourselves and our classmates, "How could *they* do such a thing?" We recognize the photograph as a part of the past and the perpetrators as anonymous and historically distant men engaged in a singular, not a systemic, act. We "know" that racism doesn't exist, because we had a black President, and we have been taught, through narratives of national progress, that we have *come a long way*. It is precisely, however, in these articulations of disgust and utterances of "look at those violent others perpetrating such unspeakable acts," that we return to the basic imaginative investments and values organized at the very site of the event framed within the photograph. The ideological grammar is sustained because we fail to interrogate the *how* and *why* within an historical, political, and systemic context that might offer a space for meaningful, difficult, yet critical relation. In this contemporary practice of looking away (both literally, structurally, and through historical distancing), we sustain white supremacist ideologies by literally failing to ask how white supremacy itself informed that historical act. Despite the fact that our belief about the situation is that "it is wrong," our action of turning away, of refusing to critically ask questions of historical racial kinship and contemporary responsibility, recreates conditions for continued white supremacy.

To further illuminate modern material implications of the ideology at work, I will follow these utterances and actions as a process of understanding how ideology translates outside of the classroom within the white imaginary. "This is not *us*," my students said, as for the sake of progress we often teach our students and children to say. Yet when we return home, we turn on our nightly news and hear that Trayvon Martin was murdered or gaze upon the contemporary spectacle of Eric Garner gasping for breath as he is strangled to death. We hear media correspondents arguing over what is and is not racial violence as we watch a recurring video clip of Tamir Rice being shot down in a playground by the very people who are meant to protect him; in a continued act of spectacle, we see media clips of Diamond Reynold's toddler bearing witness to the brutal murder of Philando

Castille in the passenger seat, and of course, unfortunately, the list goes on. The historically-conditioned practice of "turning away" as distance and denial is manifest in each of these illustrations insofar as the articulation of "this is not us" translates to "this is not racism" without ever interrogating who precisely the "us" we speak of signifies. Our collective memory of ourselves as a nation leaves a blind spot where Emmett Till once lay bludgeoned, shot, and drowned. We turn away and don't read non-indictments as modern day "persons unknown," because we have always, always turned away; and the privilege of whiteness, the function of white supremacy as ideology, invites such a disavowal of our own complicity. Our whiteness continues to forgive itself, invite a sense of historically-rooted innocence, without ever intimately getting to know itself. It is precisely in the "compassionate" act of being unable to gaze upon such torture, the turning away, that white supremacy anticipates itself and, through our actions, is sustained.

I suggest that school sanctioned turning away is one example of one institution that, in the very turning and silencing that fails to acknowledge histories of racial violence, perpetuates and sustains contemporary white supremacist ideologies. "Lynching photographs," writes Shawn Michelle Smith (2007), "do not deliver testimony so much as they call us to it" (p. 41), and if through historical practices of not answering the calls white Americans fail to confront the racially-motivated, systemic, and institutional components of how we ourselves, how *whiteness* itself, is inherent within these situations, then we continue to construct selves that are bound up in ideologies that we never call by name but persistently, through our actions, recreate—ideologies that, as both Althusser and Žižek agree, have material existences. In our contemporary, racial climate, these material existences systemically threaten the very lives of people of color under a newly imagined, side-stepping language of innocence and under a fragile conception of justice that still has blood at its roots.

Notes

1. This simplified description, of course, does not explore complex history, which in fact deemed blacks property and, therefore, not human, but this fact deserves to be acknowledged.

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