

January 2001

Youth of Color Living and Learning in the Age of Racial Paranoia: What Social Justice Educators Need to Know Abstract

Pierre Orelus
porelus@fairfield.edu

Curry Malott
currymalott@gmail.com

Andrew Habana Hafner
drewhabanahafner@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo>

Recommended Citation

Orelus, P., Malott, C., & Hafner, A. H. (2020). Youth of Color Living and Learning in the Age of Racial Paranoia: What Social Justice Educators Need to Know Abstract. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 19 (1). Retrieved from <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol19/iss1/7>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Article in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

Youth of Color Living and Learning in the Age of Racial Paranoia

What Social Justice Educators Need to Know

Pierre W. Orelus, Curry Malott, & Andrew Habana Hafner

Abstract

Fearing the other has been entrenched in the minds of many Americans. With Donald J. Trump becoming president of the U.S., overt racism is being reinserted into mainstream politics. Trump's victory has ushered in an era beset by racial paranoia—fear socially constructed about Black and Brown bodies, learned at home, in schools, and from the mainstream media, and expressed in unjust and, at times, violent manners. Indeed, racial paranoia has caused racially prejudiced individuals or groups to behave and act in violent ways against people of color. This essay draws from critical race theory and present day political events involving the Donald Trump government to explore racial paranoia and its multilayered effects on people of color, particularly youth of color. This article underscores plausible parallels between racial paranoia and the attitude, behavior, and actions of people holding White supremacist ideology and their violence against people of all colors, particularly youth of color. This article provides suggestions that might serve educators who are working with historically disenfranchised youth of color, including immigrant youth of color.

Pierre W. Orelus is an associate professor and department chair at Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut. Curry Malott is an associate professor at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, West Chester, Pennsylvania. Andrew Habana Hafner is an associate professor at Westfield State University, Westfield, Massachusetts. E-mail addresses: porelus@fairfield.edu, currymalott@gmail.com, & drewhabanahafner@gmail.com

© 2020 by Caddo Gap Press.

Introduction

Under the Trump regime, people of color, especially youth, are increasingly targeted for demonization and violence. However, thousands upon thousands of working people of all backgrounds have been flooding U.S. streets protesting every racist injustice from police murdering Black and Brown people with impunity to the nightmarish accounts of migrant children held in concentration camps. Rather than confront the legacy of U.S. foreign and economic policy that has driven countless Central Americans to flee poverty and violence and seek asylum in the U.S., Trump has used fear-mongering to characterize them as ‘invaders’ and an ‘infestation’ of ‘murderers, rapists, and bad hombres’ (Capps et al., 2019). Similarly, the August 2019 remarks of Trump to enjoin four freshman Democratic Congresswomen of color “to go back to the country they came from” is the blatant pinnacle of resurgent anti-immigrant, xenophobic and racist rhetoric (Quilantan & Cohen, 2019).

White supremacy as a concept and context has been made explicit in President Trump’s language and behavior that has deformed the social taboos of blatant racism and xenophobia. As educators, we are forced to face the historical truths of White supremacist ideology stoking fear of ‘others,’ and engage in dialogue, healing, and action toward greater justice. The current culture war on the sociopolitical context indicates the need for a new anti-racist education, and implicates the key spaces of schools and education as sites of struggle in battling for a multicultural future free of all forms of bigotry.

A growing number of Whites in the United States self-identifying as racially blind claim to have broken from the United States’ long history of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). However, young people from all backgrounds, challenging this color-blind discourse ideology, are taking concrete action against all forms of bigotry, including capitalist ideology that blames the poor for their poverty and xenophobic tendencies that aim to dehumanize the LGBTQ community. Indeed, more and more young people, of all backgrounds, are realizing that claiming to be colorblind, classblind, or genderblind as an individual does nothing to confront systemic racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. While it is challenging to overcome the internalization of racial biases and bigotry that stem from a society with centuries of systemic racism and White supremacy, the youth are forging a way forward through social media and more traditional forms of organizing and activism.

Specifically, swelling numbers of youth are joining various organizations, including socialist organizations, to take up the important work of building a mass movement by fighting against racism, environmental degradation, LGBTQ oppression, gun violence, and so on (Malott, 2019a). These youth are leading the charge against the racism that has left many Americans seeing and fearing people of color as *the other*. It is becoming more and more apparent to the broadest masses of youth and workers that the myth of a post-racial America has been starkly contested since

Donald Trump became the 45th U.S. President. In the current social and political climate, the fear to accept and engage *the other* has become more widespread, resurfacing publicly in social discourse and public policy.

Still, the movement against such tendencies is growing by the day despite the persistent diversion attempts and disingenuous resistance of the Democratic Party (Malott, 2019a; Puryear, 2013). This is yet another taboo insight taken up here. That is, neither branch of the capitalist-class political establishment would ever break from the bankers of corporate interests they are beholden to and take up the true causes of the people (Puryear, 2013). This is the tension of the times: the racist hold outs and new recruits on one side, and a growing movement of the many for a bigotry-free socialist future on the other with the Democratic Party ridiculously attempting to suppress it through co-optation (Puryear, 2013).

Youth of all backgrounds have seen through the faux resistance of the Democrats—the same Democratic Party that challenged the Republicans for not being tough enough on crime in the 1980s (Puryear, 2013). Systemic racism continues to have an increasingly oppressive impact on youth of color whose growing demographics predict a ‘majority minority’ country in the next three decades or sooner (Nieto & Bode, 2018). The youth-led activism related to the mass detention of asylum-seeking refugees, family separation policies, Muslim bans, and a never-ending narrative of police brutality and shootings is therefore completely understandable. As such, following the youth, this article asserts that recognizing and wrestling with the demonization and criminalization of youth of color, and cultural and institutional transformation, is a stance for racial justice in education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Taylor, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2015). Specifically, this article draws from critical race theory and current socio-political and educational issues to explore multilayered forms of racial inequities, including racial paranoia, manifested in behavior and actions of prejudiced individuals and groups, in order to uncover the inner contradictions in an American school and society that continue to struggle to fulfill their promised dream of racial equity. That is, a school system and society where youth and adults of color and poor Whites are given equal opportunities and adequate support to fulfill their potentials (Chang, 1985; Reed, 2013).

Rethinking Racial and Class Formation in the Age of Fear

An Intersectional Historical Approach

Building on the work of Chang (1985), Reed (1985) notes that “‘race’—which includes ‘racism,’ as one is unthinkable without the other—is a historically specific ideology that emerged, took shape, and has evolved as a constitutive element within a definite set of social relations anchored to a particular system of production” (p. 49). That there is not only a fundamental difference between an object and the historically-mediated idea of it, but that the creation and development of those ideas or racializations have been a central ideological component of modes of

production, to both slavery and capitalism (see Malott, 2019b). Racial formation, in other words, is fundamentally linked to class formation (Chang, 1985; Reed, 2013). Reed (2013) outlines a number of examples making this point. In the Nineteenth Century, for example, “railroad operators and other importers of Chinese labor imagined that Chinese workers’ distinctive racial characteristics” (p. 50) made them more conducive to laying train tracks than White workers. Similarly, in the 1920s Polish immigrants were selected to be steel workers “not for any natural aptitude or affinity” but because of popularized racial categorizations, of which there were dozens (Reed, 2013, p. 51).

Race, in other words, does not consist of a series of properties that exist in bodies, but are racialized or racist ideas designed to take the place of the thing itself (i.e., people) (Malott, 2019b). As such, the ideology of race is designed to maintain oppressive and exploitative economic relationships (Chang, 1985; Reed, 2013). As the balance of forces between labor and capital shift, thereby shifting capital’s ideological needs, racial categories also tend to shift. Since the tremendous struggle of the Civil Rights movement not only was overt individual racism severely stigmatized and consequently reduced, but also overt racial laws, such as separate but equal, were overturned because such forms of racialization were causing too much instability and therefore became too costly (Reed, 2013).

Reed (2013) therefore concludes that the power of race as a marker of essential difference has been degraded. In its place the capitalist class political establishment, especially the Democratic, liberal wing, has found that an anti-racist discourse, separated from its connections to capitalism, even as racial disparities and prejudices persist, has been a more effective form of social control and method for fostering consent to capitalism. Making this point, Reed (2013) notes that “versions of racial... equality are now... incorporated into the normative... structure of ‘left’ neoliberalism” (p. 53). In practice, the mantra of equality exists “exclusively within the terms of given patterns of capitalist class relations” (Reed, 2013, p. 53). In other words, it is okay if the one percent controls ninety percent of the wealth as long as there is proportional representation within the one percent (Reed, 2013). This is the unpursuable rhetoric of equality informing the mainstream branch of the Democratic Party.

Trump’s overt racism and calls for racist violence therefore upset the liberal establishment. However, their objection is not necessarily about racism, but the crude form in which Trump displays it. It is one of the elements of the deepening civil war waging within the capitalist class. In other words, it is not polite to publically call Mexican immigrants rapists and murderers. The liberal Democratic approach is to quietly serve the interests of their corporate donors by funding the militarization of the border. Publicly, the Democrats do not question the underlying premise of the need to protect the border (even though the rate of Mexican and South American immigration into the U.S has been declining or reversing for roughly 15 years), but the methods employed.

Indeed, since Trump’s presidency, fearing youth of color of different ethnicities,

cultures, languages, accents, religions, sexual and gender identifications has been encouraged in the streets, schools, the media, and other social institutions, even though such trends have been evolving in North America for centuries. However, it is within the strategic interests of the Democratic Party to deny any responsibility and blame it all on Trump since his racism, sexism, and overall bigotry is so overt and grotesque. Nevertheless, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual Hate Crime Report indicated a 17% increase in overall hate crimes, with 59.6% motivated by race/ethnicity/ancestry, 20.6% motivated by religion, and 15.8% motivated by sexual orientation (FBI, 2017).

The resurgent hate crimes and violence in schools and on college campuses has become a national trend, including in our own institutions where hate-fueled behavior has erupted in residence halls, academic buildings, outdoor spaces, and in social media. At the same time, after the so-called alt-right (i.e., new fascist) rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August of 2017, where anti-fascist activist Heather Heyer was murdered by a White terrorist, youth-led movements have consistently shut down every attempt the racists have made to stage public rallies. For example, a year after Charlottesville a second "unite the right" rally was held in Washington, DC, where the racists were outnumbered by anti-racists by more than 1,000 to 1. The mainstream narrative that serves the interests of capital is that Trump has been so successful in making racism popular again that there is no hope for progressive social change. Again, the taboo conclusion is that despite the rise in White supremacist extremism under Trump, White terrorism is marginal and does not represent the mood of the broadest masses of workers, especially White workers. Consequently, the re-popularization of socialism and progressive politics in the U.S, especially among the youth, offers good reason to be hopeful of not just moderate reforms but revolutionary change.

However, revolutionary change will not come by itself automatically. Nothing is guaranteed or predetermined. With the bigots being emboldened by Donald Trump promoting White nationalism, overt racism is being reinserted into mainstream politics and policies, which have to continue to be confronted and pushed back, and educators must step up and do their part. For example, the [il]legal "Muslim bans" on visa and green card holders from countries like Yemen, Somalia, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Libya, and Syria have been proclaimed with an Islamophobic rhetoric and must be rejected. Such bans have intensified discrimination in many ways such as preventing residents in these countries from entering or re-entering the United States for a 90-day period. While the whole world reacted and the country protested this unfair and appalling executive decision, these travel bans have been challenged and appealed in various U.S. courts, ultimately reaching the U.S. Supreme Court that upheld the travel ban in a 5-4 decision in June 2018. This executive order is a sign of totalitarianism, further glimpsed in the administration's proposal to open the U.S. Constitution to deny birthright citizenship to youth of color born in the United States to parents who are undocumented immigrants. Following Obama's

record-setting deportations of immigrants, under Trump's former Attorney General, Jeff Sessions—who has since fallen out of favor and was forced to step down—the administration has taken draconian decisions to further massive deportation of immigrants, including youth of color who came here as children, denying them the human rights to stay with their families in the U.S.s (Shear & Nixon, 2017).

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration's ineffectual Secretary of Education, Ms. Betsy DeVos, is pursuing a privatization agenda of school choice that will transform public schools into charter schools to enable for-profit educational companies to turn public education into big business. This includes ethical conflicts with her own family and self-interest with student-debt companies that maximize their profits in a trend of exploding student loan debt that is making higher education unattainable for many Americans. Instead of allocating adequate resources to public schools in dire need, American taxpayers' dollars have been allocated to the Pentagon and the U.S. military (Giroux, 2017). Sufficient resources have yet to be devoted to public schools and the health care system in order to alleviate agonizing living conditions of the vulnerable, namely poor youth of color and poor Whites. In response to this attack on education, which has been a bi-partisan issue for decades, teachers embarked on a wave of teacher strikes that began in West Virginia in 2018 (Malott, 2019a).

It continues to feel as if we are living in a police state, where legal anarchy reigns. Even though President Trump believes in water boarding, which he claims to be a good strategy to gain information from and about terrorists, and even though his government believes in spying on citizens and piling up Black and Brown people in prison for corporate profits in the name of restoring law and order (Giroux, 2017), the era of mass incarceration in the U.S. really took off between 1975 and 1985 and has been a bipartisan issue the entire time (Puryear, 2013).

Fortunately, more and more working people, including youth of color, across the U.S. have been protesting against the Trump administration's wrong doings. However, not only have Trump's racist discourse and policies been widely rejected by a great diversity of Americans but also more and more Americans are also beginning to see through the elite hypocrisy and cynicism of the Democratic Party as well. Pointing out the racism and elitism of both the Democrats and the Republicans is certainly also taboo. Jackson (2008) described the brand of racism Trump promotes, which has been promoted by both wings of the capitalist class political establishment especially vigorously throughout the era of mass incarceration (Puryear, 2013), as fostering *racial paranoia*—the sociological residue of our racist past that shapes the confusions of our current futures.

Racial Paranoia

Jackson (2008) discussed racial paranoia as a sociological phenomenon of the post-civil rights era in which “racial distrust” persists despite changes in societal and institutional structures that have legally prohibited racial discrimination. The

evolution of racism has made its workings harder to explicitly see in our social, public and governmental structures. Yet, persistent inequality and ubiquitous personal experience with dismissiveness, discrimination and deadly force upon people of color prove the perpetuation of racism in America.

The point isn't that race is less important than it was before. It's just...more paradoxical. We continue to commit to its social significance on many levels, but we seem to disavow that commitment at one and the same time. Race is real, but it isn't. It has value, but it doesn't. It explains social difference, but it couldn't possibly. This kind of racial doublethink drives us all crazy, makes us so suspicious of one another, and fans the flames of racial paranoia. Nothing is innocent, and one bumps into conspirators everywhere. (Jackson, 2008, p. 11)

Jackson asserts that Whites and all peoples of color in the racial spectrum experience racial paranoia, although from different historical contexts and lived experiences. At the same time, people have agency, and more and more youth see through the thin veneer of race baiting and are rejecting the old trappings of racial paranoia. Nevertheless, racial paranoia is an everyday phenomenon of the U.S. social fabric; and as such, the "instances of distrust are important because racial paranoia translates fear into social action" (Jackson, 2008, p. 16). Distrust of the other gives traction to racism and racial discrimination, operationalizing oppressions inherent in our institutional architecture.

We argue that racial paranoia is a socially constructed fear about Black and Brown people, and we take particular interest in how systemic racism leading to racial distrust has, in turn, contributed to the way capitalism has historically needed to marginalize and dehumanize youth of color in American society. We further contend that this internalized and irrational fear has been learned at home, reinforced in schools and the mainstream media and expressed in various ways. Finally, we state that racism has caused racially prejudiced individuals or groups to think, behave, and act in discriminatory and, at times, violent ways against youth of color.

In using the idea of racial paranoia, we consider Reed's (2013) challenge that "formulations that invoke metaphors of disease or original sin reify racism by disconnecting it from the discrete historical circumstances and social structures on which it is embedded, and treating it as an autonomous force" (p. 53). Indeed, while racial paranoia seems to be present, we do not want to make the mistake of arguing or implying that White supremacy is the result of a biological deficiency or genetic abnormality in individuals, but rather, is connected to the forever-developing reproduction of class formation (Reed, 2013).

So why use the phrase *racial paranoia* informing this article? Racial paranoia is used in the context of this article to underscore behavior and actions of especially White people holding deep racial prejudice against people of color, particularly youth of color. Specifically, in using this phrase, the goal here is to highlight the anxious and racist attitudes of White individuals toward youth of color. As will be explored throughout the essay, racial paranoia is linked to racist actions taken

by White individuals, as reinforced by social institutions that still reflect a White supremacist design. Racially prejudiced individuals tend to display anxiety and even paranoia when surrounded by or are forced to interact with people of color. We do not suggest a direct comparison of racist individuals with individuals who struggle with anxiety. Rather, we claim that internalized racism makes certain individuals, including well-intended teachers and administrators, react and behave in ways that suggest that they might have experienced racial anxiety and paranoia in presence of people of color. We further argue that showing erratic behavior toward people of color because one is supposedly feeling “unsafe” in their presence is a manifestation of racial paranoia rooted in internalized racism and White supremacist ideology.

Racial paranoia reflects the insidious nature of structural racism in our cultural knowledge and public institutions, especially through schools, colleges and universities that teach and reproduce this knowledge. It also reflects contradictions in our national character espousing freedom and equality, yet bigots continue to operate from oppressive ideologies of division and exploitation. In order to draw further conceptual parallels between racial paranoia and violent racist actions by racially prejudiced people, the following section draws from a well-publicized racially motivated murder case, the Trayvon Martin’s murder case.

Context

Trayvon Martin was walking through the neighborhood where Mr. Zimmerman lived when the latter decided to follow him and eventually shot him. According to what was recorded in the conversation between Trayvon and his girlfriend, Mr. Zimmerman followed and eventually confronted Trayvon. After a few minutes of exchange of words and physical encounter between the two, Zimmerman shot Trayvon. The Sanford police tried to cover up this murder for about a month, which led to the resignation of Sanford’s police chief, Bill Lee. Martin’s murder generated many protests across the U.S. and beyond, and called into question major institutions of the U.S. legal system, and the Sanford police in particular. Zimmerman was accused of Trayvon’s murder but was acquitted in July 2013. As soon as the verdict was announced, many protesters took the street to oppose the decision of the jury who acquitted Zimmerman. His acquittal is still a source of outcries in many communities, particularly in communities of color in the U.S. and abroad. Years later, people around the U.S. continue to talk about this murder, which, critics have argued has planted the seed for the Black Lives Matter movement. We argue that the murder of Trayvon is an example of racial paranoia in that Mr. Zimmerman murdered Trayvon as a result of fear of the *other* stemming from a White supremacist ideology that he apparently has espoused.

In critically reflecting on and analyzing the Trayvon Martin murder case, one must therefore ask the following questions: (1) Had Trayvon been a White boy of middle class background, would Mr. Zimmerman have been suspicious of him, let

alone follow him, provoke him, get into a fight with him, and finally shoot him with impunity?; and (2) would the decision of the jury have been different? The lack of substantive evidence to justify the acquittal of Zimmerman seems to indicate that the American justice system works mostly for people from affluent backgrounds.

Even though the focus of this article cannot address all the ideological and political underpinnings informing the case outcomes for Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman, this case effectively illustrates racist beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors rooted in institutionalized oppression. This is evident in the ways and the degree to which Zimmerman's action reflects a White supremacist mindset that misleads him, for example, to believe he could 'stand his ground' and murder Trayvon with impunity. Zimmerman was not born violent or racist. He became so through socialization. The sources of his racist mindset are multiple; he might have learned it from home, schools, family, friends, the mainstream media, or religious communities. Because of the distorted image about Blacks promoted in the media and beyond, Mr. Zimmerman might have felt paranoid about the presence of Trayvon, a young dark-skinned African American male. In his Blackness, Trayvon became instantly visible, and was suspected as a possible thief or troublemaker invading the safety of Mr. Zimmerman's neighborhood, and threatening the security of his worldview. Mr. Zimmerman succumbed to racial stereotypes and felt so threatened by the mere presence of Trayvon in his neighborhood that he decided to chase him down and shoot him.

In light of the analysis of this murder case, it is worth emphasizing that the inhumane portrait of young Black and Brown men in the media, in schools, and in the public arena has led to people's internalization of their dehumanization. To put it simple, because of the indoctrination of White supremacist ideology, Zimmerman did not seem to consider Trayvon a human being. In his mind, perhaps Trayvon was like an animal which could be killed without regard; yet even our pet animals get human consideration. We argue that irrespective of where Zimmerman's ideology originates, his attitude toward Blacks, and certainly his decision to kill Trayvon in particular, are unjustifiable.

The murder of young Black and Brown males and females by racially prejudiced people may differ depending on the context but the outcome is the same. For example, the murder of Trayvon Martin took place in a different context from that of Tamir Rice, the 12-year old African American boy who was shot dead at point blank range in 2014 by a White police officer while he was playing in a public park with a fake plastic gun, which the police claimed was mistaken for a real gun. Likewise, Trayvon's case differs from that of Renisha McBride, the 19-year old African American teenage girl who was shot by a White man in 2013 while seeking help after being involved in a car accident. Finally, Trayvon's murder case might have occurred differently than that of Mike Brown, the innocent 19-year old African American who was shot in 2014 by a White police officer and left dead for hours on the concrete before an ambulance came and took him to the hospital nearby.

They were all youth of color murdered by racially paranoid and racist individuals, acting upon White supremacist ideology that allows for apparent dehumanization of others. From countless cases of White police officers and civilians murdering young Black and Brown men and women, we conclude that their actions must have been influenced by internalized racial paranoia and stereotypes of the other.

Racial paranoia is circulatory and pervasive. For example, White police officers internalizing racial stereotypes and stigmas about Black or Brown people have used excessive force against and murdered them. Besides police officers, civilians of color have participated in the murder of other people of color they have feared. For example, Mr. Zimmerman, whose mother is a woman of color from Peru and his father a White American, and who lives in a predominantly White neighborhood, routinely called the police to report on Black people, particularly Black men, walking “suspiciously” in his neighborhood.

Ideologically dividing people of color among themselves through institutionalized fear, racial stereotypes, and stigmas has been a strategy used by those in control in society to maintain power. The creation and worldwide circulation of stereotypes, stigmas, fear, and paranoia about people of color has caused many people to behave in irrational ways resulting in discriminatory behaviors against others. These images are ideologically created and circulated by White dominant groups in order to maintain a status quo that has been responsible for the racial, educational, and socio-economic ghettoization of Black and Brown people (Kozol, 2012). The murder cases of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Renisha McBride, and Mike Brown are exemplary ways in which White supremacist ideology has led individuals to commit egregious and cruel actions against youth of color. Racial violence against historically marginalized people is a manifestation of racial paranoia rooted in the internalization of fear through White supremacist ideology.

Spreading fear and racial stereotypes about people of color, particularly Black youth, through the media has been part of the White nationalist racist project. In recent and current history of this country, projecting fear about the physical appearance, behavior, and actions of young Black men and women and other racially marginalized groups has been part of the strategy of, for example, Trump’s so-called alt-right (i.e., neo-fascist) wing of the capitalist-class political establishment (Alexander, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Malott, 2018). Such strategy has led to both invisibility and visibility of people of color, particularly youth of color. Depending on the nature of the convergent interests, such as the Democratic branch of the capitalist establishment, the symbolic representation of certain people of color in the media can be done through a positive light, like in the case of former president Barack Obama, who was supported by both White liberal and conservative political pundits (Orelus, 2015).

A critical race lens on this example is telling, as even former Vice President Joe Biden, then a Democratic Senator, was widely criticized for labeling then presidential candidate Barack Obama “the clean and smart African American,” which

he argued was taken out of context. Biden has a long history of supporting racist legislation opposing desegregation and supporting the crime bills responsible for mass incarceration (Puryear, 2013). Self-serving convergent interests are often the driving motor and underlying factors influencing certain representations of individuals and groups of color in the media (Bell, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

Historically marginalized groups, particularly Black and Brown people, have been represented in negative ways in the mainstream media, movies and popular culture, often leading to fear and stereotypes inculcated in the minds of people, particularly Whites. Fear circulated and promoted in such media about Black and Brown bodies has also caused people of color to fear other people of color (David, 2013; David & Derthick, 2014). Specifically, racially marginalized groups have internalized fear of other racially marginalized groups, and they experience and act on such fear when they see other people of color moving into their neighborhood, or simply walking through. Internalized racism impacts all people, although not in the same ways.

Racial Paranoia in Fearing Youth of Color

Racial paranoia comes to the surface through the fear of Blackness, or Black fear, which might sound like a cliché to those embodied in the “right” skin. However, analyzed through a critical race theory lens, Black fear reveals White racial paranoia often leading to racial discrimination against Blacks primarily and people of color in general, racial segregation and economic ghettoization shaping many communities in the U.S. and beyond (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Kozol, 2012). Indeed, Black fear brings to the fore racial inequality ravaging American society. What is more, Black fear suggests how deeply paranoid and fearful Whites can be about the presence of Black people, including Black boys and girls. Because of learned racial paranoia, inculcated in their minds, many people have experienced and expressed fear living in the same neighborhood as Black or Brown people. They consequently tend to *flee* as soon as some Black and Brown people start moving in—a White flight that maintains societal segregation. The value of houses located in such neighborhood usually decreases, for in the imagination of the general public, White people symbolize safety and capital, whereas Black or Brown bodies represent danger and poverty as reflected in the well-documented history of housing and financial policies of red lining (Natalie, 2017; Rothstein, 2018).

In specific terms, through different mediums and mechanisms, Black and Brown people have been portrayed as dangerous and uncivilized. Consequently, neighborhoods inhabited by people of color are usually seen and judged based on these racial stigmas and stereotypes. In addition, as a result of Black fear leading to the gradual decrease of the value of houses predominantly occupied by people of color, many Black and Brown families have lost equity value on their houses, and the ability to borrow, which is a principal resource for improving life circumstances

(Turner, Popkin, & Rawlings, 2008). As less federal and state funding goes to their neighborhoods, there is also a resulting decreasing quality of school systems and social services there. Moreover, because of a lack of resources and genuine interests invested in the future of these neighborhoods, they gradually become impoverished, deteriorated, and economically devalued (Rothstein, 2018). In short, Black fear, a manifested form of racial paranoia entrenched in a White capitalist and supremacist strategy aimed to divide, dominate and control, has affected people of color psychologically, educationally and socio-economically.

Racist individuals are paranoid and anxious when they see a large, or a relatively large, number of people of color invading what they perceive to be “their place.” They feel anxious and paranoid because of the racial myths rooted in stereotypes learned about people of color, particularly Blacks, at various points throughout their life span. Seeing a group of Blacks moving in their neighborhood triggers their paranoia, causes them discomfort, and might even make them feel unsafe. Racist individuals tend to feel apprehensive and uncomfortable when surrounded by people of color whose presence might cause them fear and paranoia.

Paranoid, racist individuals often assume that Black people are angry individuals ready to hurt White people, even though this is not the case. Therefore, they (the Blacks) must be feared, avoided, or eliminated. Escobar (2012) commented on evidence of diagnostic bias of psychosis for Blacks by White psychiatrists as possibly based on the notion that the person is “strange, undesirable, bizarre, aggressive, and dangerous” (p. 847). Many police officers, especially racially prejudiced police officers, seem to have suffered some form of racial hallucination as a result of learned White supremacist ideology. In other words, these officers might have been influenced by racial hallucination, as they have routinely racially profiled and brutalized Blacks and other racially marginalized groups.

Because of racial hallucination and paranoia caused by their deep-seated learned racial stereotypes and prejudice, these officers might have feared Black and Brown people. Moreover, their racial hallucination and paranoia might have caused them to unfairly stop and search them acting on the assumption they might carry drugs or guns with them. Countless brutality and murder cases of people of color by police officers in major cities in the U.S., such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami, are prime examples. Recall the video of Tamir Rice’s death showing police officers pulling their cruiser up immediately in front of him, jumping to dismount and fire fatal shots in seconds, without hesitation or warning, as if hallucinating imminent danger, rather than a young boy playing innocently in a park gazebo.

It is not only White adults who might have been victims of racial hallucination and paranoia due to the internalization of racial prejudice rooted in White supremacist ideology. Specifically, White children, who have been exposed to internalized racist and supremacist ideology growing up, might have, too, experienced psychological hallucinations, particularly those watching racially biased and stereotyped videos and Hollywood movies. Blacks and other marginalized groups are often portrayed

negatively in these videos and movies. If not portrayed as thieves, they are misrepresented as murderers who kill people, including innocent people, with impunity. They are also portrayed as violent thugs who in the end get killed. Their personality and character are often presented as erratic and violent. In short, people of color have been dehumanized in racially stereotyped videos and Hollywood movies.

We are reminded of Frantz Fanon's experience with a White boy in the street in Paris, France. Apparently, a White boy was with his mother, and suddenly got scared as he saw Fanon. Shivered, this White boy held to his mother tight asking her if Fanon was going to harm him. Pointing to Fanon, the White boy told his mother: "Look at the nigger!...Mama, a Negro!... Hell, he's getting mad...." (1967, p. 3). The mother responded saying, "Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we..." (p. 113). Fanon narrated the experience in the following terms:

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that White winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little White boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up. (p. 113-114)

Fanon's experience with a seemingly innocent White boy illuminates the ways and the degree to which racial paranoia has caused hallucinations in the mind of White children about Black men. Racial paranoia deeply embedded in White supremacist ideology has caused many Whites to prejudge, stereotype, and stigmatize people of color, including immigrants of color, as the next section illuminates.

Fearing the Caravan: Racial Paranoia and Immigrant Youth of Color

Issues concerning immigrants, including immigrant youth of color, have been part of educational and political debates in the U.S., and continue currently with national debates around "the caravan" of hundreds of Central American migrants who have journey north and tried to enter the U.S. Throughout history people have been defying geographical borders to move back and forth from one land to another, fleeing hardship and seeking opportunity. Immigrants cross borders immigrating to other countries for various reasons. Immigrants usually cross borders to enter lands where they hope to find a better life than the one they had in their country of origin, especially immigrant youth seeking education and hopes for a future (Hafner, 2013). While some cross borders to immigrate to another land because of poverty, others do so to avoid for family, political, or religious reasons. This is certainly the claims made by many who journey to the U.S. border to voluntarily seek asylum, including thousands of youth who now

have found themselves stuck in mass detention centers, separated from family and the hope of reunification.

Occupation and colonization of other countries are among the underlying factors leading to immigration and transnational migration of people across the globe. Specifically, insatiable economic and geo-political interests of Western powerful countries to expand their economic and political power have led to transnational border crossing and immigration (Chomsky, 2007, 2014). Western countries, such as the U.S. and France, have occupied, colonized, and neo-colonized less powerful countries, like Haiti, to expand their economic and political power (Chomsky, 2014; Zinn, 2003).

Being restrained from crossing borders to enter other lands is relatively a new phenomenon in world history. Chomsky (2007) observes, “People have been moving around the earth ever since they stood upright millions of years ago. National borders, and attempts to govern the flows of migration from above, are only a few hundred years old” (p. 188). He goes on to state,

Colonization sets the stage for later migration. This is why Juan Gonzalez called his book on Latinos in the United States *The Harvest of Empire*—because empires spawn migration. Colonization creates cultural ties. It brings people from the metropolis (the colonizing power) to the colony and places them in positions of power while destroying local institutions. (p. 123)

Similarly, in *Occupied America* (2011), Rodolfo Acuña explains the socio-economic and political motives causing the Mexican-American war where the U.S. government forcibly seized many Mexican territories. Acuña goes on to put into historical context the socioeconomic and political factors that have pushed many Mexicans to cross the border separating Mexico and the U.S. to reenter the lands that once belonged to them.

Since this war, the presence of many Mexicans in the U.S. has drastically increased, despite daunting physical and topographical borders separating the two countries. Specifically, reconfigured colonial policies disguised through socio-economic neoliberal policies have led many people of color to immigrate to the west. For example, the neocolonial and neoliberal exploitation of Mexico through the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has led many Mexican farmers to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in search of a better life, but have been treated as second-class citizens despite their hard work and contributions. Because of structural fear of brown and black bodies, Mexicans have been treated as aliens, as the wretched of the earth (Fanon, 1965), while many have been picking strawberries and tomatoes for survival and the rich have been maximizing their profits.

Lately under the Trump administration, fear about immigrants has retaken center stage of American political debates on human right issues. Under President Barack Obama the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program began in 2012 and was designed to allow undocumented immigrant youth, predominantly youth of color with no criminal record, to avoid deportation and go to school or work

in the U.S. However, in 2017 President Trump rescinded the program, which now threatens deportation for many DACA applicants that have grown up as Americans, especially those who immigrated to the U.S. with their parents as young children. With the anti-immigrant political discourse of the American billionaire President Donald Trump, various and vacillating positions have been taken about this issue. Some positions seem to have been politically, racially, and religiously motivated, such as his racist rhetoric of ‘shithole countries’ full of ‘rapists,’ ‘thieves,’ and ‘animals.’ Yet other actions have been socio-economically driven, such as the granting of temporary H2-B worker visas for seasonal workers laboring in the Trump Mar-a-Lago golf resort where the President frequently spends his weekends.

Meanwhile, immigrant youth of color, particularly Mexicans and Muslims, have been represented in the media in a frantic manner. Racist and xenophobic messages circulated through the mass mainstream media about these immigrants and other immigrants of color might have created deep paranoia in the mind of many White nationalists who have labeled Mexicans and Muslims as rapists and terrorists, respectively, seemingly following the political rhetoric of the current President Trump. In fact, because of widespread *fear of the other* in the mainstream media and public sphere, immigrants of color, including youth of color crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, have been chased and murdered by White nationalists, including border patrol agents across the U.S. Many self-proclaimed “real patriots” have volunteered to patrol the border, so that so-called illegal aliens do not invade their land, shuffle drugs in, hurt their families, and destabilize their country. Recent public protests in the U.S. against Sharia law represent a surfacing public paranoia that extremist Muslim jihad is threatening Western values and civilization, a fear-mongering claim that President Trump has continued in his second and third years in office.

Influenced by the *fear of the other*, racist and xenophobic Americans have accused immigrants of color, particularly Mexican immigrants, of increasing the crime rate in the U.S. (Chomsky, 2014). Moreover, they have blamed immigrants of color for taking advantage of the health care and educational system. Undocumented immigrants, including immigrant youth of color protected under the DACA program, have been accused of illegally obtaining licenses, going to school for free, and sucking the resources of the country (Chomsky, 2007). The 2014 immigration crisis surrounding tens of thousands of mostly unaccompanied Central American youth fleeing gang violence and civil unrest was another example of racial paranoia as legal discourse around refugee status left many of these immigrant youth in detention and deportation proceedings, some reportedly with no legal representation. Finally, racial paranoia about immigrants of color increases through the mainstream media that proliferate the dominant discourses of fear. Pundits, like former Fox News Host Bill O’Reilly; former TV commentator Pat Buchanan; and right-wing radio host Rush Limbaugh, have promoted racial paranoia throughout the White mainstream media and beyond. They have spread racist, xenophobic, and hate

messages about immigrants of color, which deeply impacts immigrant youth of color in their schools and communities, where talk and treatment about these youth can adopt a dehumanizing manner. For these media pundits, immigrants of color, including the DREAMers protected by the DACA program, must be taken out of the country before they infest it with drugs and commit horrendous crimes.

Conclusion

As analyzed throughout this article, racial paranoia is pervasive and influences the perception, attitude, behavior, and actions of people, particularly individual prejudiced Whites, about people of color, including youth of color. In addition, racial paranoia shapes many institutions, like schools and the mainstream media and impacts the lives of youth of color. It provides a means of understanding the workings of racist behaviors and ideologies as they operate in daily living in mostly very subtle, gradual ways that allow White supremacist ideologies to become normalized to people of all colors. Exploring racial paranoia in its inherent complexity and contradiction—both semantically and in application—is potent in this historical moment. We must point out racial paranoia's effects on the national psychology of our current identity. While people of all colors must confront how racism is internalized in their own surroundings, experiences and worldview, we must expect our democratic institutions to also transform through growing pains of changing societal values and culture. Racial paranoia has flourished in the two recent decades post-9/11 with expanding global wars on terror, gross inequities of global racism in the trends of police brutality and state violence, and neo-liberal renovations of democratic institutions shaped by money and influence. These trends in social and political contexts represent some of the racist tensions nagging our national history and culture and White supremacist ideology, which shapes the divides and divisions of our present. In the context of a resurgent right-wing, protectionist politics that continue to shape the Trump presidency, we the people must consider our own racial paranoia that may cloud our shared resistance to the ugly urges of discriminatory and authoritarian leadership. Understanding racial paranoia as an articulation of intersectional oppressions demands an intentional and honest rethinking of how our unrecognized immigrant history shapes our social institutions in ways that demonize communities of color, particularly youth of color, whose wide hues of beauty hold the future of our nation.

References

- Acuña, R. (2011). *Occupied America: A history of Chicanos*. Boston, MA: Longman.
- Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Bell, D. (1993). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Capps, R., Meissner, D., Ruiz Soto, A.G., Bolter, J., & Pierce, S. (2019). *From control to crisis: Changing trends and policies reshaping U. S. -Mexico border enforcement*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org>.
- Chang, H. (1985). Toward a Marxist theory of racism: Two essays. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 17(3), 34-45.
- Chomsky, A. (2007). *They take our jobs!: And 20 other myths about immigration*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Chomsky, A. (2014). *Undocumented: How immigration became illegal*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- David, E. J. R. (Ed.). (2013). *Internalized oppression: The psychology of marginalized groups*. New York, NY: Springer.
- David, E. J. R., & Derthick, A. O. (2014). What is internalized oppression, and so what. In E.J.R David and A.O Derthick) *Internalized oppression: The psychology of marginalized groups*, (pp. 1-30). New York, NY.
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2013). *Critical race theory (Third Edition): An introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, White masks*: New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). (2017). *Hate crime statistics*. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov>.
- Escobar, J.I. (2012). Diagnostic bias: Racial and cultural issues. *Psychiatric Services* (63)9, 847.
- Giroux, H. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. New York, NY: Haymarket Books.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London, UK: International Publishers.
- Hafner, A. H. (2013). Sampling an inner dj with hip hop hopes: (Re)writing immigrant identities for English language learners in classroom third spaces. *Radical Teacher*, 97 (Fall).
- Jackson, J. (2008). *Racial paranoia: The unintended consequences of political correctness*. New York, NY: Civitas Books.
- Kozol, J. (2012). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.
- Malott, C. (2019a). Capitalism, crisis, and educational struggle in the postdigital. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 1-20.
- Malott, C. (2019b). Reorienting the history of education toward the many. In D. Ford (Ed.). *Keywords in radical philosophy and education: Common concepts for contemporary movements* (pp. 226-241). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Brill/Sense.
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2018). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (7th Edition). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Orelus, P. W. (2015). *Race, power, and the Obama Legacy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Puryear, E. (2013). *Shackled and chained: Mass incarceration in capitalist America*. San Francisco, CA: Liberation Media.
- Quilantan, B., & Cohen, D. (2019, July 14). Trump tells Dem congresswomen: Go back where you came from. *Politico*. Downloaded from <https://www.politico.com>.
- Reed, A. (2013). Marx, race, and neoliberalism. *New Labor Forum*, 22(1), 49-57.
- Rothstein, R. (2018). *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America*. New York, NY: Liveright.
- Shear, M. D., & Nixon, R. (2017). New Trump deportation rules allow far more expulsions. *New York Times*. Downloaded from: <https://www.nytimes.com>

- Taylor, E, Gilborn, D. & Ladson-Billings, G (Eds.) (2015). *Foundations of critical race theory in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Turner, M., Popkin, S. & Rawlings, L. (2008). *Public housing and the legacy of segregation*. Maryland, NC: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Zinn, H. (2015). *A people's history of the United States*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.