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REEL DIALOGUES: USING FILM TO DISCUSS RACE AND WHITENESS WITH TEACHERS

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REEL DIALOGUES: USING FILM TO DISCUSS RACE AND WHITENESS WITH TEACHERS

By

Joseph E. Flynn, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

REEL DIALOGUES: USING FILM TO DISCUSS RACE AND WHITENESS WITH TEACHERS

By

Joseph E. Flynn, Jr.

This dissertation is a qualitative inquiry into a professional development activity for secondary school teachers that attempted to create a space in which they could mount conversations about race and Whiteness. As part of a larger professional development plan for a Midwestern suburban high school with a predominantly White staff and student body, this study examines the use of film as a means of fostering conversations about race with a specific focus on how the participants did and did not talk about Whiteness. Participants were involved in a film series that included *Crash* (2005), *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993), *and Whiteboyz* (1999) in which they were asked to screen the films in order to specifically engage the notion of race. The primary questions this research seeks to explore are: First, as a pedagogical tool for professional development around diversity issues, in what ways do educational professionals talk with one another about race, in the context of viewing and discussing films? Second, how do elements and aspects of Whiteness enter conversations about race? And finally, how can teacher educators use film (and other visual media) more effectively to engage the often-difficult issue of race?

Dedicated to

Gena and Jacob,

My love and my boy…

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before I began this process, I had a number of assumptions about the writing of a dissertation. The greatest assumption was that writing a dissertation (or any major document for that matter) is an isolated activity. When I began graduate school my ideas about *doing* a dissertation were wholly naïve. I had romanticized visions of my favorite writers (Hunter Thompson, J.D. Salinger, James Baldwin, etc...), heads hung over old rickety typewriters in smoky rooms with ribbons of light slicing across the scene, tirelessly pounding out line after line, word by word. Then I woke up to the reality of all the people that are necessary to successfully mount the planning, execution, and reporting of a line of inquiry. As this process has unfolded I began to think about the people across my life that have had a profound impact on my goals and ideas. Of course there are countless numbers of people who have influenced me, but the following folks have been especially powerful.

I must first give honor to my God, through whom all things are possible, and along with that, respect to the folks at Friendship Baptist Church in Peoria, Illinois, specifically the Reverend Willie Williams, Sr. and Reverend Billy Taylor. Both of them planted the seed that I had the mind and ability to achieve this milestone since I was a young boy and their encouragement has never left.

I extend a deep amount of gratitude to the people that have had a profound influence in shaping my ideas and were supportive of my growth as a scholar and thinker; this is no specific order: David Labaree, Suzanne Wilson,

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Thanks to the staff and students at Northside High School (a pseudonym). You all really challenged me to think more deeply about my ideas and provided me a space to do this research. This was truly one of the best environments I have ever had the opportunity to be a part of. Thank you all.

I must give a special shout out to my sistas and brothas in the struggle: Tambra Jackson, David Kirkland, Ted Hall, and Alexa Edwards. You all have been so encouraging and inspirational to me. In your own time and in your own ways you helped me believe that I could do this and that I did have important things to say. Thank you for your advice and support over the years, and I can't

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wait until we are all in New York celebrating at David's, as Doctors of Teacher Education. Good lookin'.

Thanks to my Chicago family: Mark and Lin VanOpstal, Lori and Wayne Landry, and Angelica and Eric Reipe. While we lived in Michigan you all were a wonderful beacon of refuge and escape. You all have also been greatly supportive of Gena, Jacob, and me. I love you all and thank you.

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I must make special acknowledge to some "newer" friends who without whom I would not have been able to make it to this point. First, I must give up much respect to David, Doreen, Dakota, Avalon (Av), and Troy Lustick. The Lustick family allowed me into their home and family without restriction and offered me a space of company, support, and intellectual challenge. They all were instrumental during a period of my life in which I was navigating a number of new challenges intellectually and personally. Thanks for all the impromptu dinners, parties, and fellowship. Specifically to David, thanks, my dear friend, for all the guidance and inspiration you have given me. You are truly a gem and kindred spirit. Equally I must give it up to Les Burns. Even though we met in

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2002, I fell like we have known each other since my days in undergrad. Many of the conversations we have had over the years have gone directly into this dissertation. He helped me figure out how to put my ideas and thoughts into words. He also helped me figure out when I was just talking out of my... Well, let me just say he and David were instrumental in helping me build a foundation in which my passion for film and popular culture could parlay into strong scholarly work. Without their guidance this piece would not be what it is. Thanks fellas.

Hopefully, every person has a group of friends that holds them up and makes them feel unconditionally loved and accepted. My friends are not like my family; they are my family. Ronnie Herman, Lance Hochmuth, Chris Wilkinson, and Chris Legan, they all in their own ways have had a deep impact on who I am as a person and I feel wholly blessed to have friends like them for nearly twenty years. Thanks brothers for your respect, support, and love. I love you all.

Now for the deep ones...

To my dissertation committee: Chris Wheeler, Dorinda Carter, and Susan Florio-Ruane. The advice and guidance you all have provided over the years has been invaluable. You all have done so much to make me a better writer, thinker, and scholar and my debt to you cannot be measured. I must also say to Chris, that the time I spent under your guidance as an instructor was fundamental to how I understand teaching and social justice. Thanks for providing me the space to try all kinds of crazy ideas, many of which served as the springboard for this research. And to Susan for helping me understand more deeply how media and discourse are invaluable tools for teaching and research.

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Our conversations have always been interesting, provocative, and memorable. Thank you. Thanks to all of you.

To my dissertation director, Lynn Fendler... Lynn, over the years you have been a great mentor and friend. In those times I felt inadequate and lost you were able to find the right combination of words and tone that gave me courage to find the scholar within and to say what I needed to say. You challenged me, *seriously* challenged me, to believe both in myself and in my ideas. I think the notion of safety in education is both hackneyed and rather privileged, but coming into your office to talk about my work (and sometimes my life) was in fact a safe space. You have provided me with a model of openness and encouragement that I will take with me forever. Yes, you were right that I could have done this without you, but as I said, this work could not be what it is without you. Thank you Lynn, I am forever in the deepest gratitude.

My sister Lisa was the first scholar I knew. When we were kids, while I was making Cs and Ds, she was making As. She is also a teacher and was in fact the first one that planted the idea of being a teacher in my head (when I was finishing a bachelor's degree in philosophy and realized there were no jobs for the village idiot). Thanks Lisa for all your love over the years.

To my little brother Julius, who isn't so little anymore... Wow dog... I'm finally here son. Your respect for me over the years has been staggeringly beautiful. I always knew how much you respected and loved me by the way all, *all*, your friends have been deferential and admiring of me. It was a testament to the ways in which you hyped a brotha. I always wanted to be the ultimate role

model for you and I hope I always succeed, even though I know sometimes I fail. But at the same time, over the years and in many ways you have been a role model for me too. The love between two brothers is like no other and nothing could ever disturb the love I have for you. Thanks Ju for being one of my greatest fans and greatest inspirations. Whether you're playing safety at Dorsey High or talking about your limousine, I love you Little Brother, 'til the end.

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To Josh... Sacrifice is always difficult. I pray this work makes you proud and understanding of who I am. Thank you for your presence and inspiration.

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To Jacob... When you are of age, I want you to know that at the end of every late night writing session, I sat in your room for a while and watched you sleep. That gave me the fuel to keep going. Several times throughout this process I wanted to quit. But, when I held you and looked into your eyes when you called me "dadee," it made me smile and resolved to see this through. You are a gift from God and I love you Son.

Finally, to my beautiful wife Gena, the love of my life... Of all the people I have named, she has been the one that navigated this entire process with me. She sacrificed her time, ambitions, and oftentimes patience, to provide me the space I needed to do this work. But my gratitude goes far beyond that. From the moment I first saw here, in my first class at DePaul University in 1996, I immediately admired and respected her. I found myself always wanting to be near her. Over the years those feelings have intensified. She challenges me in ways no one else has or could, and her intelligence, talents, and diligence are sublime. I thank her for choosing me, and as I told her on our wedding day, she always makes me want to be a better man. Simply, I could have not done this work without her. Thanks G. I love you madly, deeply, truly.

And now, let's enjoy the show...

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKSTORY: AN INVESTIGATION OF RACE AND WHITENESS IN CONTEXT

Mise-en-scene

Before fully launching into exactly what this dissertation seeks to explore, please allow me the space to lay out the story behind why this dissertation is being written. This was the most challenging thing to ever come before me. I have to admit, although I was beyond hyped being asked, the fact of the matter is I was nervous, unsure, skeptical. All that stuff I have talked over the past few years is now going to be put to the test. Did I really know as much as I thought I did? Or are my fears of being an academic and intellectual hack really the stuff my nightmares are made of? I proudly proclaim myself as a "diversity person." I have chosen the path of teacher education and within that milieu I seek to help people recognize, consider, and understand race, the hottest of hot topics in the American cultural landscape. I want teachers to stand on the vanguard of race relations in this country. Not that they are not already; of course they are.

So what is this project about? Like all good stories it is a journey of sorts. Across the year in which I conducted this research I found myself deeply challenged along all the fronts that orchestrate my identity. Although I have been a teacher educator engaged in issues of race and diversity for roughly a decade, I never really felt like a professional until Dean Patti, principal of the high school in which this story is set, contacted me at the suggestion of an area administrator

I had worked with before.[1] I was briefly told that issues with a cadre of African American students had taken a bad and tense turn, and she and the staff were at wit's end. She asked if I could come in for a chat to see what kinds of ideas I had that could help. Honestly I was a little taken aback, and I proceeded to have that talk with myself. Although I knew I possessed a great deal of knowledge and ideas about issues of diversity, I could not help but question: what did I have to say that could actually help someone in a real, breathing context? This is a flesh and blood principal with flesh and blood teachers and students trying to negotiate as a school what I know to be one of the single most difficult social issues in the United States—race. I have been called upon as a "consultant" a couple of times before, but those were small, contained activities that were intended to provide a "diversity experience" for a small office community and summer student workshops. Those experiences were marked with icebreakers and "fun" activities that usually were confined to an hour and a half or three hours, an expected arrangement when the words "professional development" are uttered. More importantly, although those experiences were on university campuses they were with offices seeking to engage office politics and expected habits of mind for groups of less than twenty. I had not been dealing predominantly with issues that were going to affect a classroom, curriculum, or entire school community. No. The call from Dean Patti was my initiation into a new realm of the professional teacher educator.

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[1] All names and location of study are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

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For the past decade I have been in classrooms with preservice and practicing teachers, instructing and dialoguing about the delicate relationship between theory and practice, specifically in relation to how culture and power impact the learning and experiences of various groups. I had also worked with teaching interns in the field as a supervisor of field experiences, helping neophytes understand the daily rigors of teaching and helping them gain and use what Shulman (1987) calls pedagogical content knowledge—the essential knowledge and skills teachers know and employ that is fundamentally unique to the subject, classroom, and teaching experience. But this task was going to be different. I slowly began to realize that although I had a fabulous education, there was so much more I just had to learn by finding and engaging in those teachable moments wherein theories or frameworks are seen and created. But to be honest and a little funny, I got a little "bugged" about the whole thing. What was I going to tell them, how, and why? Would my message make any sense? Would I be embraced? And what am I supposed to learn by doing this?

At this first meeting in late February of 2005, Dean Patti and I were joined by a teacher, Nora, and two students that represented the Black Student Union, the group of Black students that ignited the proverbial powder keg. Since I did not have human subjects clearance I did not record the conversation, my representation of the factors that brought my presence are culled from my notes of the meeting.

The need for my presence, as most issues concerning race, was rooted in contention. During the fall semester of the 2004-2005 school year, a group of

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Black students grew increasingly frustrated with being singled out for being "too loud" in the hallways. Although some of the students engaged in "undesirable behavior" they felt that teachers were more willing to engage and even allow "undesirable behavior" from White students. Additionally, students began to voice concern over expectations in the classroom. In fact, as I began to explore the school and collect data for my professional development strategy, the most Black students I noticed in a class was four out of twenty-five. By and large, though, typically a class had one or two Black students, a common trend in many high schools across the country.

One day during a free period for a handful of students, Marci, a part-time teacher and administrator, sat with the students, who were all members of the fledgling Black Student Union. She offered them the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences at NHS. As the students began to voice their concerns about isolation, silencing, and cultural misunderstanding, Marci grew increasingly surprised and dismayed with what the students were expressing. She was alarmed to know that the students shared feelings of disregard and invisibility in their classes; they knew they weren't White. Marci, a genuinely caring person, and despite her promise of confidentiality, brought up the conversation in a smaller teacher's meeting.

Word spread quickly and met with a spectrum of emotions from staff members and a brief feeling of betrayal for some of the students. Some teachers immediately felt there was a need to do something. Others felt the criticisms were misplaced and quickly repackaged the students' message as typical

adolescent angst, searching for an identity, or something to "bitch" about. Undeterred, a group of teachers and Dean Patti found it fundamentally important, given the history and over-arching pedagogical perspectives the school attempts to further, to engage the issue and develop a dialogue about what it is like to be Black at a school that is predominantly White.

It was decided to extend an invitation to the Black Student Union and give them the opportunity to talk to the staff with the goal of teachers gaining a clearer understanding of the perspectives and experiences of Black students. There are approximately 450 students enrolled in the school and 33 of them are Black students. Of those 33, the BSU had a membership of 17, a small number but a slight majority nonetheless. Apparently this kind of engagement had never happened before. Moreover, many of the teachers had been teaching in the school for more than ten years and no one remembered this level of dissent being voiced by "minority students." Most of the teachers had been under the impression that things were fine.

It was decided that on the next faculty in-service day, December 1, the students would have a three-hour block of time in which they could express their histories and experiences and ask questions of the teachers. Nora, a veteran social studies teacher, would serve as moderator. During the three-hour meeting, the students were put into a "fishbowl" format and they proceeded to tell the staff about their experiences of being Black at a predominantly White school with all White teachers that claimed to be dedicated to diversity. (Upon hearing this story I was struck by the "centering" of the Black students, but questioned if

this format would decenter discourses of Whiteness in the school's social structure and pedagogy). The students then drew questions out of a bowl for teachers to answer. The questions, according to many of the teachers, were loaded and meant to force teachers into admitting that there is a race problem in the school. The three hours ended with finger pointing, dissension, and anger.

Of the day, Nora shamefully but playfully comments, "It was one of the worse days of my teaching career." I have to give it to Nora. She truly hurt for the day ending like it did. As she put it, "I really did try but it just got away." It was clear that there were allies, those that felt the urgency of privilege and marginalization. Nora was the first that showed me that.

Some teachers informed Dean Patti that the conversation was hard but refreshing and they appreciated the students' candor. However, the majority of the staff did not see it that way. The majority felt as though they were being put through an unnecessary crucible. One teacher commented off the record, "It felt like being stabbed in the back." Calls to the teachers' union were made. The staff became divided. In the days, weeks, and months that ensued, the growing uneasiness germinated to a point wherein many of the teachers felt uncomfortable with engaging Black students on any level, fearing that regardless of what they did, they would be called racists. On the other hand, the students felt the teachers were being disingenuous and "fake," engaging the students out of feigned obligation rather than "real" interest and concern.

In fact, this year the Superintendent of Instruction instituted a district-wide mandate to address the achievement gap for students of color, and the teachers

had a number of staff-development days with district-hired consultants. Before I conducted a follow-up discussion between the staff and BSU, there were two district-wide staff-development days. The first was with a San Francisco based diversity consultant, Glenn Eric Singleton. Singleton's (2005) expertise is getting districts to open conversations about race, specifically regarding the role of Whiteness and White privilege and how the concepts shape educational contexts, in order to promote equitable practices. Although this was another "big district meeting," teachers enjoyed the session, revealing that Singleton's expertise and eloquence was refreshing and engaging, and it was also believed that his connection of theoretical concepts with his personal story was effective.

The next district-wide staff-development day came in March. The staff spent the day with a local university professor that works in diversity issues. Quite simply the day achieved mixed results and feelings. Using her own history as a student who integrated her own local school district, the professor/consultant spoke about the differences between Black and White student experiences and focused on the notions of isolation, cultural misunderstanding, racism, and privilege. Although her ideas were theoretically sound the general feeling about the time spent was not favorable. Teachers saw a great deal of worth in the information presented and found the story both enlightening and engaging, but there was considerable disdain because the staff did not feel as though their unique situation was addressed. There was dismay at the boilerplate design of the presentation and that she spent so much time talking about her own story that she left little time in her presentation to explore

the theoretical information she had in her PowerPoint to help explain her story and the stories of their non-White students. Ultimately though, the teachers found their greatest disapproval in the fact that the consultant did not take the opportunity to get to know and understand their environment before beginning to "correct" their behaviors and perspectives during an after-lunch session held at NHS with the professor/consultant and the staff. The notion of privilege was "shoved down their throats," as one teacher voiced. This group of teachers did not feel that they are ignorant or uncaring about diversity issues, and they walked away from the session feeling dishonored and disrespected. Herein rest my first strategy for being a consultant, give the people you are supposed to help time to trust you, which includes taking time to get a feel for the good work they do and judge them on the character and spirit of the environment they work hard to create.

The first meeting I conducted with the entire staff and a collection of African American students occurred May 11. In the days preceding the event, students and teachers were asked to write brief, anonymous essays summarizing their feelings. The general ideas gleaned from the students' essays revealed an experience of isolation, discomfort, lack of support, mistrust, and frustration. One student's declaration, that the quality of experience for many students of color at NHS leaves her dreading coming to school for the next three years, was a strong and unexpected criticism, at least when racial experience is attached to the reasoning. Another student's insistence that the students' goal for the meeting was not to indict teachers as racist but to display to teachers the

reality of their experiences and feelings exposed a pride in the school that is being hampered by feelings of isolation, profiling, and lack of relationships with staff members. By the same token, a third student's declaration of constantly dealing with the difficult burden of race, as a response to one teacher's feeling of being "beaten up" by all these diversity meetings, helps to show the oftentimes unbearable weight of the fact of Blackness in a largely White school, city, country.

On the other hand, teachers seemed more encouraging of putting the responsibility of communication and expectations onto the students. The main assumption the staff seemed to make was that by expressing the notion that students were permitted and free to express their concerns then issues rooted in race, culture, and power could be more easily assuaged.[2]

The staff displayed a willingness to listen with both ears and heart. After all, it is rare to see an entire staff welcome students to not only share the quality of their experiences but also offer direct criticism of instructional practices and attitudes. More importantly, there was clearly a yearning for answers on how to help the students feel better about being at NHS. Many teachers took significant risks. The first teacher to speak revealed to the students that teaching is a constant learning experience and the teachers in this building, by and large, are committed to growing and helping create a spectacular learning environment. But students also need to help inform teachers of their problems. One cannot change what one does not know. Another teacher offered that she may be

[2] For representative examples of essays submitted by students and teachers please see Appendix A.

contributing to the students' issues but is not aware of it, urging students to let her know in the hopes of bettering her practice and community. Another teacher openly acknowledged the notion that he is a racist in the sense that he knows he harbors prejudices and that he does benefit from racist practices, but he is always trying to correct that phenomenon. It was a marvelous turn in the dialogue, but it did add to the fire growing inside the Black students, and many of the kids began to show agitation and confusion.

A growing body of literature suggests that Whites Americans must accept their complicity and benefits from institutional racist practices (Katz, 2003; Wise, 2005; Jensen, 2005), and I feel the last teacher mentioned (and others in more subtle ways) made statements in that effort. But, this act opened the door further by declaring the desire to learn more and is in the process of learning. Similarly, Nora, the facilitator of the first staff/student session and a more seasoned teacher testified to her own transformation. She further suggested that it is not easy to admit certain issues related to one's own Whiteness, but necessary for creating more fruitful environments for all members in the school community.

Other than teachers who have children that attend the school, there was only one parent in attendance. That parent proceeded to turn the dialogue to a different, more hostile direction. Speaking from her own experience as "one of the only" in school, work, and teaching she exposed our racial "default mode," or the knee-jerk reaction of labeling actions as racist. She urged the students to not only reach out to teachers but also to defer labeling events as racist because they do not always have all the information to make such a judgment. During her

monologue is when a noticeable sea change in the tone and feeling of the room occurred.

One student, amidst tears and frustrations, stated that the teachers weren't hearing them; that teachers listen and just nod in order to appease without really doing anything. This statement really got the students going. (I am not suggesting that there had not been a growing anger by either students or teachers, but this is the point when it was clear to everyone). Also this is the point when teachers began to display agitation as well. Herein lay the essential disconnect that, in my opinion, prohibited progress. Students felt as though they had not been heard while teachers were desperately trying to hear. For students, it seems, there was an expectation for teachers to know and read minds. In addition, if a teacher made an attempt at personal interaction she or he was met with timidity or resistance.

On one hand teachers were expected to be advocates, a reasonable request in the spirit of teachers as cultural workers (Giroux, 1991), but on the other hand, from what was said during the meeting, students wanted teachers to advocate and interact in a way that suited student expectations. Even if teachers began to take steps they were often labeled as fake. On the other hand, teachers seemed to have an expectation for students to be empowered enough to feel comfortable in bringing forth very difficult issues. Although that is a liberating pedagogical stance it was somewhat difficult to do because most of these students had come from public or private schools where there was a distinct, traditional power hierarchy between teachers and students. Moreover,

African American families (especially lower middle class and working class families) saw teachers as professionals who ought to know how to foster those kinds of relationships if necessary (Lareau, 2001), an important point raised by two of the students who were responsible for engaging the issues from the beginning. In addition, sometimes students did not know how to communicate their issues; after all, and not to be dismissive, but they are only teenagers.

Both camps were putting each other in an impossible position. To recode that statement racially, a group of Black people felt as though they were not being heard by a group of White people, while those same White people felt as though they were trying their best but were not really quite sure what the Black people were asking for.

What is most parallel between both groups was the overarching fear of addressing the issues of race students were trying to illuminate. There is a great amount of social fear over the conversation around race in the United States (this needs a citation). In the words of Jocelyn Glazier (2000), race is one of those "hot lava" topics around which individuals tend to create alternate discursive strategies for avoiding the heat. People frequently say they do not know how to talk about it without participants getting upset. People are afraid that what they say will insult others or that utterances will be misconstrued and in effect cause others to get upset. And most important, for some, the fear of being labeled a racist is real, insulting, and sometimes terrifying.

As I stepped back and looked at the situation, I wondered how Whiteness and the lack of talk about Whiteness contributed to the issues that were being

aired. I wondered if the discourse was structured to privilege White ways of understanding and interacting with the world. The Black students were explicit and arguably honest in reporting their experiences about life in local schools and this NHS, but as the teachers responded they were in a defense mode and either dismissed the students complaints or immediately moved to what to do about it. Giroux (1997) suggests that bringing race to the forefront can be a useful pedagogical tool for helping people locate themselves on the racial map and further understand their own responsibility for sustaining and resisting racist practices. There was no discussion of Whiteness outside of a few people admitting that they are racist as a result of benefiting from White privilege. There was no talk about what exactly is expected and valued in the school and how does that reflect the general experiences of the majority of the school population. Although this conversation may be "uncomfortable and upsetting" that is hardly any reason to not have it.

Herein rests the struggle for this environment. Dean Patti wanted to challenge the ways in which the staff thought about race, culture, and diversity in the school. My recommendation to her was that we should explore the ways in which they understand the epistemological and discursive practices that frame how these issues are considered as social and pedagogical phenomenon. If we did not, then all efforts will ultimately fail because there is no critical examination of how the context is structured for and mediated by staff and students. The problem is much more substantial than merely directly instructing teachers on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Bilings, 1994) or multiple intelligences

(Gardner, 1993), which had been explored in previous staff development activities.

In short, I felt that before teachers could begin to engage Black students about what it means to be Black in a predominantly White school, they must first consider what it means to be White and how that mediates all aspects of the context. In terms of assimilation, the assumption is that subordinates will assimilate into the dominant culture. There is an unexamined expectation in this context that Black students will assimilate into a larger hegemonic structure, one mediated by Whiteness. How to do this became the challenge for this teacher educator.

Central Questions for Inquiry

There are three questions that shape and guide this research, and the one that lays the foundation is how does Whiteness, as an identity and/or set of epistemologies, appear—or disappear-- in discussions about race? As stated above, conversations about race are difficult to have in the United States since the issue has been loaded with personal, social, historic, and institutional baggage. Many citizens, including teachers, feel that racism has been "dealt with" through the Civil Rights Movement. Issues of cultural capital, positionality, privilege, representation, and other critical issues tend to escape many teachers, or they are not really sure of how to identify and deal with them in the real world. But as stated earlier, having conversations about race is difficult business

wrought with emotions, identity, and subtle (often unnoticed) strategies that aid in the prohibition of liberating and equitable practices.

This leads to the second question. When discussing race what are the general themes or issues that emerge for members of a school's staff? In other words, when asked to speak specifically about race what issues arise? How do teachers make sense of or understand race? This begs an important question regarding the conditions or circumstances under which a conversation about race is mounted. Hence the final question.

What can I learn as a teacher educator and professional developer about how to use film as a pedagogical tool for engaging educators in conversations about race effectively? Again, as stated above, conversations about race can often be difficult for individuals at best. This is no different for teachers. Additionally, the professional and social lives of teachers leaves little time (and patience) for extended discussions about these issues. Therefore we must utilize alternative strategies for engagement. As will be discussed momentarily, film offers texts and experiences groups can explore together, viscerally. The representations offered through visual media re ripe for discussion, problematizing, and challenge.

Mounting this line of research is of fundamental importance in today's multicultural world. Our society is becoming increasingly diverse, but at the same time out teaching force is not. According to projections from the National Center for Education Statistics, the teaching force is going to remain largely White for quite some time into the future. With that said, many people do not

know or understand the history and process of assimilation in the U.S. If we are going to deal with racial issues in any substantive way, we must learn how to talk about it in schools, which requires teachers becoming more comfortable and savvier with the issues. Teaching is the most human enterprise—more than any other profession. We need to care about the issue of race, one of the United States' oldest and most complicated problems, in the effort of moving closer to equitable and understanding institutions.

Engaging Whiteness with Teachers

Conversations about race in schools tend to be foregone in the attempt to be "nice" even at the detriment of student learning and the invocation of pedagogical and structural practices that can benefit students of color (Pollock, 2004). For example, in Pollock's analysis of the history of talk about race in the California City Public Schools and a particular school in the district, Columbus High School (both are pseudonyms), she tracks how over a twenty year period the use of the term "race" was supplanted by the term "all students". She states:

> At both the school and district levels, people describing education policy in the discourse of 'all students' would fail to discuss the details of expected or existing reforms for racial equality. And as discussion of education for 'all' obfuscated genuine dialogue about Columbus's own reform efforts, Columbus people would experience the consequences of a core dilemma of racial description: the de-raced words we use when discussing plans for achieving racial

> equality can actually keep us from discussing ways to make opportunities racially equal. (pp. 74-75)

Pollock's text illustrates this point in that she shows how talk about race is typically truncated and in turn prohibits the formation of policies and practices that foster equitable race relations. Although Pollock's text is more concerned with describing how a shift in language occurs and the resulting intended and unintended consequences of the action, her point is spot-on in relation to conversations about race in schools. When direct conversations about race are not mounted within institutions then race becomes the silent.

Following that logic, Singleton, the diversity consultant mentioned above who specializes in helping districts address the needs of underserved populations of students and ameliorating systemic inequities, champions the call for White teachers to undertake "courageous conversations" in order to learn not only more about race relations and inequity but also the role of Whiteness and their own role in reproducing epistemological and discursive practices that perpetuate racial problems in schools (Singleton, 2005; Sparks, 2002).

It is a fundamental strategy in addressing issues of difference in schools and other institutions; if you cannot understand how to recognize and critique your own position in society then how can one help others to understand that process? Additionally, if one is going to delve into conversations about race and race relations it seems remiss to eclipse the role of Whiteness because it is traditionally constructed as being the benefactor of racial and institutional privilege (Delpit, 1995; Jhally, 1999; McIntosh, 1988) and the source of American

cultural hegemony (Feagin, 2000; Kivel 2002). This begs the question of how teachers construct the notion of Whiteness.

The role of race in teaching is a contentious area of inquiry. A question many of the students in my college courses have asked repeatedly is whether or not Black children learn more effectively from Black teachers. Race as a biological construct, skin color, alone is not a good predictor of how students will react to a teacher and vice-versa. In fact there are many African American and Latino teachers that also have a difficult time addressing these issues, and there are many White teachers that are "down" with Black and Brown populations. Ladson-Billings in *Dreamkeepers* (1994) shows that successful teachers of Black students, regardless of the teacher's skin color, craft culturally relevant pedagogies that bring out the strengths of Black students. But what happens for teachers that encounter only a handful of non-White students? Ladson-Billings' work is highly important and revealing, but her text focused on schools with predominantly Black populations. Additionally, her work in *Dreamkeepers* does not explore how the successful teachers came to master successful practices. In the case of NHS, the overwhelming majority of teachers and students are White; so it becomes important to investigate the degree to which teachers hold Whiteness as a factor in how they understand the educational context and the discursive practices that regulate interactions.

McIntyre's study exploring racial identity with White teachers closely examines this phenomenon (McIntyre 1997). Through a Participatory Action Research Project (PAR) with 13 White student teachers, she delves into the

often-avoided discourse of Whiteness in schools. Through her study, in her words she examined:

> What it means to have a White identity, discover ways of making meaning about Whiteness and thinking critically about race and racism, and recognize how White racial identity and the system of Whiteness are implicated in the formulation of educational practices, thereby fostering the development of individual transformation, collective transformation, or both. (p. 21)

McIntyre's overarching point shows how the meanings White teachers attach to Whiteness have serious repercussions on their work with all students in their classrooms.

Through her research, McIntyre coins the term "White talk" (p. 45). By this she means "(Controlling) the discourse of Whiteness so that they didn't have to shoulder responsibility for the racism that exists today" (p. 45). She further defines "White talk" as:

> Talk that serves to insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective roles(s) in the perpetuation of racism. It is a result of Whites talking uncritically with/to other Whites, all the while resisting critique and massaging each other's racist attitudes, beliefs, and actions. (pp. 45, 46)

As I listened to the teachers during our discussion with the students and in individual conversations, "White talk" was prevalent in frequent appeals to well-meaning intentions and consistent espousal of liberal politics or

conscious attendance to diversifying course materials. More important though, the talk was consistently centered on trying to understand or sympathize with the Black students' complaints as opposed to critiquing where the misunderstanding emanated and how their own actions (or inactions) were complicit in the problems expressed. Considering McIntyre's notion of "White talk" is important to understanding this context because her construct helps us see how racially coded discursive practices can debilitate discussion.

McIntyre goes on to describe the "shadowboxing" (p. 55) around race and the attempt by White teachers to sustain a "culture of niceness" (p. 40) that really only contributes to the further marginalization of non-White students. McIntyre's work helps point out general discursive patterns and strategies that function to marginalize and silence deep, critical talk about race and race relations, such as avoidance and disruption (pp. 158-169). Taken as a whole, McIntyre's study helps us see that in spite of good intentions there is a tendency for White teachers to sustain their privilege and dismiss, tacitly or expressly, social and cultural inequities that exist in educational institutions.

Similarly, Sleeter's work with White teachers showed that it is inadequate merely to instruct White teachers about racism in education, and race in fact does matter (Sleeter, 1993/2004). Specifically she argues, "teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which they construct mainly on the basis of their life experiences and vested interests" (p. 163). In a two-year professional development program with White teachers in schools with at least

30% minority enrollments, she engaged the teachers in 14 day-long seminars that exposed them to issues like demographic changes, culture and learning styles, curriculum, working with parents, and cooperative learning. What she found is fascinating, to say the least. According to Sleeter, the teachers in her study often collapsed race and ethnicity and in effect compared the experiences of European immigrants with African Americans and Latinos. Because of this collapse, teachers found it difficult to understand fundamentally why the achievement gap that exists between White students and minority students. She develops an important point:

> White teachers of students of color need some way of understanding why people of color have not done as well in society as Whites have. Teachers generally like their students—including their students of color—and wish to help them. How do White teachers explain racial inequality without either demeaning their students or questioning their own privilege? (Sleeter, 1993/2004, p. 167)

To answer this question Sleeter shows that White teachers tend to take the strategies of denying race altogether, opting for a "colorblind" stance (Paley, 1979), or they construct African American students as immigrants. Again, this is problematic on its face because the historic experiences (socially, legally, institutionally, and culturally) are quite different from those of immigrant groups (Higginbotham, 1998; Ignatiev, 1996; Ogbu, 1994; Spring, 2000). The key point Sleeter makes is that White teachers must reexamine racism by deeper

investigations of their own privilege through programs that anticipate avoidance strategies.

Florio-Ruane and DeTar (2001) address some of these problems in teacher education and professional development. Utilizing autobiography and literacy circles she helps a contingent of teachers reconsider the value of cultural differences in education. Drawing on cultural theory, discourse analysis, and multicultural education literature, she informs us that, "Ethnic identity operates largely outside conscious awareness. It is a social construction shared by people rather than genetically given at birth" (p. 8). Although Florio-Ruane and DeTar speaks of ethnic identity, their ideas are just as pertinent to racial identity. Race is also a socially constructed idea that greatly shapes the ways in which an individual interacts with the world. This is of fundamental importance if we are to consider altering pedagogy in any substantive ways that address the role of race in schools.

Let's Go to the Movies: Formulating a Professional Development Idea

Borrowing from Florio-Ruane and DeTar's use of autobiography to explore notions of culture (2001) I thought it would be interesting to use film to explore these issues with teachers. As I looked across the literature I could not find studies of using film and/or popular culture as a pedagogical tool specifically for professional development. There is a wellspring of literature about the use of film for preservice teachers, especially related to examining the lives of teachers or the representation of the school context, which will be discussed momentarily.

But the path I am seeking is different. Within this study I am literally taking movies to school to sit down with seasoned practicing teachers, cold (only engaging their prior knowledge and the knowledge created during the conversations), and exploring how race is seen.

The path I chose is quite modest. In concert with the teachers we decided upon a series of five films, Hollywood and independently produced films and documentary films that could help us explore race. The series included: *Crash* (2005), *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993), *Whiteboyz* (2000), *Ethnic Notions* (1987), and *Color Adjustment* (1991). The first three films are fictional feature films. *Crash* was nearly mandatory since, at the time, it was the most popular film examining the relevant issues. They allowed me the opportunity to choose *Six Degrees of Separation* and *Whiteboyz*. I wanted to focus on feature film rather than documentary because I was interested in seeing how they spoke about a fictional narrative that may or may not be trying to make explicit points about race. The documentaries were chosen because the teachers were interested in viewing non-fiction films they could easily implement in their classes.

Although all the conversations were fascinating, the discussion around *Whiteboyz* proved to be the most robust and the most focused on wrestling with the specific question of the representation of Whiteness in the texts. As stated, *Crash* was a recent critical, box office, and popular smash, but the framing of the discussion inadvertently allowed the participants to focus on racism rather than race. *Six Degrees of Separation* was also a fascinating conversation, but class

issues dominated the conversation rather than race. Finally, the conversation around *Whiteboyz* proved to be very surprising because of the honesty and perception and evasion that characterized the chat in light of a more direct framing of the discussion around what it means to be White.

In Chapter 2 I will step back for a moment and look at cultural studies and film. The critical engagement of film is an extension of cultural studies. The chapter will explore the importance of cultural studies, the social significance of film, and its use in teacher education. Subsequently, Chapter 3 offers a further examination of the context and analytical considerations of the study. The discussion around *Crash* is explored and offers a justification for why it is not considered a principal part of the analysis about conversations about Whiteness. This chapter will also explore Whiteness and shed light on why the explicit investigation of Whiteness is fundamental to furthering equitable educational practices and institutions and key on fostering social justice.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the discussion around the screening of *Whiteboyz*. Chapter 4 presents the findings and discusses the themes and trends that emerged across the conversation. Chapter 5 is an extension of Chapter 4 in which I take a deep focus on a particular aspect of the discussion. In this chapter, I look further inside how the participants dealt with the introduction of a highly controversial racial issue—the use of nigga/nigger in popular cultural discourses. Finally, Chapter 6, will conclude this dissertation by summarizing my thoughts about the principal research questions and goals and considers future questions for inquiry.

Script Clarifications: A Note on Terminology

There are a terms I use throughout this text that may be controversial for some. Upfront I do not intend to insult or disrespect anyone kind enough to read this volume, however I must also practice vigilance in sticking to my theoretical, social, and cultural convictions. Of particular need for clarification, I am acutely aware that there is confusion around the terms race and ethnicity, White and European-American and Black and African-American, and "people of color." This section is intended to clarify my meaning.

Let me begin by assuming that everything about language is socially constructed. The uses of words and their meanings are mediated by social practices and in effect, language choices can reduce to rhetorical and political underpinnings. The question of race or ethnicity is particularly important in the conversation around multicultural and diversity issues.

Race is one of the most incendiary and divisive subjects in all aspects of American life and society. It is an often-confusing term since it has been applied to so many different situations. Marger (2002) points out that:

> In popular usage it has been applied to a wide variety of human categories, including people with roughly similar physical features (the White race), religion (the Jewish race), nationality (the English race), and even the entire species (the human race). (257)

With the myriad popular uses of the term it is no wonder that it is often a confusing concept, but it is a concept that holds a great deal of capital over how individuals identify and associate themselves. As Marger continues, "The best

that can be said is that race crudely describes people who share a set of similar genetic characteristics or, as biologist refer to them, gene frequencies" (257). Clearly Marger is constructing race as a biological construct; that does not hold much water in the sense that as we look at the historically defined races—Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid—we know there is vastly more variation within groups as compared to across groups. For example, due to historic and contextual circumstances, Africans in America have come to take on many shades (Herbes-Sommers, 2003; Sandler, 1993), calling into the question the validity of dividing the complex diversity of humanity into three or four arbitrary categories.

Although we can understand race as an arbitrary fiction based on physical characteristics, there is a reality to the experience of living with a particular skin color. Omi and Winant (2005) express the notion that race is seen both as a biological and ideological construct. As stated in the previous paragraph, there is arbitrariness to race as a biological construct. What do we do with so-called "mixed-race" people?! But once people have been put into these arbitrary categories and treated as such, patterns and ways of being become real. Over generations these shifts produce cultures and epistemologies that are also real. As I will discuss in relation to Whiteness, there is a physical aspect to Whiteness but there is an equally powerful—and I would argue more substantial—ideological aspect to Whiteness.

In discussing this issue we must not forget the fact that we also live in a racist society that is based on the concept of Whiteness (Kivel, 2002). Here is

where I begin to have a problem with the notion of ethnicity. Ethnicity (or ethnic groups) can be operationally defined as:

> Groups within a larger society that in some degree are set off from others by displaying a unique set of cultural traits, such as language, religion, diet, and so on. Members of an ethnic group perceive themselves as a community, in a broad sense, and thus maintain feelings of "we" (group members) as opposed to "they" (those not group members). (Marger, 2002, p. 256)

Italian Americans, Irish Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans are all considered ethnic groups. The focus here is on the shared cultures built within each of these subgroups. And this is the rub. The experiences in which these groups built their respective cultures were not in a vacuum, but in a lived context in which race was (and is) the central organizing principal. European ethnic groups were allowed assimilation into Whiteness. So, although Italians from southern Italy may have had darker skin and "kinkier" hair texture, they were nonetheless conferred Whiteness, while at the same time, very fair skinned Americans of African descent in New Orleans were Black. In this scenario, race trumps.

In my work and personal life I have found that people, although some do not like it and understand the shortcomings of the term, understand themselves as being a part of a race. It is not that they are not critical of this, but when one is asked, "How do you identify yourself racially" they typically have a ready answer. I suppose this has less to do with any certain theory and more to do with my own

politics. I'm Black. All day. I love being Black. I respect being Black. I respect and admire the history of the Africans that became Black upon reaching the United States. I respect the struggle, ingenuity, and perseverance of folks that have been defined like myself. I love Black culture, from the food to the literature, to the dance, to the church, to the styles, and of course the music. Although I understand that African American is the "politically correct" term and it recognizes the connection to Africa, denoting myself as a Black man keeps me connected to particular traditions and experiences while also paying props to my, although not quite accurately defined, black skin. Using terms like Black and White forces us to continue to grapple with this perfect monster of race created by our ancestors for the expressed purpose of privileging some and marginalizing others. My central point, especially in relation to this study, using the term race rather than ethnicity is a way, for me, to consistently connect the idea that talking about race embeds talk about racism.

By the same token you will not hear me say "people of color." This is a straightforward issue that is rooted in the above paragraph. First, the term "people of color" removes the conversation from Whiteness to everyone else. I wanted my participants and now the readers of this dissertation to keep their minds focused on Whiteness. The term "people of color" returns the focus to non-White folks and non-White folks are not what this is about. Second, "people of color" lumps an incredible number of people, groups, or cultures into one amorphous mass and bolsters the notion of the us/them binary. Therefore I

appreciate White and non-White because it forces us to constantly keep White in our focus, an activity that has been a difficult one in education.

As a final note, I have also chosen to always capitalize all racial categories: White, Black, non-White, etc. As an ex-English teacher, I have always practiced that proper nouns, specific persons, places, things, or ideas, should always be capitalized. Considering the fact that White and Black are particular races, it seems to me they should be capitalized. Plus, capitalizing denotes a sense of respect for the idea, and I want everyone to understand that I have deep respect for all aspects of humanity and the human condition.

With that said, please turn off all cell phones and enjoy the show...

CHAPTER II

LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES:

FILM AS PEDAGOGY FOR ENGAGING WHITENESS WITH TEACHERS

One of my favorite phrases is "fade in." In screenplay jargon, that denotes the beginning of a film or the beginning of a new scene in a film. After all the trailers, after the advertisements for Coca-Cola and credit cards, and after the studio and production company make their presence known, the screen fades to black (or white) momentarily and fades (or cuts) into a scene. The fade in represents limitless possibilities. It ushers in not only the beginning of a movie but also new characters and stories. For the next couple of hours, hopefully, the audience is treated to a period of engagement in which we hope our senses and sensibilities are challenged. After any given fade in we could find ourselves immersed in a world of pure imagination and wonder, the feeling we get when we watch Star Wars or Blade Runner for the first time. We can find ourselves in the midst of a family home wracked with turmoil and pain, such as Ordinary People or Happiness. We could be on a mythical battlefield in mythical land, The Lord of the Rings Trilogy. We could share in the revelry and pitfalls of youth through Sixteen Candles, Cooley High, or Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Once the film fades in we are captured in celluloid fantasies that remind us how things were, are, and could be.

I am an avid filmgoer and amateur critic, I frequently find myself in conversations about the movies. Many of those conversations I must admit are

at my own prompting because I find it fascinating to understand what people think of the film-going experience. I have found many examples over the course of my life in which people see movies as idle entertainment and rarely concern themselves with issues such as continuity, pace, cinematography, editing, direction, sound and special effects—the art of filmmaking; the aspects of movies that concern the critics tend not to be serious issues for the average consumer, only story and likeability, characters and genre. I have also found many examples over the course of my life in which people see the movies as cultural touchstones, documents that offer representations of our realities and fantasies. These folks typically understood movies within contexts and were fascinated by how the art of filmmaking could convey such power and effect.

I am also a teacher educator whose work focuses on sociocultural issues in education, specifically the role and impact of race inside and outside schools. Teaching and film go together for me because film allows a conduit through which individuals can "see" an example of a particular phenomenon, or individuals can take a scene and through encouragement and guidance can closely examine a scene or entire film and consider tacit and explicit themes that comment upon life and society. Film is the perfect site for engaging critical issues because of its immediacy and intimacy. Film is powerful. It is disarming. It is challenging. It is frustrating.

Dyer (1998) delineates two streams of film criticism. On one hand critics look at the formal-aesthetic discourses of film, focusing on the artistic merits of a motion picture. On the other hand film criticism may also investigate the social-

ideological value of a film by engaging the social, cultural, and ideological impact a film, and the film industry, may possess. Both these domains look past entertainment and focus on social and cultural impact and artistic statement, two issues that are obscured by all the cacophony around the commerce, sensationalism, and glamour of the movies.

We can see the power of film through frequent challenges of what material makes it to the screen at the local multiplex. There is frequent protest over "controversial material" and "questionable content." Whether we are talking about left-wing bias in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), religious blasphemy in Scorcese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), or teen sexuality in Larry Clark's *Kids* (1996) the social influence of film is not to be mistaken. The Kirby Dick documentary, *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* (2006) challenges the structure, secrecy, and contradiction of the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings board and acerbically indicts the ratings board for not allowing scenes of female sexual satisfaction, homosexual sexuality, and realistic story-driven violence while allowing male sexual aggression against women, wanton "cartoonish" violence, and the denigration of gay characters. In short, film is a deeply contested social and cultural terrain while also being a highly profitable commercial institution (Giroux, 1997).

This notion is not lost to my participants. As a matter of fact, as a group they are very savvy about film and understanding of the social and cultural power of the movies. Grace made a particularly interesting comment about the power

of film. In responding to my question, "How does film affect people's attitudes and beliefs" she responded:

> Well... Wow. Let me see... Movies can expose you to things outside your experience. Doors can be opened. You can experience times, places, events, that are long gone or across town. For me personally, I love foreign films and films that explore relationships, with intricacy. So you can be exposed to ideas and people from all over the world. But pandering films can reinforce negative ideas about society. But it's kinda political too. You know? I mean if something is made as a vehicle to make money then moral and political things are going on.

Similarly in response to the same question, Tom recounted in an interview the impact of the historic television mini-series Roots, which was the first popular document that depicted slavery and plantation life and recast the Black struggle as one quintessentially about the American Dream just as the struggle of the Irish, Italians, or any other group:

> Oh (film) can be so powerful. I remember when Roots first came on. It blew me away, and just about everyone else I knew. Every night would spark a lot of conversations the next day and it made a lot of people uncomfortable. But I think that it really helped change some things between Blacks and White after that. It at least got people talking.

The power of film rests in its ability to touch viewers on multiple levels. As my participants will latter show, film can often reveal unexpected realities that are complex, confusing, and enlightening. Americans (and many other cultures like the Indians, Mexicans, and Japanese) are drawn to film, and the impact of the film industry's economy is testament to the pervasiveness of film and the inherent need to consider what they represent.

In 2004, the motion picture industry grossed $9.5 billion dollars in ticket sales, home dvd/vhs sales, and rentals (Motion Picture Association of America, 2005). It is a staggering amount of money and shows how dedicated of a buying audience the American public can be. 2004's Spider Man 2 had an opening weekend gross of $115.8 million, the highest opening gross of that year. To put this number in perspective, the highest opening weekend gross in 1994 was only $37.2 million. Over the past twenty years the industry has grown by approximately $5.5 billion dollars. That growth is accompanied by an increase in the number of films released yearly by the film industry. In 2004, 483 films were released to 36,594 total screens (pp. 12, 23). In addition, the home entertainment market is even more thriving. Roughly 37 million home digital videodisc (DVD) players were purchased in 2004 with over 40,000 titles available for rental and purchase (p. 35). And recently a new market of internet video stores has made it possible to rent videos from home and has made it possible to access esoteric, vintage, and underground titles previously rarely found. These statistics help us see that film is a massive industry and institution and because of its scope has far reaching possibilities in popular culture and education.

This leads to a couple of questions that undergird this study. How has film been used for professional development? And second, what can teachers gain from this type of engagement when addressing issues about race? These questions are fundamental to fundamental to this study. It has been shown that critically discussing film helps teachers further consider how issues of race are popularly constructed and transmitted socially (Manley, 1994; McCarthy, 1997). Through this study I hoped to further understand how engaging film can assist teachers in opening the door to critical conversations about race.

The following section discusses the use of film as a pedagogical tool for discussing diversity issues. In the realm of teacher education using film has been shown to be helpful for exploring the lives of teachers and illuminating issues about race, class, gender, and other issues (Trier, 2001; Dalton, 2004). However, there is no significant body of literature that focuses on the use of film as a tool of professional development. I further point out that it is important to utilize films that are not set in schools in order to further consider how race is represented across social and institutional landscapes. The section closes with a mini case study of my own use of a school film in the effort of providing a sense of what can be mined during a post screening discussion. It is also a foreshadowing of the method I employed with the participants.

Seeing through Celluloid: Using Film as a Pedagogical Tool

Employing film as a pedagogical and methodological tool for engaging preservice teachers and secondary students is not a new phenomenon, nor is the analysis

of images related to education in film a new concept. Maynard used film in an experimental course for high school seniors as a supplement to the traditional, standard curriculum (Maynard 1971/1978). Through film he engaged his class in issues of race, gender, marriage, and other critical issues to great success, during an era in which the United States was in the midst of great social and cultural change, the latter 1960s. Although my study focuses on adults immersed in the teaching profession, the ultimate point is that Maynard was the first to display the idea that film can be a useful strategy for addressing critical issues. Maynard's writing was particularly useful pedagogically since it was the first text that explored the use of film as an effective teaching tool. However I was somewhat disappointed with the text. Maynard uses film to explore the representations of African Americans and African, but forgoes an examination of Whiteness. As we are now over thirty years removed from the time of Maynard's study I find that instigating critical conversations around Whiteness is necessary to further our understanding of race and educational practices (Singleton, 2005).

Studies employing film often show the use of filmic representations to investigate popular constructions of teachers and schooling, focusing on the "school film" genre. Trier used school films to help pre-service teachers in during their teaching internships think about the personal and professional lives of teachers (Trier, 2001). Using a combination of articles and key scenes from "school films," Trier provided his students with a number of scenarios and representations his students were not able to have. Not only did this kind of engagement offer a common experience all the students in his class could

address, but also it helped his students understand that, "Their own images... were probably derived from having watched such films..." (p. 128).

Brunner also employs school films in the effort of offering pre-service teachers more stories about schooling with which to think about (Brunner, 1994). As she explains, "Making a leap from abstraction to situation can be difficult without a bridge... (school films) can provide such a link and may be the key to making meaning" (p. 71). This is especially salient in the context of my study in the sense that it is key to help teachers focus on situations rather than abstract suppositions or isolated incidents of which only that individual teacher is a part.

In my experiences recommending titles to colleagues, many involved with teacher education are interested specifically in how schooling and the construction of teachers is represented on the silver screen. This trend in my professional life, coupled with the fact that my area of teacher education centers on social and cultural issues, pushed me to move beyond school films to look for selections that point toward critical issues regardless of setting. After all, teachers and students only partially reside in the institution of schools; they also have lives outside schools and their interactions with those contexts equally shape their experiences (McLeod, 1996). For this study I am much more concerned with using film to explore our understanding of American culture, specifically what it means to be White.

Manley shows how using film can be a powerful tool for uncovering key issues related to critical pedagogy (Manley, 1994). Through Spike Lee's visceral groundbreaking film *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Manley engaged his college level

students in overarching themes fundamental to critical pedagogy such as race, gender, and power. Although Manley used Do the Right Thing as a text for a sociology course, the fact that he used the text to explore critical pedagogical issues is also a powerful influence for this study. Manley's work augments the idea that film can be explored on many levels and film offers a space in which participants can see how various aspects of identity can affect a character's story and interpretation, begging the question of where do people derive their understanding of race, identity, and culture. Another powerful intervention, shown in the work of Grant, exposed preservice teachers to representations of urban schools (Grant, 2002). Using the films *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), and *187* (1997), Grant connected preservice teachers' attitudes about teaching and learning in urban contexts with the representations circulated in these popular Hollywood school films.

Broadening the scope of study from school films to other film genres is an important move for teacher education and professional development. As Omi and Winant (1994) point out that film and television images are notorious for presenting negative images of racial minorities. Additionally popular films are more likely to speak to or satirically criticize dominant ideologies (Spigner, 1995, p. 98). Turning the gaze to also investigate the construction of White representations and epistemologies may help foster deeper understanding of how images shape the ways in which we see the world and ultimately the ways in which we see students and ourselves. It is the essential hope in this move that orients this study. But again, investigating how teachers see Whiteness is

seldom represented in the literature and it was my hope that as my participants viewed various films they would begin to construct trends in the representation of White folks.

The participants in this study also find film to be an important tool for teaching as well as a challenging and rewarding medium to teach about. Errol teaches an English class on film and examines film as a literary genre. He stated, "Its one of my favorite classes. We watch a movie over a couple of class periods and then discuss them. Usually the students come up with some really really good stuff." Likewise, Nora, a history teacher, uses film often to help her students further investigate American history. For example, she uses *All Quite on the Western Front* (1930), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and *Schindler's List* (1993) to foster conversations about World War II. She also uses texts like *Malcolm X* (1992), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) with her students to foster conversations about the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups.

Although for Errol and Nora film is an integral part of their classes, others use them incidentally, as a strategic ploy of sorts to help students engage particular ideas. Tom, a civics teacher, commented:

> Yeah, I use movies in my classes. Sure I do. Not as much as I'd like but I do sometimes. They are a good diversion for the kids to get them to look a little more at representations of civics in action. But I don't really like to use documentaries because the kids call them boring.

In fact, all of the teachers that participated in this study use film as a teaching tool either regularly across the school year or to punctuate specific lessons, like Mary, an English teacher, coupling the film version of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* with the original print text. Using film with this specific group began to feel like a "no-brainer," and this opened a space of willing participants that entered the experience optimistic that sitting to watch and discuss a film could help them bridge communicative gaps.

Trailer: Example of Using a School Film

Film (and television) has been a key factor in shaping my pedagogy and practices. I cannot lie. It initially had nothing to do with anything other than the fact that I loved movies and loved talking about movies. Like many others, film was always a great thing to talk about, and as I grew older the conversations pointed to more critical subjects. As an instructor of social and cultural issues in education I have had the opportunity to employ film frequently. An example of this is my use of the 1974 film *Conrack*, a "school film," with a group of master's students in a course on building learning communities. Most of the students in the course were practicing in their own classrooms.

Conrack tells the story of Pat Conrad, an upper- middle class White man who takes a teaching post on an island off the coast of South Carolina. The island is entirely African American and the residents speak the remnants of the Gullah dialect, the forerunner to African American Language (also known as Ebonics) (Rickford and Rickford, 2000; Smitherman 1999). In fact, most of the

residents have never ventured off the island, due to a fear of the river that has claimed the lives of many children, locking the islanders into a relative cultural time capsule. Due to language differences, the students and principal of the school refer to Conrad as Conrack; he attempts to get the kids to say his name correctly but eventually gives up and adopts the mispronunciation as a nickname.

Due to stark cultural difference Conrack immediately runs into trouble. He uses what is considered improper language and improper teaching methods. Others would say that he was reflecting progressive teaching practices. The principal, an overbearing and somewhat "abusive" Black woman, is constantly critical of Conrack, and informs him that he must be hard on the "babies" and he must not be afraid to give a lash when necessary. Conrack defiantly shows his disdain for such practices and continues on his own progressive, liberal pedagogical path. He shows surprise that the babies have never learned to play football, swim, or go trick-or-treating. More substantively, the students are academically "behind," unable to read, write, and count, or show a mastery of the kinds of basic facts that constitute the American cultural core (Hirsch, 1988), like who the great presidents are.

Thinking he has an ally in the superintendent, a White man who lives on the mainland, Conrack airs his concerns. He is stopped cold and told that there are ways things are done on the island and as a teacher his job is not to change or challenge those practices but to reproduce them, in spite of the fact that most of the babies cannot read, write, or count.

When I used this film, to begin with, I asked the students to watch the film and consider the differences and similarities between the characters along racial and/or ethnic lines (depending on the unit the class is covering I also asked the students to think about gender, sexuality, and class). I also asked them to consider the morals and values privileged or promoted through the text and whom the text is speaking too. Upon completion of the film we engage in a conversation about what the students saw and how they understood the representations presented in the film. As will be explored in the next chapter, this method became an integral part of the film screening experience for the participants.

Conrack exposed a number of issues for the students in the course to grapple with. They were concerned with the ways in which Conrack's character was constructed as having greater and more useful knowledge than any of the residents of the island. Conrack was also dismissive of the knowledge and cultural capital of the residents. Many of the students in my course found the construction of the African American principal as offensive in that she was domineering and (in some students' words) abusive. Also through the text the students were able to make strong connections about the nature of curriculum and how curricular design has a direct effect on the quality of educational opportunities for students. Many other ideas were gleaned from the discussion such as language inequity, structural inequality, prejudice and racism, Whiteness as purity or savior, and other key observations.

But for my purposes in the context of this study, I am more interested in seeing how engagement with film can be a beneficial tool for professional development and has allowed an "in" to difficult conversations about race, privilege, and culture. The significant difference between the above example of using film as a pedagogical tool and this work is that those students came to class not only with their own personal and professional experiences but also with a unified set of readings that specifically pointed out such issues. The teachers that chose to participate in this study did not have that to bolster their ideas. They came in cold, only relying upon their histories (which of course may include critical, theoretical texts) to negotiate the images on the screen before them.

Although I did not use Conrack for this dissertation study it is important to cite the example from my experiences with using film to point out a central issue for me. Even though the film is rife with fodder to discuss, it nonetheless reflects a school experience, an experience that is far removed from the participants of the study. Using popular, non-school films is a valuable strategy because school films can often not reflect the reality of most teachers. The urban decay represented in texts like *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Cooley High* (1975), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *187* (1999), or more recently *Freedom Writers* (2007) are important but are not critical examinations of suburban or rural contexts. Additionally, those texts can have the unintended consequence of reinforcing stereotypes and tropes of White teachers as saviors. I wanted the teachers to confront situations that are more common to their own experiences. Watching ghetto games and gang banging can present challenging

images for critique, but they can also allow an "out" for bypassing conversations about what it means to be White.

Bridge

In summary, my ideas about the use of film as a pedagogical tool came from my experience and from teacher education literature. A key feature of using films in teaching is the participants' relationship to the context presented in the film selections. Although school films and urban-centered films are highly valuable texts, when dealing with a specific group of teachers at a particular school in a particular context, it is important for them to see closer reflections to their lived experiences. The feature films that were used in this study in many ways achieved that measure. For example, *Crash*, although set in Los Angeles and not the Midwest, offered a palette of characters and experiences the participants could recognize and feel. As Anne commented about one of the characters in the film:

> You know who I identified with, even though I really don't want to admit it? The racist cop. Officer Ryan? Yeah, Officer Ryan. He was taking care of a sick parent and I know all about that too well. (Anne's father passed away from a long bout with cancer near the end of the semester the data was collected for this study).

This aspect of Officer Ryan's character humanized him for Anne and others, and even though his struggles with taking care of a sick parent and the bureaucracy of the health care industry did not pardon his racist inclinations, it did offer

mitigating circumstances. They understood him as a human and not merely an archetype.

Similarly, *Whiteboyz* is set in rural Iowa. For Nora this was particularly moving since she was raised in Iowa. Although the setting of Iowa did not warm her to Flipp, the protagonist, her experiences growing up in Iowa pushed her to defend the state. As she declared in response to the notion that Iowa is not a socially and culturally enlightened place Nora sharply retorted, "Hey, I'm just saying don't stereotype all of Iowa!" Seeing the familiar and finding spaces in the text to latch onto personalized the experience for the participants.

In addition to my teaching experience and the teacher education literature, further insight into the pedagogical use of film comes from literature in cultural studies. This branch of literature fascinates me due to its focus on inquiry for social justice. Cultural studies investigates the negotiation of power through cultural and social artifacts that promote particular cultural codes, mores, and folkways. Cultural studies utilizes analytical tools from multiple disciplines in order to understand how representations shape cultures and societies and are shaped by cultures and societies. The area of study also attempts to examine the lives and experiences of youth and marginalized cultures, uncovering their complexity and humanity in the process. In short cultural studies is a prime site in which teachers can gain understanding about their students, their communities, and their own role in the formation of equitable social practices in a context of increasing diversity. The next section will generally explore the area of cultural studies, focusing on its definitions and purposes. Then the section will

dovetail into a key aspect of cultural studies, the exploration of film and its value for engaging professionals.

Cultural Studies and the Exploration of Film

The study of film and the impact of representations within fall under the auspices of cultural studies. Born out of Marxist thought, the study of culture positions the object of culture as a political phenomenon that shapes the ways in which individuals and groups interact across the social matrix. As Fiske (1994) points out, the notion of culture in cultural studies "is neither aesthetic nor humanist in emphasis, but political" (quoted in Storey, 1995, p. viii). Using the knowledge and methods of many different disciplines including anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, political science, musicology, and film studies, cultural studies explores broadly defined cultural groups, practices, representations, and productions in order to more fully understand how various groups are marginalized and privileged, resistant to and empowered through social practices (Sadar and VanLoon, 1999; Storey, 1995).

Giroux (1996) further helps us understand the mission of cultural studies. He states:

> Cultural studies, with its ambiguous founding moments spread across multiple continents and diverse institutional spheres, has always been critically attentive to the changing conditions influencing the socialization of youth and the social and economic contexts producing such changes. The self and social formation of

> diverse youth subcultures mediated by popular cultural forms remains a prominent concern of cultural studies. (15)

Upfront, this is one of the most important reasons to utilize cultural studies with teachers. Excursions into cultural studies allows teachers a vehicle to help them connect with the realities of their students and foster deeper understanding of social, economic, and institutional factors that shape not only youth cultures but also racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual cultures as well (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994). Cultural studies challenges status quo assumptions by examining the representations of cultural practices and the backlash or embrace of those practices.

One of the most significant moves of cultural studies was to decenter the discourse around culture from that of "high culture" to "popular culture." Dolby (2003) helps to differentiate. High culture is most reflected in the ideas of Mathew Arnold, a social theorist of the middle 1800s. He defined culture as "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (quoted in Dolby, 2003, p. 259). This definition oriented the study of culture for nearly a century. The problem with Arnold's definition was that he self-righteously assumed that he and his ilk (middle class English) were superior to the working and lower classes and disregarded the production of culture within those groups. This eventually led to the delineation of high-class culture and common (i.e. popular) culture. In effect, the popular culture did not carry as much social and cultural weight as the high culture.

We can see the vestiges of this antiquated construction of high versus popular culture in the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s in the United States, punctuated by texts like E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1988). Hirsch argues that every American should know a common set of ideas (or information) in the effort of achieving equitable communication in public discourse. The central problem of this texts was that what every person should know primarily focused on the history and cultural artifacts of the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant middle and upper classes to the near exclusion of non-White groups and working class and lower class cultural practices and experiences. Once again, Hirsch is not critical of Whiteness in his texts, hence begging the need to vigorously mount an investigation of Whiteness as an organizing principal in American culture and society.

This leads to the question of what is popular culture? Morrell (2002) states, "Popular culture... is not an imposed mass culture or a people's culture, it is more a terrain of exchange between the two" (p. 2). Since this is an exchange, the process becomes political as the struggle to define and negotiate power ensues. In turn, the ideologies, representations, and voices evident in mass media become rife with possibilities for critical engagement and social agency. Engagement with these issues is key for teachers in the effort of seeing how cultural practices shape the experiences for students. Lipsitz (1990) makes the following point:

> Popular culture intervenes in the construction of individual and group identity more than ever before as presidents win popularity

> by quoting from Hollywood films ("make my day," "read my lips"), while serious political issues such as homelessness and hunger seem to enter public consciousness most fully when acknowledged by popular musicians or in made-for-television movies. (325)

Now, with the rise in home electronics, the Internet, and other technology, popular culture is more accessible and pervasive than ever before. To not utilize these avenues in not only school curriculum and teacher preparation but also within the continued professional development of teachers is pedagogically, methodologically, and socially unsound practice (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; Giroux, 1996; Morrell, 2003; McCarthy, 1993). This notion filled my mind as I ruminated over how to help my teachers approach more nuanced conversations about race. Lipsitz further states:

> Investigations into popular culture are not merely good-hearted efforts to expand the knowledge base of our field. They are also inevitably a part of the political process by which groups—including scholars—seek to reposition themselves in the present by reconstituting knowledge about culture and society in the past. (327)

This is an important quote arguing the full scope and use of cultural studies and popular culture for pedagogy and practice in all aspects of education. It falls in line with the belief that teaching is a political act (Freire, 1973; Nieto, 2004) that can challenge constructions that appear natural or normalized in US society and culture. The recasting and problematizing of representations and images allows

a space for teachers to fundamentally engage in liberating pedagogies and praxis. Considering the cultural, social, political, and economic repercussions of the representations utilized in mass media helps teachers understand how their students can be "seen" in social contexts and in turn can help them consider how their own practices contribute to or challenge those constructions.

This study did not intend to measure change but was more concerned with observing the introduction to teachers a different professional development strategy and sought affective evidence for the quality or worth of that engaging. We were couched in a situation in which it was much more important to focus on initial talking and consider actual methodological practices much later. This study was part of a larger mission, declared by Dean Patti, to change the culture of diversity. As Nora pointed out in an early conversation:

> Last year was kinda painful. Seriously. The staff was resistant to dealing with the fact that we are not as open as we think. I mean if you've got half the Black students upset with what's going on you've got a problem that needs to be looked at. I wasn't the one to do it! I later found that out the hard way. (Nora is referencing the December 6 staff meeting where a contingent of Black students aired their experiences and concerns). I mean I didn't think it would end up that contentious. Other teachers started looking at me like I was drudging all this stuff up.

Upfront, there was discomfort and resistance that needed to be dealt with. The first step had to be to get folks talking about race in general with the aim of

expanding conversations across the staff later down the line. Employing popular culture and film is meant to assuage the process.

"The meanings of (popular culture) and our understanding of the relations between them are not matters that can be resolved by definitional fiat. The most one can do is to point to a range of meanings" (Bennett cited in Dolby, 2003, p. 259). Generally speaking we can see two primary streams. First is the lived experience of popular culture created by youth that occupy the contexts in which they function. For instance, Paul Willis' Learning to Labor (1981) examined the cultural practices of two distinct social class groups in a working class London school. The text explored the cultural values and ideals for the Lads and the Ear'oles in the effort of conveying an understanding of their social behaviors as having logic and reason, in effect validity, and how those practices shaped their opportunities and experiences. Cultural studies has explored the micro and macro issues of a wide array of cultural contexts and groups: the heavy metal culture (Spheeris, 1988; Walser, 1993); hip hop (Rose, 1994; Dyson, 1996), and Trekkies (Star Trek fanatics) (Nygard, 1997) to name a few.

Second, there is popular culture created through texts, and this strand focuses on how individuals receive, interpret, and interact with texts. This is the space in which critical investigation of mass media (film, television, music, and print) flourishes. This strand of research questions not only how various representations, or lack of, shape the ways in which individuals and groups are constructed in society but also the ways in which media is manipulated as a tool of both domination and liberation (Guerrero, 1999). In this spirit, Bogle's *Toms,*

Mammies, Coons, and Mulattoes: An Interpretive History of Blacks in Film (1994) examined the stereotypical representations of Black folks in popular media between the ante-bellum period through the 1980s, questioning whether or not the representations have changed or merely reproduced. The feature documentary *Woodstock* (1971), which chronicled the historic three-day concert that punctuated the counter-culture movement of the 1960s, is a classic document that captured both the music and style of a specific culture and the essence of community created in the context. D'Acci's (1994) work examined the construction of feminist narratives in the hit groundbreaking show Cagney and Lacey. There are countless others, but the key point here is that popular culture texts are sites to further understand how society functions, how we see ourselves, and how we see others. The work with the teachers in this study is born out of this second stream of cultural studies. I sought to consider what would a group of teachers talk about if they were asked to look specifically at race while engaging a particular cultural artifact, in this case film.

Dolby (2003) further argues that engaging popular culture ought to be seen as a cultural practice that has the power to bring about social change. Again, the argument focuses on the application of popular culture for students while not examining the equal power of popular culture investigations for teachers. This point brings into focus my urge to use film as foremost a means for inciting conversation rather than seeking engagement with theoretical constructs and explanations. As she expresses, "... Poplar culture is not simply fluff that can be dismissed as irrelevant and insignificant; on the contrary, it has

the capacity to intervene in the most critical civic issues and to shape public opinion" (259).

The reality of filmmaking is that it is a political process. From the writing of the script, acquiring funding, shooting, editing, marketing, and distribution is a process of millions of negotiations and decisions. At the end of the day, a film is a product that embeds cultural cues. Film can be thought of as cultural productions that shape the ways in which individuals not only see the world but also shape the ways in which individuals interact with the world. Zavarzadeh (1991) expresses a perceptive notion regarding the role of film in culture and how individuals share in the construction of meanings generated by film:

> Films are not enclosed constructs... but are instances of cultural acts in terms of which the viewer negotiates his way through the realities of daily practices—all of which are organized, in the last analysis, to confirm dominant social relations. (p. 10)

In other words, when any given viewer engages with a film, the viewer considers the reality of his/her own daily life in relation to those represented on the screen. Films that promote or support the viewer's sense of morality, justice, ethics, and characterization (the viewer's perceived sense of reality) tend to be viewed favorably by the viewer.

In a conversation after the screening of the feature films, Nora emphasized this point while expressing her derision toward the film Whiteboyz and its main character Flip:

Nora: I hated that film, absolutely hated it!

Joe: Why? It seems like most everyone didn't like the flick.

Nora: Well because the main White boy (Flip) was so stupid! He was just obnoxious and way over the top, almost like slapstick.

Gloria: So its stupidity that you hated?

Nora: And Flip was it. But the movie did get a lot of conversation started.

Representations resonate with viewers, for good or for bad. Regardless, unappealing characters or unexpected stories can produce powerful examples for discussion. It is not a matter of whether or not the movie has a warm, fuzzy ending. In fact there are a number of films with tragic endings that strongly resonate with the public and are useful for exploring critical issues: *Titanic* (1997) and class; *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and gender; or *Boys 'N the Hood* (1991) and race are some that come to mind. Whether or not characters in a film possess qualities the viewer finds "realistic" and the themes furthered by the text are affirming are more important factors contributing to the popular success of a movie. Kellner (1998) summarizes this point, "Hollywood film, like U.S. society, should be seen as a contested terrain and films could be interpreted as a struggle of representation over how to construct a social world and everyday life" (p. 354).

As will be shown further in this texts, the participants in this study gravitated more readily toward Crash, with that film's universalizing of racism and overall redemptive storylines, as compared to Whiteboyz wherein a seemingly

less intelligent White youth "gets it wrong" in his self-proclaimed embrace of Black culture.

Arguing for the exploration of the political motives embedded in movies, Ryan and Kellner (1988) explicates the relationship between ideology and film through formal conventions such as narrative closure, image continuity, non-reflexive camera work, character identification, voyeuristic objectification, causal logic, dramatic motivation, shot centering, frame balance, realist intelligibility, etc:

> Formal conventions help to instill ideology by creating an illusion that what happens on the screen is a neutral recording of objective events, rather than a construct operating from a certain point of view. Films make rhetorical arguments through the selection and combination of representational elements that project rather than reflect a world-view. In so doing, they impose on the audience a certain position or point of view, and the formal conventions occlude this positioning by erasing the signs of cinematic artificiality. Emphasis added (p. 1)

What is more telling in Ryan and Kellner's thesis is the role thematic conventions have in conveying ideologies:

> Thematic conventions—heroic male adventure, romantic quest, female melodrama, redemptive violence, racial and criminal stereotyping, etc.—promote ideology by linking the effect of reality to social values and institutions in such a way that they come to seem natural or self-evident attributes of an unchanging world. The

> conventions habituate the audience to accept the basic premises of the social order, and to ignore their irrationality and injustice. (Emphasis added) (p. 1)

McCarthy, et. al. (1997) express the notion that film (and other electronic media as well) play a critical role in transferring negative images of inner cities and the construction of suburbs as havens of peace and tranquility (McCarthy 1997). Film in part functions by, "... singing back to society lullabies about what a large part of it already knows (emphasis in text) (p. 229). McCarthy eschews the idea that film and other media stand outside the construction of social meaning. In effect, film serves as a vehicle for social meaning that "positions the viewer at the center of a cultural map in which suburban, middle-class values 'triumph' over practices that drift away from mainstream social norms" (p. 229). Particular themes and characterizations are popularly successful because they mirror middle-class sensibilities.

Taking an example from this study, I was surprised by my participants' general disdain for the main character of *Whiteboyz*, Flipp-Dogg. Flipp did not reflect and in fact resisted popular, middle class notions of behavior. In turn, the participants ultimately had less affinity for him and were less willing to see the virtues within his character. As Mary summarized Flip, with the head-nodding agreement of virtually the entire group:

> He was terribly ignorant... He was ignorant in every relationship he had. I thought he was ignorant with his parents. I thought he was ignorant with his girlfriend. And that's not to say he wasn't stupidly

tender with her too, but I thought he could have had some sensitivity to the day his dad lost his job.

Juxtaposing the above example, consider the character Rocky Balboa, the beleaguered longshoreman and pugilist title character of the 1977 Academy Award winning film. Although from the "wrong side of the tracks," Rocky attempts to pull himself up by his bootstraps when given the chance. This riff on the Protestant work ethic resonates strongly with White, middle-class Americans, and in spite of his past indiscretions his hard work turns him into a virtuous character and national fictional hero. What makes him all the more palatable is that he nearly defeats (and later does in the sequel) the champion Apollo Creed, an arrogant, boisterous Black boxer who is part Don King/part Muhammad Ali, and who drapes himself in the American flag. It could be stated that Rocky put Apollo in his place.

The film and its subsequent franchise served as a backlash to the social advances precipitated through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, Affirmative Action, and social programs that benefited the poor and minority communities. Rocky fulfilled the fantasies of working class and middle class White men that constructed themselves as victims of progressive policies in the post Civil Rights era (Fine, 1997). The representations of race, physicality, and social mores are glaring in the highly profitable Rocky franchise and are a display of the power of representation in the popular film medium.

I am hoping to understand whether or not employing media and popular culture is beneficial for teachers. Film allows them the space to engage

representations that can be used to further their own thinking about a broad range of issues fundamental to education and social justice. In addition media in general can become a powerful tool to put into a teacher's toolkit as a pedagogical/methodological strategy. I turn to McCarthy for this. He states:

> In many cases our students depend on the media, more so than on textbooks or the classroom, for their understanding of existing relations of dominance and subordination in the world. We must therefore find some way dynamically to interrogate the current production of images in the popular culture; we must find some way critically to examine film, TV, the newspaper, and popular music in classrooms. (McCarthy, 1993, p. 297)

McCarthy's point is well taken. Engaging teachers through media may help them see the media as a powerful tool for instruction, and more important to this study, media, specifically popular film, may also facilitate teachers' engagement with critical issues around power, knowledge, representation, culture and race. This is not easy, to say the least.

Individuals watch hundreds of movies over the course of their lives and in turn see thousands of images and representations of places, events, and people. Deciphering images is complicated work, even when you are aware of what you are looking for. But thinking about how Whiteness is constructed is an entirely different monster since for most of our lives Whiteness has been uncritically extended the role of the norm. By the end of the series, my participants became

more aware of looking for Whiteness, but did not necessarily have an understanding of what Whiteness looks like.

Closing

To summarize, cultural studies is a field of study that utilizes ideas from a number of disciplines in the attempt to understand how power shapes the contexts in which competing cultures operate. Although it is difficult to pin-down a definition of cultural studies, its mission of investigation and critique for social justice is elementary to my pedagogy and to the underpinnings of this study. Through cultural studies we can examine how our texts produce and reproduce cultures and how those representations function to marginalize and privilege. Film is a key site for this work in light of its political and social position. Americans and others around the world spend billions of dollars a year taking in film.

The representations and images conveyed through this medium is a hotly contested matter, one in which teachers ought to engage. Popular film texts aid in shaping the ways in which students see the worlds, and, more important to this study, any given film is rife with stories, characters, and themes that can be utilized to open people up to transgressive conversations about often-times difficult issues. As we will see in the following chapter, the choices of films and the structuring of conversations around film is not as easy as just loading a DVD into a player. In fact, as I later came to find, emphasizing the wrong questions can spin the dialogue into unexpected directions.

CHAPTER III

CREATING THE STORYBOARD AND PRODUCTION NOTES: CONTEXTUAL AND ANALYTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are three questions that drive this study. First, as a pedagogical tool for professional development around diversity issues, in what ways do educational professionals talk with one another about race, in the context of viewing particular films? Second, how do elements and aspects of Whiteness enter conversations about race? And finally, what can I learn as a teacher educator and professional developer about how to use film effectively?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the method and analytical considerations for this study. The chapter begins by describing the methodology and procedure of the study. Afterwards follows an overview of the ideas that shaped the analysis, which focuses on seeing Whiteness.

Production Notes: Method Introduction

This study is a qualitative ethnographic study. The principal streams of data utilized here include field notes, interviews, group discussions of the films, direct observation, and emailed comments from participants. Originally the participants agreed to also submit journals, but due to their time constraints and other issues, the participants did not submit journals. This omission in data was

made up for by regular "chats" with participants outside the confines of formal interviews and group discussions.[3]

In considering how to design this study I was confronted with an important fact: I had no clue of what I was going to find nor was I sure of exactly what I was looking for. I had no hypothesis to test. I had no statistical analysis I was interested in. I simply wanted to see what arose when a group of teaching professionals got together, watched a movie, and discussed how race was represented. Since I could find no studies that actually did that, I felt timidly justified to create that kind of inquiry. Again, the purpose of this study is to understand what ideas are generated among a group of teachers after watching movies for the purpose of exploring race and Whiteness. Nothing more. The salient question they were asked at the outset of each film was, "According to this text, what does it mean to be White or Black?" Before delineating the process by which the data was gathered, first I must delve into the setting and selection of the participants.

Production Notes: Storyboarding the Location and Setting

This study took place in a midwestern suburban high school. Northside High School (NHS) is one of three high schools in this community and the school is only a short walk away from a highly respected, nationally recognized university. Before revealing other factors relevant to this setting and study I want to take a sidebar and discuss the history of this school a little more.

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[3] For more detail of the methodology see Appendix B.

Northside High School is an alternative magnet school that has been open for a little more than thirty years. The building which houses NHS was previously an elementary school until it was closed due to budget cuts and a new redistricting policy that splintered the school's predominantly Black population to other area elementary schools. Technically NHS was open for a few years before the defunct elementary school closed its doors, but NSH has been in the location so long that there are few who remain either at the school or in the district that actually remember NHS being housed in an office building in the downtown community of the city.

A high school in an office building you may be wondering? Yes. The school's impetus rests in the social upheaval and change of the 1960s countercultural movement, Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and anti-war movements. At the time there were two high schools in the city and many new, young parents and parents affiliated with the university of the early 1970s were hoping to eschew the traditional confines, pedagogies, and curricula of the traditional high school. Eventually, the district's administration, in support of the progressive ideas of the city, the times, and educational ideas began to craft a space in which students had more control over their learning, individuals felt empowered to explore non-traditional subjects and ideas, and individuals felt safe to be themselves and explore all schooling has to offer. Although the school did not utilize an arts based curriculum, the arts and artistic expression became cornerstones of the institution and remain key aspects of the school's image to this day. Alongside the arts, the school promoted a progressive pedagogy that

attempted to empower students. The school was a place of refuge for what we would now call at-risk students as well as high performing students that felt stifled in the traditional high schools. For example, in the early days of the school, although there were grades, attendance policies were lax, students could create and teach their own courses, and teachers and administrators encouraged students to refer to them by their first names. As a matter of fact, those three examples remain status quo in the building and the Community Resources department (the arm of the school that manages and supports the creation of courses) is a respected program across the district that attracts students from the other high schools.

There is another side to this, however. As the school moved into its second decade (the 1980s) it began to develop a local reputation as the school of the "freaks" and "burnouts." Due in part to the permissive environment, it was not uncommon to see students "hanging out" outside the school smoking cigarettes and other substances (usually marijuana). It was also common to see kids with spiked, mohawked, or cobalt blue hair. Also, in the beginning the school was a largely diverse place with very little cross-racial antagonism, but as the school moved through its early years the number of non-White students began to fall and the image of the school in the local Black community was of suspicion and distaste.

By the time we move into the latter 1990s a serious problem that precipitated an important policy decision was coming to a head. Since the beginning NHS practiced a first-come-first-served admission policy. The

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community was notified that registration was taking place and people that were interested showed up and waited in line until that year's maximum was reached. Currently there are roughly 450 students in the school and that number has steadily increased. As the popularity of the school grew, a result of a top-notch music program, a killer visual arts department, an award winning student newspaper, a high college placement rate, and other accolades, the demand for a spot in the school's enrollment grew to a fever pitch. Staff members fondly talk about the insanity of registration day, and also told of families literally camping out on the front lawn of the school for two or three days to ensure that their child would get in. But what began to disturb the dean (NHS has a dean instead of principal), teachers, and district administrators was families that were economically privileged would actually pay college students and homeless persons to sit on line for them! Something had to change.

To ameliorate this problem, the school instituted a lottery system in which parents would sign-up their incoming student and if your number was pulled you got in. Everyone initially thought this move would create an equitable system, and it did, if you were White. The unintended consequence was that because of the racial make up of the district it is a much greater gamble to get admission if you are not White. The city the school is located in is roughly 79% White and the schools reflect this trend. However, of all the schools in the district NHS has the greatest disparity, with 83% of its students being White, six percentage points higher than the other schools. In effect, local Black and Latino families' belief

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that the school catered to White students' needs was bolstered and it has been a struggle to attract more non-White students.

Also, over time the progressive curriculum has given way to more traditional practices. The school currently operates on a block-scheduling system, which does give the teachers more time with their students. But, in light of No Child Left Behind and the age of standardized testing, traditional classes have become the core of the curriculum, while classes that a student could not take anywhere else-- like United States History through Minority Perspectives, Chinese Literature, Advanced Photography Studio, Non-Western Civilization, and Latin— powerfully augments the traditional.

I have had the pleasure of working in a number of schools and I will say without reservation that this was one of the most fulfilling experiences I have ever had. I have never encountered a staff and student body that had more community and respect for each other than at NSH. Clearly, as with any school, there are issues they can contend with. But the general spirit of the school is warm, inviting, open, and, well, fun!

In the introduction to this document I deeply explored the roots of my presence at this school. So I will not bore you with those details again, but I will give you a thumbnail sketch of the information that specifically connects to this study. Currently there are 53 staff members, which includes: 35 teachers , 2 counselors, 2 administrators, 5 administrative assistants, 4 building service workers, and 5 paraprofessionals (speech therapists, Michigan Merit Exam administrator, and other district liaisons that spend limited time in the building).

My role in the school was that of "diversity consultant." What is fascinating to me is that most of the staff did not feel there was even a problem with race, let alone the need for a consultant, until three months before I began in March of 2005. Dean Patti was put into contact with me through a mutual colleague and I was happy to come help out, or at least try some things. I collected data for three months: observing classes and hallway activity, eating with students, talking with teachers formally and informally, attending school functions, and other actions that not only provided me with an understanding of the school but also gave me a face and broke down the wall of the outsider consultant. When Dean Patti and I debriefed at the end of the year, I told her the work was just starting and I would like to think and read over the summer to come up with some strategies for how to engage the staff in these conversations.

The greatest problem for me in terms of brainstorming development activities was time. Teachers have such heavy demands on their time and only so many hours in a day. Plus, the allotment of time the school has for staff development is not that great either. All staffs in this district are allotted ten eight-hour days for staff development to utilize throughout the year. However, those ten days includes two district-level development days. Adding to the logistical nightmare, although I am of the opinion that race and diversity are the most important issues in a school, there are a number of other important issues that are dealt with during staff development days including technology skills, departmental curriculum planning, community outreach planning, other community building activities, standardized testing administration training, and

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general fellowshipping. Indeed, there is much on the professional development plate. Oh, and that does not include addressing the general day-to-day rigors of teaching.

In short, the primary constraint I had to deal with was making sure that my proposed activities were not too rigorous (a lot of outside reading) or time consuming (unlike the professional development activities of Sleeter (1993) and McIntyre (1997) explored in the *Introduction*). The idea of a mini-course about the issues of race and education was pitched to the staff, but that went over like a lead zeppelin precisely for the reasons stated above. In light of that, exploring race through the images that can be seen in film seemed to be a promising path. I had used film with great success in the teacher preparation courses I taught and I figured why not try it with a group of seasoned, practicing teachers. When I pitched the idea to Dean Patti she was intrigued and supportive of the effort and assisted in spreading the word that this activity would be coming down the pipe.

Dean Patti's approach to her staff was a more "hands-off" approach wherein she made suggestions but rarely required teachers to participate in non-mandated professional development activities. Initially I was concerned and dismayed that only 10 staff members chose to participate in the film series, but at the same time that is roughly 20 percent of the staff. More important though is the fact that I also had to navigate suspicion and confusion about my role in the school. There was quite a bit of concern and even resentment toward me on the part of some of the teachers because they did not know if I was going to be evaluating or criticizing their practice, in spite of repeated communication and

clarification by Dean Patti and me. Dean Patti and I agreed, in the end, that voluntary participation would be more respectful of the staff culture and expectations and in turn more effective than required participation.

As a final point it is key to mention that this activity is ultimately one in a larger professional development strategy for the school. In concert with Dean Patti, it was decided that in order to change the ways in which teachers thought about race and diversity more than one activity or intervention was needed. The film series stood alongside book clubs, guest speakers, staff (and student) committees, sustained discussion in staff meetings about diversity issues, curriculum advice and suggestions, and teaching observations. As will be explored later in the text, the film series ultimately served as a way of helping me understand how the teachers talked about race and diversity and allowed me insight to plan future activities. Also, the film series provided a space in which the participants could "safely" talk about race and allowed them a forum where they could become more comfortable with addressing the issue.

Production Notes: Casting

Initially I wanted this study to focus only on teachers and I had hoped to use the film discussions as sites to not only explore the representation of Whiteness but also as a space in which teachers could robustly discuss how race is tackled in their classrooms. But I was immediately met not with resistance, but with an unexpected conception of professional development for this particular school. At Northside High, all staff members (teachers, administrators, and

administrative assistants) are encouraged to participate in professional development activities. Since this was intended to be a staff development activity, participation in the study was open to all staff members. The formal announcement was issued at a staff meeting on January 11, 2006, a little over a year after the staff meeting with the resistant Black students and ten months after my first encounter with the school. The announcement provided an opportunity to allow the staff a taste of what the experience would be like. I had them watch a five-minute clip from the film *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and discuss the racial issues that arose during an argument between Mookie, the film's Black protagonist, and Vito, a White Italian who is disgusted at the fact that his father owns a pizzeria in a working class Black New York neighborhood. The following day, an official announcement letter was put into all the teacher's mailboxes. The letter briefly described the study, a list of film titles considered, and statement of confidentiality. A two-week window was extended to sign up for participation. However, as pointed out above, in a latter discussion with Dean Patti, it was decided that any school personnel would be invited to participate in any film in the series.

When I was first told this new parameter I must admit that I was somewhat concerned that the study would no longer be about teachers. However, that ultimately did not bother me and did not require me to change much about the study design. I decided that it would be appropriate to go ahead and interview the teachers as originally planned and use that data if necessary. But as I thought further about the study I became less interested in teachers themselves

and concerned more with how staffs writ large engage issues of race and Whiteness. My belief morphed to the notion that any school actor has a place and responsibility to engage issues about race and/or social justice. Moreover, as I spent time in this context I realized that students went not only to teachers to air issues and concerns but also to secretaries, speech therapists, resource room coordinators, and others. In effect, if my initial question was how do we talk about race and Whiteness, then it would behoove me to open the study to all school actors that have direct contact with students.

After the initial participants were identified, the group met to plan the dates of the first three films in the series. We agreed to meet every other week, on Thursdays. Screenings would begin around 2:00 in the afternoon and conclude around 5:00. This allowed for a film of up to two hours in length (an important selection factor) and an hour-long discussion immediately after the film.

Although it was discussed as a matter of scheduling I had no interest in the participants viewing the films on their own and convening later to discuss the films. First I feel strongly that films must be viewed in their entirety in order to be successfully read. From my experiences I have come to believe there is a "toss-up" between viewing an entire text and viewing a scene for discussion. When I first began using visual media I would show a clip and have the class discuss what they were able to glean from it. But questions would always arise that I knew could have been answered by watching the entire film. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Conrack* (1974) was a film I often used. Before using the whole film I would have students watch a scene in which Conrack first

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encountered his new students. My students would often talk about the clip through relevant course issues—cultural capital, language, inequitable funding, lowered expectations based on race, etc.—but would always wind up spending a great deal of conversation time asking for clarifications, contextual cues to orient the scene. Questions would include, "How does the school's administration interact with the students," "What role do the parents play in the film," "Does Conrack evolve his paternalist stance?" At first this was a nuisance since I wanted them to focus squarely on the scene being represented, until I realized that all these questions were important to the story and could have an effect on how my students critiqued what they were seeing.

Although viewing an entire film is logistically difficult, I grew to feel that watching the whole film, like reading an entire autobiography (Florio-Ruane and DeTar, 2001) would be more germane to mounting organic conversations as opposed to watching a clip, where typically there are specific issues the instructor or facilitator is trying to get participants to mine. In short, using clips, for me, seems to be more in line with a methodological strategy that provides an "example" of a phenomenon or concept, while using an entire film is meant to lay the foundation for a conversation that can go wherever the group wants it to go while also offering a number of examples that may be related to a course or lesson.

Second, accessibility was a serious issue. At the time the call for participation was issued, no decision had been made as to which titles would be viewed and the participants could have a hand in choosing the titles. I was not

sure at all of exactly what the series would look like. The major problem at that point was that not all films are readily available at the corner video store and at the time Internet-based video stores like Netflix had not quite hit their stride in the rental market. Plus I would not ask them to spend any money and I had none in my budget to purchase them all subscriptions for four or five months. This in fact was a struggle for me in acquiring a copy of Whiteboyz, in light of that film's virtual snuffing by the distributor and "b-list" cast (Hoch, 2000).

Finally, I was interested in having as unfettered conversations as possible. Because this was a sensitive topic, we can be sure that some participants may not have been 100 percent forthcoming about how they felt regarding what they saw or their own beliefs. McIntyre (1997) warns us of strategies White teachers tend to take in order to steer discussions away from critiques about Whiteness and White privilege. Although I could hardly ever force participants to voice all of their ideas, I can structure discussions so that they will have to recognize for themselves when they are feigning and when they are not. I would have rather had them confront their issues immediately after viewing a film rather than allow them the space to consider and reconsider initial beliefs and assumptions.

Ultimately 10 participants signed consent forms and for each screening no fewer than 8 participants attended. Of the 10, 6 were classroom teachers. The others included 2 teaching aides, 1 office assistant, and the community services officer. Racially of the participants, there was 1 Native American female, 2 Latino

males, and 1 Black male. Also there were 5 women and 5 men.[4] I will insert the table here, when I figure out how to do it.

Before the series began and in its early weeks, the teachers were individually interviewed because of their close contact with the students. The interview was designed to explore their personal histories, general pedagogical ideas, perspectives about multicultural education and professional development, and personal and professional experiences with film.[5] These interviews were largely to provide me with background information of which to be aware as their conversations ensued and my analysis was mounted. Midway through the series the group was also interviewed to offer comments about their reactions to the experience. Discussion participants were also informally interviewed between film screenings and after the series. All post-screening discussions and formal interviews were both video and audio taped and subsequently transcribed.

Production Notes: Film Selection

The films selected and their order of screening was as follows: *Crash* (2005), *Six Degrees of Separation* (1994), *Whiteboyz* (2000), *Ethnic Notions* (1986), and *Color Adjustment* (1992). The first three films are fictional feature films while the latter two are documentaries. For the purposes of this study I had intended on only screening fictional feature films, not including "school films" (Trier, 2003). I wanted to offer a broader palate of films to choose from that may or may not

[4] For a complete list and profiles of participants see Appendix C.

[5] For the complete Individual Interview Protocol see Appendix D.

have directly dealt with race? Also since many of the participants had passions for film, many of them had seen the popular school films more than once. Just as important, I wanted them to be interesting upfront, and *Dangerous Minds*, *To Sir, With Love*, and even *Conrack* have become stale and hackneyed. I had originally considered using current teen movies in which some scenes take place in schools, but I wanted my participants to have as much ownership in this professional development activity as possible and they were not interested. They wished to see something a bit more thematically challenging. Furthermore, I wanted to move outside the traditional films used for teacher education. However, once participants were identified Crash was popularly suggested as a beginning.

During the early stages of planning this dissertation, the use of the documentary *Color of Fear* (Mun Wah, 1994) as a means of engaging the participants in a conversation about White privilege and other issues related to race relations. *Color of Fear* is a fascinating and powerful documentary in which Mun Wah assembles eight men (two Asian men, two Black men, two Latinos, and two White men) to talk openly and explicitly about their lived racial experiences. The power in the film rests in the capturing of the unbridled rage and anger of racial oppression and the blind acceptance of White privilege. I highly recommend the film, but in the context of this study I did not wish to use that particular text.

I wanted to use feature films. In my experience, when a person watches a documentary there is an embedded assumption that the viewer will learn

something, whether that "lesson" is about a historic or social experience, the daily lives of a culture, the composition of celestial bodies, or how to make something. I wanted my participants to mine the messages of the feature films and consider how media that is meant to be entertaining also has a profound teaching and social effect.

As will be discussed momentarily, the introduction of documentaries into the film series was not my idea; it was the result of an expressed need from the teachers. In choosing the documentaries, a few of the teachers suggested *Color of Fear*, but as we talked about it, more of them had seen it than assumed and there was a desire to screen films that were lesser known to the participants. *Ethnic Notions* and *Color Adjustment* fit the parameters of "new" to the group: instructive, entertaining, and powerful for discussion.

What was most important though in choosing the films (focusing on features) and wholly omitting *Color of Fear* was that I did not want to approach these teachers in a condescending way by making the assumption that they had never been thoughtful about these issues before. *Color of Fear* lends itself to a classroom setting in which the phenomenon of White privilege is under study and I did not think it was as appropriate for professional development wherein I wanted the participants to begin to describe or explain the representation of White and/or Whiteness. If I had had another semester to work with the participants then I might have used *Color of Fear* further down the road. But, as the study and film series worked themselves out, it became clear that the film

series was an introduction, a way of sparking conversation and assessing how folks talk about race and Whiteness.

I was happy with the choice of *Crash* since I was leaning toward suggesting it. As a professional development activity, and considering the issues the staff was confronting, I felt it would be beneficial to engage them in a "general" conversation about race. As will be shown momentarily, the conversation about *Crash* focused primarily on the question of what is racism?

After the *Crash* screening the participants asked me to choose the following two films, simply because they were interested in seeing what I would come up with. As Tom expressed, "Joe why don't you come up with the next movie or two. You seem to have a lot of ideas and it would be neat to see what you have in mind." I chose *Six Degrees of Separation* because I felt the poor Black protagonist's desperate attempts to infiltrate a White upper-middle class family life would create rich fodder for discussions about race, but alas the conversation, as stated earlier, focused on class issues. This was fascinating, but disappointing nonetheless. I was intent on keeping the issue of race central to the conversations. Therefore the third selection had to put race and Whiteness right up front, unabashedly. *Whiteboyz* did just that.

The final two films were chosen because the teachers were interested in choosing films they could immediately take into their classrooms. As Nora, Grace, and Tom commented when the group met to discuss the final two titles:

> **Nora**: I really loved the movies we have seen so far. Except for Whiteboyz of course. But that was even really good for starting

conversations. But I would really like to watch a movie that we can use in class that is a little more instructive, like a documentary or something.

Grace: Yeah, like Eyes on the Prize.

Tom: Yeah Eyes on the Prize or something like that.

All of the first three titles were R-rated and that would make it a little difficult to use in a high school classroom, especially when engaging underclassmen. For example, *Whiteboyz* has scenes of violence, teen unprotected sex and profuse profanity. Similarly, the themes of *Crash* may be a little beyond the maturity of a ninth grader. I chose *Ethnic Notions* and *Color Adjustment* because in the spirit of professional development I wanted to show a film text as direct instruction. Both films chronicle the history and development of Black stereotypes in media. Running through stereotype constructs such as the Sambo, Mammie, Pickaninny, Uncle Tom, and others, both films push the viewer toward seeing how race is constructed through media and plays off social and political factors circulating through American life (Riggs, 1988; 1991).

Since a major purpose of my study was to conduct effective professional development, this development is particularly interesting to me. First, I had not anticipated that teachers would want to see films that they could use in their classrooms. This development signified to me that talking about race with not only other professionals but also with students was a priority among the teachers involved with the study. Like Mary pointed out during the mid-series debriefing:

> I really had a great time with that last movie. What was it called? Whiteboyz? Yeah Whiteboyz. That guy was just such an idiot, but we had such a great conversation about it. I really love that, when we can get together and just go wherever our thoughts take us. But I kept wondering how I would use that movie with my classes. I mean there is some pretty heavy stuff and even though we're a little more, you know, um, liberal I guess, than other schools around here, you still gotta draw a line.

Mary's sentiments are not unique in the sense that all the teachers interviewed expressed the notion that professional development was helpful when new ideas that could be implemented in the classroom was presented. Although I initially wanted to get away from that burden, it nonetheless came back through the voice and concerns of the teachers involved. I had no intent or desire to offer lesson plans or anything like that, but to engage teachers in conversations that helped them to challenge pedagogy. In the end though, it seems that regardless of how professional development is structured, the "grammar of professional development" has built an expectation that all activities will ultimately directly translate to classroom practice rather than exercises for the express purpose of just talking.

After our discussions in the first three films, although they were highly spirited and interesting, I ultimately agreed that it would be good for them to see documents that could also instruct them on how to see trends in the construction of characters in film and other sites. *Ethnic Notions* and *Color Adjustment* are

strong visual texts that can introduce them and their students to issues relevant to media literacy, representation, and multicultural education. Ultimately, the final selections shifted from solely inciting conversation to offering direct instruction.

The Screenings

The screening of all films followed the same format. As everyone convened for the beginning of the film, I presented a brief statement. My introductions established the social context for the film, information the participants were advised to keep aware of as they watched and reflected on the texts. I pointed out key factors in the production or themes of the films.[6] For example, the *Crash* introduction exposes the roots of the film as expressed by the writer and director, Paul Haggis. With *Whiteboyz* a brief history of hip hop was provided that also explored the suburbanization of an urban, working class, Black and Brown cultural movement (George, 1998; Kitwana, 2005).

Next I started the film. During the running of the film I offered no parameters for viewing the text. I informed the participants they were free to point out something to the group and were free to respond to images or dialogue however they saw fit. Across all three screenings no one ever asked to stop the film and replay a scene. At most, participants only solicited dialogue or character clarifications, and their responses to what was happening on the screen did not seem unusual. For instance, in a scene in *Crash*, one character makes an uncomfortable joke about Latinos. There was feigned laughter in the room,

[6] For the full text of the *Crash* and *Whiteboyz* framing essays see Appendixes E and F respectively.

which was a similar reaction I found when viewing the film in a cinema. The participants always seemed engaged with the texts (no one fell asleep or seemed to not enjoy the films).

Immediately after the screening we took about a ten-minute break and reconvened to discuss the film. I pointed out that the conversation was theirs and they could go wherever they felt. As the series began I took on a much stronger presence by asking many questions from the Post-screening Questions Protocol.[7] The questions ranged from, "Based upon this film, what does it mean to be White or Black" to "What was your initial reaction to the film?" But as the discussions progressed I began to feel the need to not offer so much guidance and let them really go. By the third screening, *Whiteboyz*, I would ask questions as seldom as possible, apart from repeating the questions at the beginning of the screening, but I would also be available to clarify points of the text, such as character names, plot progression, production notes, or dialogue clarification if necessary. Literally I chose to keep all avenues of discussion open because I was interested in hearing where they would go. The relatively free form did not become an issue until the mid-series debriefing when the participants asked for films they could take directly to class for instructive purposes. The post-screening discussions lasted between 60 minutes and 85 minutes.

[7] For the complete list of Post-screening Questions Pool see Appendix G.

Editing Issues: Learning from *Crash* and Focusing on *Whiteboyz*

Above I expressed that the reporting of this study will focus on the conversation around the film *Whiteboyz*. There are a few key factors that went into this decision. The film series was intended to encourage conversations about race among teachers and other staff members. I believed that the most important missing piece of the staff's exploration of racial issues was their relative omission of talk beyond White privilege to investigating exactly what is Whiteness, how to identify it, and how to see it unfold in institutional practices. Pedagogically I felt that upfront it was important to have a general conversation about race in the effort of thematically easing into a more direct conversation that explores that Whiteness. Our first film, *Crash*, began that exploration.

The conversation around *Crash* began with a statement that explored the roots of the film, focusing on the experiences of Paul Haggis, the film's director and co-story writer (Appendix E). I went on to ask two key questions to frame their viewing of the film: How is racism defined through the film? And, choose a character or two that most resembles your own racial background. How would their story change if they were a different race? As the conversation unfolded, in spite of the fascinating exchange of ideas, I found that the conversation was not necessarily as instructive about Whiteness as I had hoped. Centrally, the conversation did not significantly move past a conversation about how racism is defined through the film.

According to Haggis, *Crash* is principally about isolation. As he states, "The movie is about our fear of strangers and we isolate ourselves from

strangers. Its only when we collide with each other do we feel something" (Conant, 2005). And this is evident throughout the text. Haggis is expressing a perception of life in a wholly diverse city divided into spaces where some reside and others do not. Whites don't mix with Blacks who don't mix with Asians who don't mix with Persians who don't mix with Latinos, ad nauseum.

Most of the participants who watched *Crash* did not know that Los Angeles was so racially and ethnically segregated. But Hector, a Latino from East Los Angeles, was able to validate this notion about the City of Angels for the rest of the group. Gloria pointed out that although she loved the film she was disturbed by the extreme stereotypes represented. Hector then responded by talking about the fragmentation of L.A.:

> **Hector**: It's a very L.A. movie. And I think that that's why, I mean besides the fact that the director lives there, I think L.A. is the perfect place to set a movie like that in because you do have all those different groups in L.A. And L.A. is very segregated. It has its pockets. So you know if you go to this community (gesticulating with his hand) its an Asian community. If you go to certain places there are Latin neighborhoods, White neighborhoods. And its only certain places where people see each other, you know? The malls... Its only when people are out shopping do people cross paths. And even then, people can kinda stay in their own neighborhoods. Blacks and Latinos may go to the White malls because they have a better selection.

Gloria: So you're saying that people do live in isolated groups?

Hector: Oh yeah.

Nora: I remember my nephew asked my sister, "Where do all the gardeners and nannies live?" 'Cause they sure don't live in his neighborhood!

The film promotes the notion that racism operates at the institutional level, evidenced by scenes highlighting racist practices in the Los Angeles Police Department and in the television industry, but more substantively the film promotes the idea that racism is an indelible part of all of us and we are all capable of redemptive actions. In short, everyone is a racist and everyone is virtuous. Throughout the film we see characters caught-up in situations that snowball into full-blown racist behaviors against another. The participants latched onto this, and that notion centered the conversation.

In a passage of the conversation, the group was discussing a scene in which Daniel, a Black male who the viewers know is a carjacker, is picked up by an off-duty police officer while walking across the Hollywood hills on a cold Christmas season night. We soon find out that it is not the notorious racist cop of the film but his ex-partner, Officer Hanson who is curiously dubbed "the good cop." Through a series of presumptions Officer Hanson makes about Daniel, who was in fact trying to connect with the officer. The scene crescendos with Officer Hanson fatally shooting Daniel because the officer assumed he was attempting to pull a gun from his jacket. In this passage, Anne and Errol eloquently summarized the scene and its power:

Anne: I remember thinking, "Oh no! Don't pick him up! Don't pick him up!" And then they do the cinematic trick and it's the good cop that picks him up and I'm going, "Oh, relief. He's with the good guy." And then in that, that's where I made my assumption. I'm caught-up in it; it drags me into the film. And I've made this assumption about this kid based on what we have seen. And that to me was the shocker of the film, how it pulls you in.

Errol: There's just so much irony in the film that way. And I don't think it's a trick. You called it a "trick," a "cinematic trick," and I don't think it's a trick. But it all fits. I think this is the perfect little movie. It is tied together so well, and what it does is, it deals with this whole notion of appearance and reality. And that what appears to be through the lens of prejudice isn't always the reality... I think the scene you're talking about where the young cop does in fact shoot the guy, Daniel, I think that sort of embodies the whole film. I mean that's the tragic outcome of whatever he felt intellectually that made him want a new partner, that made him stand up and face (his commanding officer) you think this guy knows what racism is and he's not going to be one. Yet, and I think this is what the filmmaker's suggesting, its not something you can intellectualize away. That racism and the way we view people and view others is so steeped in the media, how our parents, how our culture defines

it in us. And so subconsciously he was just as racist as his fellow cop, even though intellectually he would deny it.

The points raised in this passage strike at the heart of why using *Crash* to discuss race is such a difficult task. The film promotes ideas that universalize the experience of racism to the point in which it is merely a natural part of the human condition. In other words, racism and prejudice just is. Racism ultimately distills to a series of choices people make-- sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Anne issued the following point and was met with a chorus of head nods and various significations of affirmation:

Anne: Assumptions, in every, in every scene there's assumptions made about one character to another. And then fear is played out in every scene too. There's this fear. And the fear…

Gloria: Like Daniel.

Anne: Yeah fear of the unknown. Or fear of the person. So the assumption causes them to make, you know, a a misjudgment about that person's character 'cause they made an assumption based on stereotypes of that culture, that person's culture. And then fear. It just seemed like there was so much fear in all these encounters. Um, and that, that colored everything as well.

All the vignettes in this film point back to a basic human condition. There is plenty good to be said about the sentiment generated by this film. However, this message also has a less charitable dimension. The film's message can also be seen as a liberal trope that gives us an "out" in terms of racism, an example of

McIntyre's notion of shadowboxing, or talking around the essential role of Whiteness in shaping institutional practices and social mores (McIntyre, 1999). We all are racist! Therefore to "cure" racism we must continue to examine ourselves. This does not read against the film but accepts the general ideas of universality and individual morality promoted through the story. The film is a prime example of McCarthy's (1997) notion of film singing "lullabies about what a large part of (the audience) already knows" (p. 229).

Our society has moved to the point in which overt acts of racism, such as using racial epithets, is gravely frowned upon. Just ask Don Imus, Michael Richards, and Mel Gibson. But for every argument out there about individuals' actions and speech, there remain holes in how our structures that promote and protect inequitable practices. This can be seen in the film when considering the scene in which Officer Hanson, a White male, tries to get a new partner to replace his racist partner, Officer Ryan whom is also a White male. Hanson's commanding officer, Lieutenant Dixon (L.T.), a Black man, tells Officer Hanson how it goes down at the LAPD:

> **Hanson**: I don't want to cause any problems Lieutenant; I just want a new partner.
>
> **L.T.**: Oh I understand. Your partner is a racist prick and you don't want to stir up any bad feelings with him.
>
> **Hanson**: Well he's been on the force for a long time and I...
>
> **L.T.**: Seventeen years.
>
> **Hanson**: ... And I do have to work here, Sir.

L.T.: So, you don't mind if there's a racist prick on the force. You just don't want him riding in your car.

Hanson: If you need me to go on record about this I will.

L.T.: That'd be great. Write a full report (spoken with sarcasm). Because I'm interested to understand how a bigot could have gone undetected in the department for seventeen years, eleven of which he was under my supervision. That doesn't speak highly of my managerial skills, but that's not your concern. I can't wait to read it.

Lieutenant Dixon is expressing to Officer Hanson the reality of functioning in a complicated, contradictory institutional structure that embeds serious repercussions for whistle blowing racist practices. The sarcasm peppered across the L.T.'s comments point to the notion that in spite of his own disdain for racist police officers, it is just much easier to pass them along rather risking his own ostracizing or loss of command. Here is where the notion of racism Haggis furthers and the notion of universality and individual choice embraced by the participants loses credibility. The L.T. and Officer Hanson did have personal choices and responsibilities in this situation, but those choices do not exist in a vacuum. There are repercussions to their actions and the structure of the system clearly did not do an effective job of promoting battling racism within the ranks.

In the discussion there was talk around institutions and institutional constraints, but the emphasis always came back to the experience of the individual and in turn the conversation did not mount a direct critique of how institutional structures present constraints to behaviors (McLeod, 1996). This

point can also be seen while discussing the characters Rick and Jeanne, the district attorney and his wife (both White) who were carjacked. In the film, Rick's political haggling over how to spin the fact that two Black men carjacked their Cadillac Escalade is juxtaposed to a vicious tirade by Jeanne in which she hurls racist epithets and assumptions about a Latino locksmith. Through the film Jeanne comes to face the fact of her anger but only as a result of finding that the only person there for her is her paid Latina housekeeper. On the other hand Rick decides to pin a medal on a Black man to show the public he has no spite for the Black community. Simply, Errol proposed the notion that it was a political game that any holder of public office would have to play, and that's just how it is. Ultimately institutional actors make choices, often in the effort of achieving the best results. Errol stated:

> They all (the characters) have varying degrees of prejudices. Sandra Bullock's character (Jeanne) I think at least comes to recognize it. But she's not doing it for the right reasons. It's for political reasons, like her husband, you know? "I gotta pin a medal on a Black guy. Oh why does he have to be named Sadaam?" You know? But that's a political reality. So I think a lot of time people's choices are just pragmatic. In order to do good work sometimes you just have to do the practical thing.

This passage is illustrative of how talk about institutional racism comes up but disappears as quickly. Racism can be seen in institutions, but it is ultimately

about people's choices regardless of whether or not those choices reproduce racist practices.

Instances of institutional racism in the film are seen specifically in four sites: the district attorney's office, the insurance/healthcare industry, television, and the Los Angeles Police Department, or as we say LAPD. In one scene we see the district attorney plan the spin of his car jacking. He finds it necessary to make sure he is seen doing something positive with a Black person, like pinning a medal. Cameron is "asked" by his White producer to reshoot a scene because one of the characters did not sound Black enough. Later we see Officer Hansen ask for a new partner because he is tired of his partner's racist behavior. The commanding officer, a Black man, points out that Officer Ryan has been on the force for 17 years, 11 under his command. How is he supposed to explain that? The film points out the contradictions of life and how those contradictions can rest in the world of color and race. But ultimately, the viewer walks away with the validation that fundamentally it is all about our choices that shape the racial and racist landscape of the United States. Errol went on to raise an unavoidable point: "Racism and the way we view people and view others is so steeped in the media, how our parents, how our culture defines it in us." The role of institutions was not, in the final analysis of this film and conversation, an equal part of the calculus of racism. Racism, as defined by the group, is a result of miscommunication, fear, and stereotypes under the pressure of a real life circumstance. Institutions were merely places, sites if you will, where these things happen.

But what was never seriously taken up in the discussion was the presence of Whiteness, the principal reason this dissertation focuses more on the conversation about *Whiteboyz*. Across the conversation the talk focused on racism, stereotypes, miscommunication, and fear. We never took up what it meant to *be* White in terms of the text. But I do not blame my participants for this. There are a few possible explanations for why Whiteness was not explicitly raised. One possibility is that the participants simply chose to avoid the topic. I do not think this is a plausible hypothesis because all the participants expressed an interest in having critical discussions about race and they all were aware of the notion of White privilege and in effect Whiteness. Another possibility is that people were so intently listening to each other, the role of Whiteness slipped their minds. Again, I do not find this plausible because in at least four different places throughout the conversation, Nora brought up the framing question of considering how a character's story may have been different if the character had been a different race. Since the majority of the screeners were White and were supposed to focus on a White character, with regular redirections back to race, I can hardly believe that the participants just simply forgot to consider the impact of Whiteness on the film.

Another important alternative hypothesis is that since the discussions ranged from 60 to 80 minutes there simply was not enough time to mount a discussion about Whiteness. Along with that, I did not ask pointed questions that lead the participants to discuss Whiteness. These two points are very important and are especially relevant to the discussions around *Crash* and *Whiteboyz*. But

I do not give these explanations much credence because all the discussions were framed with race and Whiteness in the fore. Although I did not specifically ask the participants to discuss Whiteness in the framing for *Crash*, there were many openings in the conversation in which Whiteness was the elephant in the room. Moreover, as will be later shown in the *Whiteboyz* discussion, the participants were explicitly asked to talk about Whiteness. It leads me to believe that given the historic silencing of Whiteness in public discourses and texts (Dyer, 1997; Morrison, 1993) it is simply status quo to not critically engage or name Whiteness. People are just not used to it. Because of that historic silencing, when Whiteness does come up, I believe that folks are just not sure of where to go with it, how to see it, or how to grapple with it, and that can lead to silence and frustration. I do confess that the framing of the questions for the discussion around *Crash* provided an opening to talk specifically about racism, but not race and definitely not Whiteness. I set out to correct that strategic faux pas with the *Whiteboyz* discussion.

When I learned that these participants did not talk explicitly about Whiteness, I learned something important about my own preconceptions and about professional development in this case. I learned that although explicit introduction of Whiteness is an important step in demystifying and racializing Whiteness, that must quickly be accompanied by a more structured process through which the "uninitiated" can understand and embrace the idea of Whiteness, its myriad roles in the formation of national and world history and culture, and eventually how to work against its institutional privilege. This is a

difficult but wholly necessary task in the effort of substantively altering the notions of race and racism in the United States. As Katz (2003) points out:

> Instead of talking about the present-day impact of our history, we congratulate ourselves on how far we have come and how progressive we now seem. Because race has been such a contentious and difficult subject for many, we talk around it rather than address it head-on. (p. 3)

In this comment, Katz reprises the point that addressing Whiteness is both elusive and charged. Regardless, she issues the proverbial challenges for the generations:

> The task that confronts us all is to develop a way of identifying the issues of racism as they exist in the White community and helping White people to grow and learn about ourselves as Whites in this society. How can we help White people to shatter the myths that have sheltered us for so long and to begin focusing on the difficult realities and discrepancies that are present in our society today? (pp. 4-5)

Katz point is fundamental to the advance of understanding race and social justice. What I learned through this experience with these school actors is that care, patience, and structure ought to be provided when discussing Whiteness. I realized that this particular model for professional development is powerful as an introduction. It allows for the facilitator understanding of how individuals in the context talk about race and how

they may feel talking to each other. They were open with me because they felt safe with me, but that did not necessarily translate to being able to dive in head-first and construct for themselves what these films were saying about what it meant to be White!

I had a concept and hope in my mind that when I asked my participants to think about how racism is defined through the film, they would begin to have a conversation about both how White people were portrayed as well as the values promoted through the text. I asked them to choose a character of their own background and consider that character's story as a way of letting them think both objectively and subjectively about the experience of Whiteness on the screen. I felt as though I made important statements upfront encouraging the participants to think about the fact that Haggis was a White man who was carjacked by two Black men, and that his story decisions are filtered through that experience. But in the context of the screening and the ensuing conversation, White was eclipsed and racism was magnified.

As I have thought about this for quite some time, watching the film, and reading the transcript, I have come to believe that the primary reason my participants did not address Whiteness to the degree I had hope was because of how I framed the discussion, asking them to first consider how racism is defined and then choosing a character. I did not follow through on my own belief that Whiteness should be explicitly engaged. By not asking them to consider upfront what it meant to be White alongside how racism I inadvertently made the conversation about racism and not race. The two concepts were conflated and I

assumed the group would tease this out. The same point stands for the *Six Degrees of Separation* screening.

The framing of *Whiteboyz* was meant to ameliorate the misstep of not explicitly asking about Whiteness. In trying to talk about how Whiteness is constructed, within the film and socially, perhaps the participants could arrive at larger notions of racism as an institutional phenomenon. For example, as they began to discuss the limited representations of Blacks in the media they could consider how institutional practices in the mainstream media contribute to racism and the privileging of Whiteness. You will have to read the next chapter to find out what happens. But the larger point I am making is that the most important decision one can make as a facilitator is how they begin the conversation.

In summary, although *Crash* is a wonderfully compelling film, its populist notion that racism is a condition of the human experience that is aggravated by our lack of connection with others is a comfortable theme for the largely White viewers that paid to see the film (in the theater and on video). Everyone, supposedly, is indicted. As Larenze Tate, who portrays Daniel, one of the carjackers, stated, "Everybody gets their due" (Lion's Gate Films, 2005, p. 5). On one hand I can understand that notion. We all, in different ways, are privileged and marginalized, depending on context. However, the key problem about race talk in the United States is the focus primarily rests on individuals and not institutions. Moreover talk about race focuses on "the other" and not Whiteness. It is a classic question: Just because we all hold hands and sing "We Are the World" and treat each other with respect, does that necessarily mean we will

reframe institutional practices that ameliorate institutional racism? It is not enough to encourage politeness, but to encourage critical analysis and action to change institutional constraints. A substantial part of that critical analysis is pointing out where and when Whiteness appears-- or disappears.

CHAPTER IV

CREATING THE STORYBOARD AND PRODUCTION NOTES II:

Analytical Considerations

The following sections are intended to offer an orientation to understanding the analytical framework I bring to these data. I focus here on Whiteness and ways of understanding Whiteness. I am particularly interested in exploring three central questions. First, what is Whiteness and how has that influenced my framing of the idea within this study? This section argues that engaging Whiteness must move past the physical descriptor of White, which is important, but Whiteness as an epistemological idea has a further reaching impact when considering institutional racism and the expectations of the dominant group toward marginalized groups. Second, how did White become institutionalized and normalized? Utilizing Critical Race Theory, I show how the notion of White and Whiteness became embedded within law and social practices. And third, how is Whiteness seen beyond the norm? As has been stated earlier, the role of Whiteness is largely not discussed in light of its positioning as "the norm." I show that for some, Whiteness can be equated to domination, fear, and loathing, but this is only one read, although a read I believe many African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asians have lived experiences with. But discussing Whiteness solely through a lens of domination is not productive. In turn it is necessary to think about Whiteness more robustly with the goal of encouraging conversations rather than closing them off.

This analytical framework is crucial to this study as it lays out the roots for needing examinations of Whiteness and offers the framework I employed to consider how Whiteness enters—or does not enter—conversations. A central question for this study, as mentioned above, is how do elements and aspects of Whiteness enter conversations about race? This particular question is the center of my analysis in the hopes that my findings can offer guidance about professional development around diversity issues, and as an attempt to extend a conversation that directly questions American life, culture, schooling, and teaching.

Seeing through Us and Them: Understanding Whiteness

Many researchers suggest that the notion of Whiteness has been outside the frame of daily interaction and personal analysis because of the silent position it has taken in American history and culture (Dyer 1997; Morrison 1993; Roediger 1998). The virtual silence of Whiteness as a cultural and political force in the popular discourse leaves a hole in thinking about how race impacts the lives of teachers and students because it neglects to entertain the whole equation, a point that fails to voice the construction of one at the expense of the perceived other. Florio-Ruane (2001) further explains:

> Lack of cultural understanding and awareness reinforces Euro-American teachers' sense of "us" as normal (mainstream, White, or colorless) and "them" as abnormal (minority, of color, non-native

speaking). Yet implicitly, the unmarked form is defined in its relationship to the marked form. (p.32)

In effect, when teachers are engaged about issues of race there is great need to move discussions past teaching tolerance of "others" toward more critical discussions about how race is constructed (Sleeter and Grant, 1999), with a keen focus on the construction of the unexamined dominant "us"—White folks. It was within that vein this study emanated.

An essential point that orients this study is the theoretical stance that one does not necessarily need to be phenotypically White in order to adopt White epistemologies. According to recent Whiteness theorists, White people and Whiteness are two separate (yet related) ideas (Doane, 1997; Feagin, 2000; Omi and Winant, 1994). Leonardo (2004) states, "Whiteness is a racial discourse, whereas the category of white people represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color." Whiteness has been generally constructed as a system of thoughts, values, assumptions, and beliefs that shape the ways in which an individual interacts with and interprets her/his environment (Anderson 2003; Doane 2003; Hitchcock 2002). Doane (2003) eloquently locates the notion of Whiteness in the context of the ideology of race. She states:

> "Whiteness" must be understood as a position in a specific set of social relationships—a "racialized social system" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997)—and as a historically contingent social identity. While "White" has been used in a descriptive sense in a variety of settings, including China and the Middle East, the hardening of

> group boundaries and the racialization of Whiteness are modern phenomena linked to European conquest and colonialism (Bonnett, 1998) and the spread of global capitalism. In the United States, "Whiteness" slowly emerged as a socially constructed identity in concert with the racialization of dispossession and enslavement and in response to ruling-class strategies to separate indentured servants and landless free persons on the basis of race (Allen, 1994, 1997; Fields, 1990; Takaki, 1993). "Whiteness" then, was constructed as a claim to superiority and privilege in contradistinction to a racial "other"—groups defined as inferior in an emerging racialized social system and its supporting ideology of "race." (pp. 9-10)

In other words, Whiteness can be understood as an epistemological lens through which individuals negotiate any given cultural space. Doane supports the notion that White shifted from a general descriptor to a socially constructed set of ideals, values, ways of being that differed from "others."

As a socially constructed epistemology, critical interpretations of Whiteness have come to be identified with a number of signifiers. Fine, Weis, Powell, and Mun Wong (1997) explain the construction of Whiteness as:

> Objectivity, normality, truth, knowledge, merit, motivation, achievement, and trustworthiness; it accumulates invisible supports that contribute unacknowledged to the already accumulated and bolstered capital of Whiteness. Rarely, however, is it

> acknowledged that Whiteness demands and constitutes hierarchy, exclusion, and deprivation. (p. xxi)

Fine, Powell, Weis, and Mun Wong point to a number of signifiers that describe Whiteness and its social power. If we look across the American social landscape Whiteness is one of the significant factors of assimilation. The more individuals adopt and reflect the norms, values, and styles of Whiteness the more accepted they are across social institutions (Ignatiev, 1996; Jacobson, 1999). The power of Whiteness rests in the notion that in order to succeed one must show her/his ability to navigate this particular way of seeing and interacting with the world.

This differential is important to my study because I wanted teachers to understand the notion that being White is not solely about skin color; it is more importantly about ideas, dispositions, and actions and this can have impact on curriculum, pedagogy, policy, and students' experiences. The ways in which we experience the world is filtered through a number of different lenses or identities. Our gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, among other factors shapes our individual and collective ideas. Race is such an important factor in light of the emphasis that has been historically placed on it, a point that will be explored momentarily. Decisions about schooling in the policy and curriculum spheres has been influenced by race in terms of where schools are built, emphasis of curriculum programs, and hiring practices (Anyon, 1997). Alongside the more obvious imposition of Whiteness as a racist epistemology, immigrants from all parts of the globe were more or less required to assimilate into American culture, American being code for White (Sanchez, 1995). This process, Americanization,

has been an essential part of American education, especially during the wave of European immigration through the early to middle 1900s (Tyack, 1976). We can still see reverberations of that process in the arguments around bilingual education and English as a second language programs. We can also see it in the struggles across the racial divide in schools today.

Within Northside High School, the teachers have been confronted with Black students' claims that teachers do not understand them as Black people, and that charge implies that the teachers do not see through their own Whiteness in order to fully understand what a non-White student must address in order to be successful academically and socially. In this theoretical framework, being White is not fundamentally about skin color, although that is an important part. But what is more powerful is the epistemological and social constraints and privileges of Whiteness and the burden of others to assimilate into them.

In the context of Northside High School, many of the teachers admit to their unease about broaching the subject of race and Whiteness but more importantly they have not had the professional development to help them understand exactly how to assess and describe Whiteness as a culture. Explaining their lack of professional development on this topic, Grace pointed out:

> You know Joseph when we have professional development its usually some big district meeting where we get a PowerPoint and a lecture from some no-name consultant. And if it is about multicultural issues we might hear about White privilege but over

the last few years it has been more about what's wrong with or how to reach Black and Latino kids.

Tom echoed Grace's sentiment:

Tom: I don't know. I get a little out of professional development, like when we talked about multiple intelligences. But it doesn't really help me understand how to deal with students in class. And I cant say that even after all these years of teaching if feel anymore comfortable having conversations about race with my students.

Joseph: How about with other staff members?

Tom: Maybe one-on-one conversations but I tend to be quite in big groups.

Quite simply, engaging conversations about race continue to be difficult and given that constraint, mounting explicit conversations about Whiteness is all the more problematic.

Creating the Perfect Monster:
Whiteness, Law, and the Institutionalization of White(ness)

To understand Whiteness it is key to consider its historic construction. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a useful area of study for this purpose. CRT is a form of legal analysis, created as a response to the race-neutral analysis of Critical Legal Studies. Drawing perspectives from ethnic studies, feminist studies, and postcolonial studies, CRT is an analytical framework that addresses social justice and racial oppression in law (Bell 1993; Ladson-Billings

1998/2004). CRT is important for thinking about these issues because it bolsters the notion of Whiteness as a socially constructed phenomenon created for specific purposes. Although I do not directly employ ideas from CRT in the context of this study, CRT has helped me in shaping understanding of Whiteness as something more than a silent norm, but a powerful political, legal, economic, and social force. A useful example of CRT can helps us understand how the American legal system created and manipulated the notion of Whiteness, cementing the influence of Whiteness across the American fabric.

Another Whiteness theorist who approaches the idea from a more functional perspective is Harris (1998). She illustrates how Whiteness can be seen as both a property that affords particular privileges in economic, social, and legal institutions and an ideological orientation. According to Harris, the legal construction of Whiteness institutionalized identity and privilege, as well as property, an element owned by an individual that can be used to acquire resources. Most salient in her analysis is that of the property functions of Whiteness. Employing classical and contemporary property theories, Harris shows that laws were created to define who could be included as White and functioned to accord "holders of Whiteness the same privileges and benefits accorded holders of other types of property" (p. 108). Early laws meant to define who could vote originally privileged male property owners, but the train for suffrage first stopped to pick up all White men, regardless of land ownership. Whiteness in turn became the relevant factor in who could vote.

Her analysis further explores how Whiteness as a property offered holders of such property the ability to exclude. As she expounds:

> The possessors of Whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges in Whiteness; Whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded. The courts played an active role in enforcing this right to exclude—determining who was or was not White enough to enjoy the privileges accompanying Whiteness. (p. 112)

Simultaneously, for Harris and others (Doane, 2003; Frankenberg, 1993; Roediger, 1991), Whiteness as a theoretical construct or ideology became predicated on the notion that its value rests in its exclusive powers. We can see this in the continued issues surrounding, the "3/5 Clause of the Constitution, the "one-drop rule," immigration and assimilation, the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizens Councils, and other contemporary hate groups that seek to sustain the superior positioning of Whiteness and White people in America's social hierarchy. Thus as Harris (1998) states, "The concept of Whiteness is built on both exclusion and racial subjugation" (p. 112).

These moves in the law ultimately asserted that if one is not "purely" White then one does not have the right to access the privileges and resources afforded to Whiteness. The question is whether or not Whiteness is a property in today's context? One could also ask why so much White anger and guilt continues to persist in spite of clear statistical data that shows the continued privilege of

Whiteness (Fine, 1997)? The fundamental question, the question I wanted my participants to explore, is how do we see-- or not see-- Whiteness?

Ways of Seeing Whiteness

hooks (1992/1998) constructs Whiteness as mysterious and terrorizing. She points out the history of Whites perpetrating atrocities against people of color, and espouses the idea that since segregation was so deeply entrenched into the American way of life, it was rare to have the opportunity to get to know White people. As she states:

> I want to focus on the representation of Whiteness that is not formed in reaction to stereotypes but emerges as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of White racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way Black folks 'see' White folks. (p. 43)

Testimonies and stories offered by writers and critics display the historic and contemporary negotiation of a terrain laid down by Whites. As hooks points out, "All Black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by Whiteness" (p. 50). The terror she speaks of is inclusive of ideological, institutional, and psychic, as well as physical terror. Recounting the events of a cultural studies conference she notes how in spite of being surrounded by other like-minded progressive intellectuals, White hierarchies were perpetuated through who was speaking, who was in attendance, where people were seated on the stage, and other

examples. She questions, "If these progressive people, most of whom were White, could so blindly reproduce a version of the status quo and not 'see' it, the thought of how racial politics would be played 'outside' this arena was horrifying" (p. 52). That fear is all the more powerful when considering a context like the one of this study: a high performing suburban high school in which 85 percent of the students are White and the teaching staff is over 95 percent White!

Dyer (1997) expresses the need to interrogate the notions and representations of White and Whiteness in order to see White as a race and not simply a norm. He states, "As long as race is something only applied to non-White peoples, as long as White people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people" (p. 1).

Through his text, *White* (1997), Dyer makes bold criticism about the construction of "White" and shows how the film industry and the technological advances therein aided in constructing White as beauty, purity, and perfection. Beginning with the idea that talking about White ethnics (Italians, Irish, Albanians, etc.) pulls the discourse away from the power and privileges of White in Western culture. In fact, the overwhelming majority of media is a conversation among White people about White people; only they are constructed solely as people. Dyer states:

> Research... repeatedly shows that in Western representation Whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominate,

have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. (p. 3)

Given this condition it is not a stone's throw to understand how Whiteness becomes loudly silent!

What is most salient in Dyer's exposition is that Whiteness is embodied (pp. 14-40). The embodiment of Whiteness is constituted through shifting perspectives of Christianity, race, and imperialism. The commingling of these factors privileged notions like the Protestant Ethic (hard work equals success), delayed gratification, material gain, self control and denial, energy, will, ambition, rationality, and individuality. It is not the case that these points are indigenous to Whiteness, but that these points do appropriately describe the epistemic foundations of Whiteness. Race as a physical construct, according to Dyer, is fundamentally important to constructing Whiteness. Before the 1950s it was common to talk about the White race and innate qualities of White people. But now to talk about race is "to talk about all races except White" (p. 18). Considering the constructions of Whiteness expressed above, White became a political construction allying disparate groups of people in opposition to other groups. "(White) has generally been much more successful than class in uniting people across national cultural differences and against their best interests" (p. 19).

Focusing on the construction of racial coalitions, Whiteness is key for two reasons. First, it categorizes who can and cannot be White. For example, as referred to above, African Americans, regardless of skin tone, could not be White

because of the fact that "Black blood" runs through their veins. Historically Whiteness was constructed as purity, and even though many Black folks attempted to "pass" for White if their skin color and hair texture permitted, there was the recurring fear that one would be "found out" and the privileges of being White would be stripped (and depending on the era of history they likely could have been lynched). Second, it shows that some are more White than others, wherein Anglo-Saxons, Germans, and Scandinavians are at the top of the hierarchy. Groups like Italians and Irish had to endure a much more rigorous negotiation and assimilation process, but ultimately they became allied with White by virtue of skin color and adopted cultural values (Guglielmo 2003; Ignatiev 1996). This creates a racial hierarchy and boundary for Whiteness and makes acquiring Whiteness more compelling due to the privilege Whiteness confers.

Dyer is important to this inquiry because he addresses the roots of Whiteness and further explores how the representation of Whiteness was manipulated to construct popular notions of beauty, purity, and perfection. As Hollywood mined the folklore and mythology of White(ness), an image was created and reproduced in which White became the virtuous while all others became objects in need of uplift, a common trope in Hollywood from D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation to Steven Spielberg and George Lucas' Indiana Jones Trilogy (Gordon, 2003). But yet again, Whiteness seems to be constructed primarily as a destructive, oppressive epistemology. This is problematic because when engaging teachers, let alone anyone, in

conversations about race incessant constructions of depravity, arrogance, Manifest Destiny, exclusion, paternalism, and oppression tends to turn them off. People do not want to see themselves as such, regardless of the accuracy of the construction. More importantly, the possibility for creating allies is diminished.

In light of this notion I found it fundamentally important to open discussions about race, and specifically Whiteness, as broadly as possible. I wanted my participants to seek out for themselves evidence within the selected films that point to what it means to be White. I hoped they would consider attitudes, dispositions, assumptions, or statements from characters that questioned or described what White meant through the texts. I would not say they failed at this, but by the same token they did not necessarily do that. For instance, and this will be touched upon later, while discussing *Whiteboyz*, the group found it difficult to talk explicitly about the diversity of White characters represented in the film and further could not make specific statements regarding the assumptions about Whiteness that characters were expressing or embodying. At many points throughout the film characters would ask, "Why do you act so Black," encouraging the assumption that there is a way to "act so White." However, the participants found that to be a difficult question to sink their teeth into.

Popular constructions of Whiteness and White culture create a narrow door through which one can pass into Whiteness and eclipses myriad ways of thinking evident across the White population of the United States. Hitchcock realizes this problem and quietly mentions in the text that "most" White people

experience those characteristics "most" of the time (Hitchcock 2002, p. 113). Does the dismissal or challenge of particular cultural practices and perspectives exclude one from that culture? This is an important question about assimilation and identity that my participants ultimately took up in the discussion around *Whiteboyz*.

As a caution, Howard (1999) asserts that we must be prudent with "academic rhetoric that equates Whiteness with oppression" (p. 110). Howard asks a compelling question, "If Whiteness is theorized to be synonymous with oppression, and then how do we provide White educators with a positive racial identity and include them in the work of social transformation" (p. 111)?

Giroux (1997) comments on the need to be prudent in investigating Whiteness and to use caution to work against essentializing Whiteness. His words work best here and I must quote at length:

> While it is imperative that a critical analysis of "Whiteness" address its historical legacy and existing complicity with racist exclusion and oppression, it is equally crucial that such work distinguish between "Whiteness" as a racial identity that is nonracist or anti-racist and those aspects of "Whiteness" that are racist. Where "Whiteness" has been dealt with in educational terms the emphasis is almost exclusively on revealing "Whiteness" as an ideology of privilege mediated largely through the dynamics of racism. While such interventions are crucial in developing antiracist pedagogy, they do not go far enough. I am concerned about what it means

> educationally for those of us who engage in an antiracist pedagogy and politics to suggest to students that "Whiteness" can only be understood in terms of the common experience of White domination and racism. What subjectivities or points of identification become available to White students who can only imagine White experience as monolithic, self-contained, and deeply racist? What are the educational and political stakes in rearticulating "Whiteness" in anti-essentialist terms so that White youth can understand and struggle against the long legacy of White racism while using the particularities of their own culture as a resource for resistance, reflection, and empowerment? (p. 91)

Giroux and Howard point out a key factor that is often missed in criticism against multicultural education and talk about diversity. The notion of culture is complex and multifaceted (Erickson, 2001). Just as we must be vigilant to not essentialize Blackness and Black people we must be vigilant to not essentialize Whiteness and White people.

McCarthy (1993) astutely adds to this conversation. He further states, "Static definitions of what White people are like and what minorities are like can lead to costly miscalculations that can undermine the goal of race relations reform in education itself" (p. 298). Whiteness must be examined in order to understand the construction of structural inequality, racism, and privilege, and also the complexity of culture as an idea and lived experience. In addition, critically engaging with Whiteness allows practitioners and others to also

understand how Whiteness, White people, and European ancestry are connected. In many respects one cannot exist without the other and there is a rich history that precipitates those connections.

Katz (1999) delineates aspects of White cultural views and assumptions (See Appendix H). Katz's work as an anti-racist educator and consultant utilizes a typology to help her students get hold of seeing Whiteness in daily life and institutions. Although she encourages folks to not use her ideas out of context and keep them grounded in a curriculum that lays a foundation that assuages this revealing to resistant participants, my purposes for using the typology are slightly different. I am using her work as my own guide to see if these assumptions and aspects do arise as teachers begin to have these conversations. The traits include: rugged individualism; a Protestant work ethic; competition, emphasis on the scientific method, wealth equaling worth, time as a commodity, future oriented, privileging of the nuclear family structure; hierarchal power relations; reliance on "the King's English"; minimizing conflict; restraint of emotions; privileging of Western art and culture; centering of Christianity; and history based on Northern European immigrants' experiences (Hitchcock, 2002).

These constructions of Whiteness possess a great deal of complexity, but they are nonetheless essentializing of Whiteness and require further consideration. As has been displayed, Whiteness has become almost singularly associated with silence, domination, terror, and oppression. It is important to bring these notions to the surface in the effort of mounting a critical investigation about Whiteness with teachers. Katz's typology is a useful tool for describing the

elusive idea Whiteness. It elegantly summarizes and structures White assumptions and dispositions in straightforward terms, and she offers a powerful mirror through which Whiteness can be seen. Again, these are descriptions and not value judgments.

Thinking about Whiteness in critical ways is a great hurdle in professional development for teachers. The push for multicultural education attempted to challenge the notions of Eurocentric thought and values that were dominant in American curriculum (Boyle-Baise, 1999). At its impetus, multicultural education was meant to challenge power relations that shaped curricula based on a construction of the Eurocentric canon that dominated and continues to dominate curricula across American educational institutions. The irony of this is the roots of multicultural education as an enterprise about the empowerment and recognition of marginalized groups has also served as a recentering of Whiteness and White people in discourses around multicultural education, race, and diversity by constructing non-Whites as "others." In practice, the critical conversations were largely doomed from the start as curricular options focused on human relations, single-groups studies of marginalized groups, and straddling the deficiency/difference binary of student abilities and cultural practices (Sleeter and Grant, 1999). The teachers at this particular site of study voiced that professional development activities addressing multicultural education themes tend to focus on who the "other" is and humanist similarities between "us and them" or methodological considerations such as multiple intelligences or cooperative learning, leaving them unprepared to create environments and

activities that challenge racist structures and practices. Sleeter and Bernal (2004) point out:

> Although multicultural education emerged as a challenged to racism in schools, its writings tend to focus on classroom practices without necessarily contextualizing classrooms within an analysis of racism. Teacher training in multicultural education often takes the form of offering solutions to problems connected to race and ethnicity without digging very deeply into the nature of the problem. (245)

All the teachers interviewed expressed a general disdain for and boredom with professional development about diversity and multicultural education issues, unless the activity was particularly engaging, such as a stirring and powerful speaker, or specific lessons or strategies offered that could be immediately implemented in class. Sleeter (1993) reflects this phenomenon in her own work with teachers:

> The teachers perceived staff development on multicultural education as useful if it gave them new information about groups they did not already 'know all about,' or if it reaffirmed what they were doing in the classroom. (169)

However, when I asked the teachers if they had specifically talked about Whiteness, they spoke of conversations about White privilege, particularly in reference to McIntosh's Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (McIntosh, 1988), but not about how Whiteness dominates curriculum, pedagogy, or American culture.

In reference to multicultural education professional development, Errol's answer summarizes the sentiment of the others:

> **Joe**: How do you feel or what do you think about professional development regarding issues of multicultural education and race?
>
> **Errol**: Well you know Joe, teachers tend to be practical. So I always appreciated workshops that gave concrete examples instead of a bunch of theory. Not that theory isn't important, but we get really busy, you know? And working through a bunch of theory isn't always the most efficient thing. I want ideas that I can take right to class that can help me and my students.

Errol's admission is not uncommon. That, in my humble opinion, is why McIntosh's *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies* (also known as *White and Male Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*) (1988) is such a powerful piece for people. She points to a specific list of experiences, fifty total, in which she knows the fact of her Whiteness brought privileges, such as: being in the company of people of her race most of the time; being able to get an essay on White privilege published, not having her shortcomings blamed on her race, and being able to choose flesh colored bandages and hose that actually match her skin! Through McIntosh's admissions teachers can tangibly point to instances in their own lives in which they have benefited from being White. But the problem is that being able to point to where privilege arises in ones life does not necessarily mean one can operationally define what it means to be White; one does not

necessarily know how to describe Whiteness if a student directly asked the question nor can they help students understand what is meant by statements and queries like, "doing good in school is acting White" or "why do you act so Black?" And ultimately, White privilege only looks at the product of racist practices but not the roots of those practices.

I realize that I have written many pages without referencing White privilege much. Although I think this is an important and powerful conceptual tool it is hardly where I hope this study goes. I find it relatively easy and reactionary to speak about Whiteness simply as a matter of privilege. The notion of privilege will come out and has consistently come out over the last twenty years of critical educational writing and research. The notion of White privilege has stifled the conversation around Whiteness because it has come to singularly define the discourse. It is a matter of choice that I am refraining from employing or focusing this work on White privilege. Moreover, as my participants talked about the films, privilege hung in the air like the smell of sausage and peppers. Privilege was the backdrop, the assumed, to all the conversations about what it means to be White. As I had been informed many times before the film series began, the staff had read the McIntosh piece many times before and had encountered several district-hired consultants that explained White privilege to them. Therefore I wanted to move away from another conversation centering White privilege toward a conversation that I hoped would explore exactly what was privileged. In spite of explorations of White privilege, key questions loom: What does it mean to be White and how do we talk about it? What is missing is a critical examination

of Whiteness as an indelible part of the core culture and society of the United States (Jensen, 2005; Kivel, 1996; Wise, 2004). Further exploration of Whiteness with teachers, beyond the notion of White privilege, is a crucial step in advancing an agenda of anti-oppressive pedagogy and social justice (Kumashiro 2000).

Exploring these varied constructions of Whiteness and epistemologies of Whiteness uncovers a fundamentally important point about studying race. There is no panacea and there are no fixed meanings attached to Whiteness. My purpose is not to reconcile these varied constructs but to employ them in their diversity in order to understand the information and perspectives my participants may share. I recognize the play across these theoretical considerations and will utilize their broad range throughout my conceptualization and analysis.

Again, in the context of this study, the issue that brought me into the school as a diversity consultant was the complaints of approximately half of the 33 African American students that their experience was isolating, dismissive, and painful. Led by a few senior students, the cohort of protesting students lodged complaints of inequitable treatment by teachers, evidenced by a lack of cultural understanding, greater likelihood of reprimand, "fake" attempts at becoming allies with Black students, and culturally irrelevant teaching strategies. Although the teachers are willing to engage with students and each other about issues of race, there remains a desire by many to divert the statements on race by Black students by attributing their criticisms to rabble rousing and adolescent quests for identity. I would argue that there is truth in all these explanations, but the fact

that many teachers allowed the latter diverting statements to stifle the discussion speaks volumes about the need to further investigate talk about race in schools.

Coda:

The Fact of Blackness amid Whiteness in Professional Development or Why Is It a Brotha Cain't Lead a Conversation about White folks wit' White People?

Before launching into the analysis I must address an important issue that arises with diversity work. Should conversations about race be an intraracial or an interracial exercise? I am troubled, deeply, by the question in and of itself. Although I do not intend to make this a tome about White privilege, here is a prime example. I find it incredibly humorous that White people have been studying, analyzing, commenting on, instructing, and defining Black people and other non-White folks for quite some time, virtually without question. Throughout the history of White folks commenting on non-White folks we can point to some pretty gnarly pronouncements. Gould (1981) debunks the notion of scientific racism, an organizing principal that constructed non-Whites as inherently inferior to Whites for centuries, and challenges the roots and impact of the socially constructed notion of intelligence. Despite this, Herrnstein and Murray (1996) recirculated these arguments in the middle 1990s, at the peak of the culture wars to great success, championing the notion that non-Whites do have a predisposition to not achieving as highly as their White counterparts. Never mind the fact that they did not include an examination of the social construction of

culture, society, intelligence, or the impact of institutional racism. Not to say that the motives behind inquiry about and instruction for non-White people always has nefarious underpinnings, but it begs the question of why is it that there is an assumption that if a Black man talks flat-footed about Whiteness to White people then we are grinding our proverbial axes.

It seems logical to me that if one is going to engage in a topic that has largely been hidden from popular discourse, then one would seek out the experiences and perspectives of those that have a critical experience with that topic. Looking at my own experiences both inside and outside classrooms, I have found that the primary reason it is difficult for White folks to talk about race with non-White folks is because they may have to make some embarrassing admissions, and more importantly they may make admissions that will point to racist inclinations or misgivings. Truthfully, I am sympathetic to this point. It must be hard to talk about something in which you are in danger of not being in the moral catbird seat. As I like to say about these kinds of conversations, in which what it means to be White is put on trial front and center, finally they know what I feel like!

I grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood. Throughout my elementary and secondary school experience I had one non-White teacher, a Black woman who was my choir teacher. I did not have a Black academic teacher until I began my undergraduate study. Most of my friends over the years have been White, even though most of my parents' friends were also Black. I have dated White women (not exclusively). And as an educator I have taught

predominantly White students. Although I do have deep roots in the Black community and with Black culture, I have also come to learn a great deal about how to associate and interact with White culture, and I have grown to be very understanding of the misinformation and assumptions some White people have about Black culture, opportunities, and success in the American context. In short I have spent the majority of my life, either formally or informally, studying the ways of Whiteness, to the extent that I too have been able to successfully assimilate into Whiteness, like we shall see with Khalid in *Whiteboyz*.

As a matter of pedagogy, I give people the benefit of the doubt. Racism can appear any and everywhere. That does not necessarily mean that anyone who commits an undesirable act is an active racist. As I look across the social landscape I find that most folks I encounter are trying to do the right thing and foster atmospheres of equality and understanding. However, that does not let people off the hook. Here is an illustration. During the first course I taught at the collegiate level, a student told me during class that race would not be a problem if it weren't for people like the NAACP and me! Wow! That was a blow. But as I talked to her later, she revealed that her parents regularly called Black folks niggers at the dinner table. She did not understand and was ill informed about the experiences of Blacks and other non-Whites. She did not understand how institutional structures and practices do in fact have disproportionate repercussions on people, depending on factors such as gender, age, language, sexuality, and of course race.. So as an educator I had to ask myself, can I really

be angry or disgusted with this person? If you don't know, you don't know. But once one engages with these ideas the task becomes a moral imperative.

That set me out on a course to work as hard as I could to show people that, at least with this particular Black man, no statement is out of bounds. I would rather a participant in a class or workshop or film discussion say the most out of this world statement in the effort of challenging ideas and beliefs rather than not. To do that it takes a great deal of time to foster trust. I firmly believe that the lion's share of the discussions that took place were the honest feelings and interpretations of the participants. They greatly appreciated the fact that I spent nearly a year in the building, asking questions and sharing ideas, before the film series even began. Additionally, I constantly discussed with the participants the importance for them to engage honestly with their ideas, for in that honesty comes light.

CHAPTER V

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION: EXPLORING RACE AND WHITENESS THROUGH *WHITEBOYZ*

Of all the discussions I have ever had the opportunity to be a part, this is definitely in the top ten. Attending this screening were the following: Anne, Nora, Errol, Mary, Tom, Michael, Gloria, Carl, and Grace. We began with an orienting statement from me in which I helped them consider a brief history of hip hop and its transformation from a predominantly Black and Latino, urban cultural phenomenon to a co-opted and commodified phenomenon largely consumed by White suburban and rural youth (Appendix F). The question that oriented the reading of the film and the ensuing discussion was short and direct: As you watch this film consider, based upon what is represented in the film, what does it means to be white, to be black? This central question was followed by: What is cultural identity and how does on come to assimilate into a culture and does assimilation necessarily mean understanding or acceptance?

While the screeners were wayfaring down to a smaller conference room from Errol's room, where we watched the movie, they buzzed about the film. Most of them did not like it, protesting the protagonist Flipp-Dogg. He was an "idiot," "ignorant," "stupid," "unappealing" character. But they went on to discuss other stories of personal battles with racism before getting into the film.

The discussion about the representation of race in *Whiteboyz* developed across three trajectories. The first trajectory guided their discussion around

stereotypes. The second trajectory was along assimilation. And finally, there was the unspoken or suppressed trajectory. Stereotypes proved to be a troubling phenomenon for the group. Upfront they all reject stereotypes. However, they found themselves employing them. What they did not see was when they chose to latch onto stereotypes, nor how to resolve the conflict of resisting and using stereotypes. They directly questioned assimilation and questioned the disparity between assimilation into the dominant culture, Whiteness, as opposed to assimilation into a subordinate culture, Black youth culture. As the discussion around assimilation unfolded the group addressed notions of privilege, albeit minutely. The suppressed aspects of the conversation were fascinating. In particular, conversations around what it meant to be White, the role of socioeconomic class in race, and the use of nigga and nigger in the film were largely forgone, even though they were significant parts of the narrative.

A Critical Synopsis of *Whiteboyz*

If teachers are going to challenge race it is fundamentally important to expose them to texts that complicate the notion of race. *Whiteboyz* (2000) is just that type of film; it is a little known gem that challenges the ways in which we understand race by focusing on Flipp-Dogg (Flipp for short), a White working class male youth, during the summer after his high school graduation, whom has adopted a particular Black youth identity. To use the current jargon, Flipp is a wigga(er), or "White nigga/nigger." Smitherman (1994) tells us that a wigger is:

> An emerging positive term for White youth who identify with hip hop, rap, and other aspects of African American culture. Throughout U.S. history, there have always been wiggas, and particularly in the twentieth century. In the 1950s, White writer Norman Mailer dubbed them "White Negroes." Their numbers are significantly larger today than in previous generations because of the exposure to African American culture made possible by television. (237)

In defining Flipp, I say he has adopted a particular Black youth identity because he has "fallen" to the seduction of the "gangsta."

The construct of the gangsta is a new addition in the long line of negative stereotypes of Black males constructed in the media (Boyd, 1997). Created at the intersection of a few powerful popular images-- the Italian gangster films, Errol DePalma's retooling of the gangster genre, Scarface, and rap music-- the gangsta takes an "I just don't give a fuck" attitude to life and relationships. Typically the gangsta is hyper-violent, misogynistic, obsessed with money and material excess, ingests copious amounts of marijuana and alcohol, and has a penchant for the over use of nigga/nigger and profanity. He dresses in expensive tennis or basketball shoes, baggy low-hanging jeans, and jewelry. Respect and loyalty is demanded, even though their primary mode of making money is through illegal hustling in the alternative economy: drug dealing. The question is how does Flipp become so deeply enchanted by a lifestyle that is

nothing short of dangerous and a culture that by all accounts does not represent the best of African America?

Danny Hoch, the co-writer of the film who also portrays Flipp, in explaining the film states:

> (The film is) a tragicomedy about a White kid in Iowa named Flipp-Dogg, who is obsessed with gangsta rap music and gets all his images of African Americans from TV, like most people around the world do. His obsession is so great that he wants to be Black, or at least his TV definition of "Black." (Hoch, 2000, p.27)

However, understanding Flipp is not as simple as saying he is just a White boy trying to act Black. Flipp is navigating an identity crisis in which his restrictive and alienating rural Iowan environment offers little in terms of opportunity or entertainment. In his attempt to escape the mundane, which he has also come to believe epitomizes what it means to be White, Flipp tries to assimilate himself into Black culture through notions of Blackness that are filtered by media and popular culture. In *Fugitive Cultures* (1996), Giroux makes an important point about the intersection of identity, culture, and media:

> While circumstances of youth vary across and within terrains marked by gender, racial and class differences, the modernist world of certainty and order that has traditionally policed, contained, and insulated such difference has given way. In its place is a shared postmodern space in which cultural representations merge into new hybridized forms of cultural performance, identity, and political

> agency. As the information highway and MTV condense time and space... new desires, modes of association, and forms of resistance inscribe themselves into diverse spheres of popular culture. Music, rap, fashion, style, talk, politics, and cultural resistance are no longer confined to their original class and racial locations. (p. 31)

Hierarchies of culture are antiquated notions in today's postmodern world and the fact that, through television and the internet, youth now have immediate access to cultural models as diverse as gangsta rappers in South Central, Los Angeles to Japanese drift racers in Tokyo to English ravers in Manchester to teen drag queens in New York City, traditional lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality are up for grabs. Flipp embodies this shift. Isolated in his rural Iowa community he consumes images of tough, bawdy, cool Black men that are separated from critical interpretations of actual life in economically depressed urban areas.

Hoch crafted a character that spends his summer needling the only Black kid in his all White community, Khalid, for connections to the "game" (drug dealing) in Khalid's hometown of Chicago. Khalid is Flipp's alter ego. The irony about Khalid is that he is a middle class Black youth whose mother is a professor at an area university and does not have any deep connections to the game. Khalid is much closer to the Cosby ideal than the ghetto warriors and entrepreneurs Flipp aspires to be (Dyson, date). Khalid is an interesting character in that he serves as both the moral center of the film and its cultural mirror. Khalid, although being closer to the Cosby ideal, often dons a hipness

inspired by Hip Hop Black youth culture around his White friends that he hides when his mother is around. He does not have any interest in participating in any "ghetto games" or any other dangerous behavior, but he does highlight his Blackness when necessary, by code switching his language (Smitherman, 1999; 2006) and reluctantly entertaining Flipp's inquiries about ghetto life.

All the while, Flipp, aided by his posse, a lower class trailer park kid named Jay and a middle class kid named Trevor, spend their summer months smoking weed, drinking forty ounces of beer, selling burner bags (substituting flour or baking soda for cocaine, which leads to Jay shooting someone in the hand), engaging in unprotected sex, and procrastinating on deciding what to do about the future. And, well, acting Black at every moment, sometimes pretending and sometimes trying to be rappers. I will return to that questionable assertion momentarily.

In terms of representing Whiteness the text initiates that sort of analysis by the frequent question of, "Why do you act Black," that is shot at Flipp throughout the film. We see Whiteness emerge through the film as not only a phenotypical phenomenon but also an epistemological phenomenon as well. Flipp identifies White with the boring and bland confines of his rural town. Everyone he knows, except Khalid, is White. On the surface it is difficult to see Whiteness, a point that will be explored later this text. But as we pull back the layers we can see the elements of Katz's typology of Whiteness glaringly (see Appendix G).

In summary, Flipp is symbolic of a long line of White youth that have latched onto Black youth cultures in the hopes of finding something to fill the void

of loneliness and isolation that suburban and rural life can create. Flipp, in his mind, feels Black. He feels that the danger and braggadocio indicative of the popular images of Black males in gangsta rap and popular culture are truer reflections of what is in his soul (no pun intended) than what is represented in the suburban havens represented in John Hughes films like *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *Sixteen Candles* (1984), or Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995) and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982). In fact, filmic representations of White youths assimilating into Black culture are few and far between or are bad punchlines to cultural jokes. Films like *Can't Hardly Wait* (1998) and *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003) utilize the "wigga" character but offer little by way of critical cues to engage the characters. They are supposed to be jokes and typically shout mantras like, "I'm just tryin' to be me!" These images, like canned images of the Black gangstas, simply further particular notions of racial and cultural hegemony and dismiss notions of resistance, privilege, and power.

An Inconvenient Truth: The Return of the Dreaded Stereotype

The notion of stereotypes is complicated territory. Unlike *Crash*, in which the group uncritically embraced the fact that Haggis took advantage of common stereotypes, across the White Boys conversation the participants largely did not embrace the stereotypes they witnessed. Although the group recognized the fact that stereotypes existed within the text, a substantial portion of the conversation was dedicated to avoiding or dismissing the use of these stereotypes as a means for understanding how notions of race are constructed in popular media.

Specifically, Flipp did not ring for them as a legitimate stereotypical construct while the film's main Black character, Khalid, was wholly embraced.

Additionally, Flipp was chastised throughout the entire conversation for "not getting it right" in terms of his understanding or his assimilation into Black culture. Throughout the film we see Flipp viewing and promoting narrow constructions of Black people. He tries to adopt African American Language (Rickford and Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 2006), but it sounds more exaggerated, awkward, and misappropriated, to the extent that when Khalid's mother met Flipp she asked him if he was Creole (a slam Flipp does not understand due to his ignorance of the complexity of Black culture). We see Flipp trying to be a "baller," (one who sell drugs). We also see Flipp rapping and often posing like America's Next White Rapper. We see Flipp disrespect his parents and brazenly flaunt the fact that even though the family may be in financial crisis he has his own mysteriously appearing money (he does not have a "legitimate" job). He was criticized for latching onto negative stereotypes of Black culture as his primary means for interpreting Black culture. This chastisement from the participants came while comments were also made about the lack of nuanced representations of Black culture and life in media. It is essential to understand that stereotypes can be understood as reflections of the ways in which groups are socially constructed. In effect, they must be recognized, examined, interrogated, and liberated.

It is the classic notion that in every stereotype resides a kernel of truth. The real-world problem of stereotypes is that these kernels of truth erupt into fact

about an entire group and shape the ways in which individuals interact with those seemingly unlike themselves, overtly and covertly (citation needed). But this poses an important problem, especially for educators attempting to navigate issues of race. If stereotypes are not acknowledged and explored, then how do we deal with the constructs and representations individuals employ that can serve as road blocks in understanding other complicated issues, such as institutional racism, identity formation, and equitable pedagogical practices?

Late in the conversation Nora offered the fundamental question that reflected the central issue for the group:

> I still don't fell like we have addressed the question of what does it mean to be Black and what does it mean to be White? I don't think this movie addresses, I mean I don't think you can answer it based on watching this movie. I'm not sure you can answer it anyway, but um, for me, you know, it's the way White culture is depicted is um fairly negative, especially if you see it through the eyes of Flipp and his friends.

As stated above, Flipp saw Whiteness as boring and bland. He also felt that White people were racist and disrespectful. The film also shows a scene in which Flipp and his friends get into a scuffle with a group of racist skinheads. This scene will be explored more deeply later, but for now the point is that Whiteness can be constructed as terrorizing (hooks, 1992/1998), and the presence of skinheads is indicative of that. Here was an opportunity for the group to examine how history, identity, and power intersect to promote

exclusionary practices and the further bracketing of White culture as fundamentally different or more substantial and pure than other cultural lenses and experiences.

Nora's contradictory statement reveals an important point about when and how stereotypes were (or were not) embraced. Although the film is predominantly populated with White characters, the resistance to use stereotypes to define what it meant to be White, specifically, was avoided because the dominant White character reflected a negative image. This obscured, to a degree, other images of Whiteness, such as Flipp's working class dad, who was just fired from his job due to downsizing, or set extras at parties that were dressed differently and talked differently when compared to Flipp.

Consider the following juxtaposition. In the opening scenes, Flipp critiques his boys' rhyming skills, telling them they sound like Wayne Newton, stiff and "proper." The reality of the situation is that none of these teens have rappin' and rhymin' skills. In the next scene, we see Sara, Flipp's girlfriend, at her telemarketing job, speaking as near the queen's English as possible. Juxtaposing the faux Ebonics spit by Flipp and his crew with the language of wider communication (Smitherman, 1999), or "standard" English as most would say, spoken by Sara immediately brackets Flipp and his boys as being outside the mainstream of their sleepy, White Iowa town and in many respects a social joke. Immediately the film questions whether or not to take Flipp seriously in his ambition to be Black because the images and language do not make sense. The fascinating point about the film is that Flipp and his friends constantly serve as a

"countering" image in relation to the other White characters, such as Flipp's girlfriend (Sara), their parents, racist skin-heads at a carnival, and others gathered at parties.

According to the film, to "act Black", like Flipp and his friends, was definitely not like "acting White." Simply, there was a notion floating through the conversation that Flipp and his friends were stereotypes that do not reflect what it means to be White, in spite of the fact that they do reflect an aspect of Whiteness that is gaining cultural and social relevance in popular culture as well as within their school's context. The so-called Wigga shares social space alongside "the middle class homemaker, the racist skinhead, the "preppy" White girl and boy, and other stereotypical archetypes for White folks, all of which are featured in the film.

In a latter conversation with Nora and Grace, they co-constructed their working definition of stereotype:

> **Nora**: A perception usually based on a prejudgment on a whole group or class of people in most cases. Although I suppose you could stereotype pit bulls.
>
> **Grace**: Well I want to add that they are sweeping generalizations. Like painting everything with a broad brush. Based on...
>
> **Nora**: Incomplete information. Maybe?
>
> **Grace**: Yeah. Right. They're superficial in a way.
>
> **Nora**: There's some truth in these things but you can't apply them as generally as people tend too. Sort of like a caricature.

As a matter of fact, their definition was strikingly similar to all the other participants. This is of no significant shock; it is evidence of the years of canned professional development and academic training. What is most fascinating though is the notion that they reluctantly employ stereotypes. Nora pointed this out in her own teaching:

> Today I was teaching about the Civil War and I was talking about the North and the South. And then I caught myself and said, "You know I'm speaking really superficially here." You know, this is an over-simplification here. Not everybody in the South believed slavery was right. And not everybody in the North believed slavery was wrong. But it simplifies the discussion if I speak of them as though they were totally opposite from each other. But understand that they weren't. So, it was good for me to sort of clarify that, but it doesn't stop me from speaking of the North and the South as though they were monolithic entities.

This sort of conceptual shorthand is common. Stereotypes as expressed above are not good or bad in and of themselves, but when people get lazy with them and use them as their primary way of understanding the world then problems arise. Since Whiteness is largely normalized in visual media and holds wide representations, non-White groups tend to hold the lion's share of negative stereotypes (Dyer, 2000) and as a result are marginalized. Nora's willingness to point out that she was making "oversimplifications" when discussing the North and the South is important in that it models for students the need to look closer at

constructs to find distinctions and a more accurate picture of an event, place, culture, person, etc. This begs the question of when and how do we distill the stereotypes of White people in media and use those constructs to critically investigate our understanding of race, Whiteness, and educational institutions?

During the film discussion, Mary highlighted the point that stereotypes provide a place to begin but require further critiques. She uses her experiences having conversations with her students about China (she regularly visits China and teaches a course in Chinese literature):

> It's an interesting question about stereotypes because when you look at a culture you don't know anything about you gotta start somewhere. And um, people make all kinds of stereotypical remarks about Asians, about China. I don't get upset about it. I try to move people from it eventually, but I feel like when they don't really know about a culture at all they have to start somewhere. We make stereotypical statements all the time in this building, about Asians. We expect them to do well. We expect them to have good families and maybe even giving up a whole lot to make sure their kids are here and so forth. So I don't know. It think the issue of stereotypes and how people respond to them are very complicated because people buy into them a lot and don't admit that, especially if it's a stereotype of you, or your race, or your culture, or your age, or sex or whatever it is. But I think we buy into other ones.

Mary's submission is right on point in describing how the role of stereotypes complicated the conversation around this particular film. The group's major problem with Flipp was that he was attempting to assimilate himself into Black culture via stereotypical representations in the media. For example, the film utilizes daydream sequences that show us Flipp's aspirations. In one daydream set in a prison and shot like a rap video, Flipp is rapping with Snoop Dogg, a successful and controversial rapper who is an ex-gagnbanger and was also on trial for murder in the latter 1990s while in prison. Delusions of grandeur overtake the scene as Flipp and Snoop beat up a corrections officer and eats a five-course meal that includes lobster and champagne, while the other inmates cheer them on. Prison is constructed as a center of luxury, a desired destination like an all-inclusive resort. It is another example of how Flipp has it "all wrong" in the sense that glorifying prison by popular standards is misguided, insulting and offensive, especially when applied to Black males.

Popularly those stereotypes are largely negative and in effect dangerous. The particular stereotype, the gangsta, demands one be tough and not "give a fuck," and Flipp in many ways personifies that. Like Gloria declared, Flipp and his boys were not sympathetic characters, a value judgment based on the characteristics of Flipp that abrasively resonated most with Gloria, who declared:

> I never had sympathy for them. I thought they were mean motherfuckers. I didn't have sympathy for any of them... I just didn't want anything to happen to Khalid. I thought they were assholes and they deserved everything they got. They were mean.

On the surface, Flipp embodies the problem with stereotypes they all resist. He seemingly gained an insufficient understanding of a culture because of his reliance upon stereotypes. He played to one flat, uncritical, and uncriticized image. However, the participants' critical interrogation of stereotypes in this film did not go beyond that. It was expressed that rejection of stereotypes was a part of a teacher's responsibility:

> Errol: But do you think as educators and well-educated people we naturally reject stereotypes?
>
> Gloria: It's our responsibility. We're given that responsibility when we work for the public schools.

Gloria has a wonderful point here. Teachers should check their stereotypes at the door. As teachers they occupy a particular role in society and within the institutional structure of schools, and they are charged with responsibilities that promote the learning and success of students (Buchman, 1987). Lowered expectations has been a significant problem contributing to the academic achievement gap that exists between White and non-White students across socioeconomic groups and those lowered expectations have been in part shaped by stereotypical assumptions teachers make about students (Singleton, 2005). But that admission should not be a pass to not engage stereotypes or assumptions.

Paley's experiences (1979) as a self described liberal learning how to address the needs of Black students in a multicultural classroom helps us understand that teachers must constantly examine their own ideas and

assumptions in order to see students, and that is not always an easy task. Paley (1979) tells us:

> The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, is valued, and can be talked about. It is not easy, because we are influenced by the fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us. (27)

Paley is on point here. As this context shows, conversations about race are difficult. It is even more difficult when your identity and experiences are in question.

As Mary's comment above portrays, oftentimes it is difficult to resist stereotypes of communities in which you know very little. And in a shameless act of riding Mary's coattails I must add that simply donning a "liberal" disposition does not insulate one from the act of stereotyping or acting upon stereotypes. This notion seemed to be the foundation for the ways in which the group talked about Khalid as a "role model" for Flipp.

They were willing to pardon "positive" stereotypes as long as Flipp could learn from them. Khalid, as Gloria pointed out, was of more concern or compassion. Khalid, as the "Cosby kid" stereotype, projected behaviors largely valued by the group, values that promoted notions of Whiteness, and in effect a number of assumptions were made about him, such as his knowledge of Black culture or his willingness to actually "teach" Flipp Black culture. After all, one of the common complaints among the students resisting in their school is that they

always feel like the spokesperson for the race. We can see this phenomenon present in different places within the conversation. Twenty-four minutes into the discussion Errol expressed:

> **Errol**: I just think its curious that Flipp, he had an opportunity to experience Black culture through Khalid's family, and yet for him that wasn't something that even occurred to him.
>
> **Michael**: No (he didn't) (in affirmation of Errol's statement).
>
> **Errol**: And that was probably more of a representative kind of means or representative family to understand Black culture. As opposed to hip hop culture.

Later, Nora chastised Flipp for what she deemed disrespect toward Khalid:

> **Nora**: I thought Flipp totally disrespected Khalid. I mean he wasn't listening to Khalid.
>
> **Gloria**: Oh totally disrespecting him.
>
> **Nora**: Khalid was African American and Flipp thought he served as an entryway into the Chicago hip-hop culture, and it was totally not Khalid.

Khalid's character is obviously complicated, while Flipp is obviously oversimplified. We see Khalid rap a few times in the text. We also see Khalid take Flipp, Jay, and Trevor to the Cabrini-Green in Chicago to scoop some weight. We also see him "behaving" in school. We see him rejecting drugs and alcohol. We hear him talking about getting things together for college. We see Khalid carrying out a number of actions that construct him as the "all-American

Kid" who happens to also be Black. This is where epistemologies of Whiteness, ironically, are most glaring in the film. None of the participants ever questioned why they were so fond of Khalid, but I submit that their affection for him was because he reflected notions of Whiteness, especially when compared to Flipp.

Considering Katz's typology, we can see Whiteness in Khalid's embrace of the Protestant Work Ethic. He has worked hard to graduate high school and be admitted to college, although this is an assumption since it was never stated in the film that he worked hard only implied. He is future oriented, stating in one scene in which he finds himself in a jail cell with Flipp that he "didn't have time for this; a record could mess up (his) chances for law school." He believed that one should work before play, citing that the reason he could not go to Chicago with Flipp and the boys was because he was getting his computer together to leave for school, although he ultimately acquiesced and went on the life altering trip. He clearly spoke the language of wider communication (standard English), and this fact is especially punctuated in scenes in which he has dialogue with Flipp. Khalid was always polite and friendly. These characteristics are not necessarily White in and of themselves. Rather, they point to particular dispositions that are privileged in American life and culture and emanate from Western European, Judeo-Christian ideals. It is fundamentally important to highlight that Katz's typology is not a construction of all White people but a yardstick or measure, and the closer one lives up to these types of characteristics and assumptions the more Mary that is extended. As the participants glossed over what it meant to be White they failed to consider an important maxim that was promoted through the

film: If being Black is the polar opposite of being White, then being Black is embodied in Flipp just as being White is embodied in Khalid.

In reference to Nora's quote above, a fascinating side-note is the attempt to bracket hip-hop culture as separate and distinct from Black culture. Reflecting a general trend across American history, as one cultural practice is produced in the Black community it is met with popular resistance and them co-opted and commodified as another great part of American popular culture (Cashmore, 1997). Whether the history is of jazz, Chicago blues, Motown, rock and roll, or hip hop itself, musical genres (i.e. cultural forms) that emerge on the fringes are taken up by the masses after a period of assimilation and acceptance. Many would argue that hip-hop culture is Black culture, or at least deeply rooted in Black culture (George, 2005; Rose, 1994). The roots of hip hop promote the oral tradition, African American language, rhythm, imaginative wordplay, and call and response, all of which are considered elements of Black culture and history. The participants allowed for Nora's differentiation to fly. It was not questioned whether or not hip hop is Black culture. Moreover, Nora's assertion assumed that since Flipp was hoping for an entry into the Chicago hip hop community it was a negative space in which to learn about Black culture and a space that was beyond Khalid. As she says "... it was totally not Khalid." But the fact of the matter is, as the film portrays, it *was* Khalid. Although Khalid would not identify himself as a gangsta, he does embrace hip hop in all its diversity. And as evidenced by the rap he was performing at the talent show, he was definitely in

touch with early hip hop and progressive hip hop, like Common or Kanye West (major rappers based out of Chicago).

A specific example of the dichotomy between Flipp and Khalid emerges in the following scene. As the film unfolds, we see Flipp drifting through his summer, hoping for the chance to either get a hold of some major weight (a large amount of drugs to sell) or a record contract. But the narrative constantly presents scenarios that complicate Flipp. At the local fair, a talent show is underway. As they enter the tent, Khalid is on stage rapping, and doing a very good job of entertaining the White, rural Iowa crowd. Standing in the back of the room, Flipp and his boys inadvertently get into a fight with a group of other White boys, racist skinheads, because one of the other boys bumped into Jay. Trying to be hard, like their gangsta heroes, a fight breaks out and draws attention away from Khalid. It is a troubling scene because in the attempt to be tough and not disrespected, Flipp and the boys interrupt a display of Black youth culture in action.

Even though Khalid is a "good" character he does engage in some dangerous behaviors. But Khalid's posturing and acquiescence to Flipp's prodding is immediately pardoned in the discussion:

Errol: Well Khalid was the innocent in all this.

Carl: Well the one young guy (Trevor) was just following along.

Gloria: That doesn't excuse you. I don't give a shit. You hang around the motherfucker you deserve what they get.

Michael: Yeah well so did Khalid.

Gloria: Yeah but he wasn't like they were. Like when they were at that club and they just cut in line to go into the club to sell that bad stuff. (Khalid) doesn't go picking fights.

I found it curious that so much Mary was extended to Khalid. By Gloria's logic, Khalid either should have been arrested during the final drug deal scene or he should be pardoned outright because he merely buckled under Flipp's pressure. As Nora expressed about Khalid, "Khalid maybe felt the need to act in a certain way that he thought the White Iowa kids expected." But if we pull back the curtain a little, what we see is the validation of a particular stereotypical construct. Khalid is accepted because he occupies stereotypic notions of the well-adjusted, assimilated, middle class Black youth; in effect he is safe, not dangerous.

The notion that perhaps Khalid felt a certain sense of timid excitement around Flipp was hidden throughout the conversation. After all, Khalid did agree to take the drive across Illinois to pick up some weight in a Chicago housing project. He could have just said no. But days after the screening during a conversation in the hall, Nora made an interesting point, "Maybe Khalid just didn't want Flipp to "out Black" him. I'm not sure of just what that means but I get that sense."

The group's tacit embrace left Khalid uncriticized and in effect left two important conversations unengaged. First, how "positive" stereotypes function to restrict discourse and engagement is just as powerful as "negative" stereotypes. Second, and more importantly, to find cues about Whiteness one does not need

to only look at the portrayal of White people but of all characters, keeping a keen eye on the attitudes, dispositions, and assumptions that one feels are normal or acceptable.

Flipp on the other hand is viewed engaging largely in negative behavior: drinking, smoking weed, selling drugs, having unprotected sex, pathetically rapping, disrespecting his parents, and daydreaming. What we don't see is how Flipp learns about social injustice and inequity. We don't see him learn about White privilege and institutional racism. We don't see him learn about the "the great kings and queens of Africa," a comment he makes to Khalid while waiting in jail. All of which are key aspects of his character. What we see Flipp doing is attempting to assimilate into a model of Black culture that is marginalized and misunderstood and inappropriate according to White hegemony. But if we can assume that Flipp did not learn his more socially conscious ideas, then we can only assume that he learned those through the same images the group is railing against. Every moon has a dark side.

Not all of the teachers flatly rejected Flipp and saw how complex of a character he truly is. The initial response to Flipp was that he was ignorant. Below are two prime examples of this response to Flipp, taken from the same conversation:

> **Errol**: So, the movie. What does it suggest about being White and being Black?
>
> **Gloria**: You mean being a White Iowan... Being a White Iowan named Flipp.

Grace: Who is stone stupid!

Mary: Didn't you say whoever plays Flipp also wrote the script for this?

Nora: Yeah.

Mary: I think he wrote himself as an ignorant, really ignorant person.

Nora: I think he did too.

Mary: And I think that that certainly worked. He was terribly ignorant... He was ignorant in every relationship he had. I thought he was ignorant with his parents. I thought he was ignorant with his girlfriend. And that's not to say he wasn't stupidly tender with her too, but I thought he could have had some sensitivity to the day his dad lost his job.

What is fascinating here is the use of words like ignorant and stupid to define Flipp. These words are common stereotypes of Black men. Although I do not feel that my participants consciously tried to racially marginalize Flipp, the fact of the matter is they did use a number of negative stereotypes for Black men to describe Flipp. Consider the following exchange among Gloria, Nora, and Errol after the screening:

Gloria: I think that he was exotic.

Nora: Who?

Gloria: He was exotic.

Nora: Flipp?

Gloria: Flipp. I think he was different than everybody else. He was exciting. He was wild. He was crazy. He was always putting on a show. He was unpredictable. He was opposite to everything that was, to him, was Iowa.

Nora: He was dangerous.

Gloria: He was dangerous.

Nora: That was his appeal, probably. Yes.

Gloria: I think he was filled with self-loathing. I think he hated everything White. He hated everything Iowa.

Errol: You can see all that anger in him.

Gloria: That's what White was for him.

Here, Gloria and others inadvertently begin to speak of Flipp in stereotypes common to Black men. Their proclamations of Flipp as exotic, dangerous, and self-loathing are reflective of the constructions of Black men in popular media for centuries (Bogle, 2003; Boyd; 1997). These adjectives must be taken alongside the text, in which a White male is attempting to assimilate into his understanding of Black culture. Carl went on to add:

Carl: They had some losers in that story.

Michael: Some what?

Carl: Some losers in that story.

(there is a chorus of "oh yeahs" and head nods coming from the group).

Carl: And Flipp is trying hard to be one of them.

Nora: He was wasn't he?

Carl: Yeah.

Nora: That's, that's a good observation.

The construction of Flipp as a loser makes it difficult to look past his vices to see his virtues, to see the complexity of his character. There was a contradiction in the making here. Although the group professed the idea that stereotypes were undesirable, they allowed to a large degree to let stereotypes frame their judgment of Flipp. It made me wonder what if Flipp was a student in one of their classrooms? How would they interact with him?

Later, Anne and Errol offered complexity to Flipp's character by pointing out that even though Flipp lived out the realistic fictions of the gangsta he was also in touch with more critical aspects of American life:

> **Anne**: I would like to say one thing on behalf of old ignorant Flipp is that at the party, um, when the cops did come. You know, for whatever reason, he did see the injustice that was taking place with Khalid. (Khalid, the only Black kid at a party, was targeted for arrest by the police).
>
> **Tom**: He did.
>
> **Anne**: He did stand up for that. He did stand up to it.
>
> **Gloria**: He was "representin'".

Anne: Yeah. I mean he was still ignorant when they were in jail. You know, like it was a great experience while Khalid was flipping out...

Gloria: It was street cred for him.

Anne: ... but you did see him standing up. For whatever reason, he saw, I think he really saw the injustice there.

Errol: And I would challenge the notion that he was ignorant. Yes, he's kind of a buffoon in some way, like Jay is, but he does have a sensitivity to what happens in our country in terms of what injustices have occurred.

In a conversation with Anne after the group discussion, she offered a deeper insight into why she felt she was, unbeknownst to her, the primary participant that presented and encouraged a more critical reading of Flipp:

> I'm always looking for places where people relate to each other and I did recognize that he was, even though he was acting on stereotypes he saw in the media, he did have a deeper understanding and he did see that there was social injustice taking place, for instance when Khalid's arrested at the party maybe because he's Black. He did recognize it. And maybe he was you know, pushing up against with not wanting to be identified White, was being identified with those types of, you know the dominant structures, the racist aspects of our country. Out in the farmlands... He didn't want to be identified as a White racist.

But again, this begs the question of why the participants were not able to cull what the film was "saying" about what it meant to be White or Black. Although we do see a number of stereotypes emerge across the text, stereotypes did not seem to count as a way in which we can understand how races are constructed in popular culture. Although I attempted to be a "fly on the wall" for the conversation, I found myself needing to put the question directly to the participants:

> **Joe**: I am wondering why you, as a group, are reticent to using stereotypes to define what it means to be Black and White in this film, or the other films for that matter?
>
> **Tom**: Because we don't want to be labeled racist.
>
> **Nora**: You don't identity with a stereotype.
>
> **Errol**: But Joe I don't think that's true, because, you know we watched Crash, and I thought we were all pretty much on the same page when we said a lot of these characters, whether they're White or Black are stereotyped. And we talked about that. So it was hard for us to say in general, you know, what does it mean to be White and what does it mean to be Black because you had Blacks of all sorts. You had Whites of all sorts. So I think that's what we're suggesting. I don't think we ever not addressed the question. But when you have, and I think that's what good films do, they don't make it so clear. And I think it would be kind of boring to watch a

film that says this is what its like to be White in American. This is what its like to be Black in America.

Michael drove this point home to the participants, criticizing Flipp for latching onto a stereotype in order to embrace Black culture:

Michael: Stereotypes. Maybe that's the problem you have. We're trying to connect with stereotypes rather than trying to connect to what the "real" is. Does that make sense?

Nora: Um hum. That's what made it difficult (for me to say what it meant to be Black or White).

Michael: If you're reaching for an apparition you're never gonna get it. You think you've got it, but.

Michael's notion of what is "real" is interesting. What is real? Are not there African American youths that actually live out the "ghetto stories" portrayed through the negative representations we see across media. Does Doughboy from *Boys 'n the Hood* really exist? Did Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Jay-Z, and Biggie Smalls (a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G.) really sell drugs and/or participate in gang bangin'? Do all Black folks identify with or aspire to the "Cosby ideal?" As the text of the film proceeds we do see Flipp glamorize the gangsta representations and as Errol pointed out, "They saw what came with that. They saw the drugs. They saw the girls, and all the bling-bling."

Besides, when Jessie referred to "real," he was channeling the role and stereotype of Khalid. The entire group felt that Khalid was a "truer" representation of Black culture that Flipp failed to tap into:

Errol: I just think its curious that Flipp, he had an opportunity to experience Black culture through Khalid's family, and yet for him that wasn't something that even occurred to him.

Michael: No (he didn't) (in affirmation to Errol's statement).

Errol: And that was probably more of a representative kind of means or representative family to understand Black culture. As opposed to hip hop culture.

Jessie: That wasn't what he wanted.

Gloria points out the notion that the media has culpability in all this and this is a crucial point. After all, media does perpetuate these images and representations:

> The gangsta piece was all these kids had of Black culture. That's all these kids had because that's all the industry exposed them too. So if the industry, if BET and MTV and VH-1 exposed these kids to other aspects of Black music and Black culture he could have been a, those three boy could have totally taken on a different, and still admired Black culture and wanted to be a part of Black culture. Because, you know there is so much to love (about Black culture). But this is all they got. This is all they got.

I must admit that when I first heard her point this out I was elated. It was cool to see their analysis of the film point to other factors than just Flipp. However, in considering her statement, I am somewhat troubled. This is a common critique. As a matter of fact, none of the other participants challenged Gloria on this

assertion. I have heard several of my pre-service teaching students and in-service teachers at professional development activities make this claim. But it is an incomplete analysis of what is represented on television and in film. As a Black man I am hard pressed to find representations of Black men that I am wholly fond of and that I feel offer more nuanced portrayals of cats like me. However, speaking of MTV, BET, and VH-1, gangsta rap videos are not the only representations of Black men and/or hip-hop. Kids and consumers make choices about the images they enjoy and those they do not. Gloria's claim makes it seem as though Flipp did not know "The Cosby Show" ever existed, or that right after a Jay-Z or Snoop Dogg video one would never see Usher, Boyz II Men, or Public Enemy! A more valid point is that Flipp and those like him choose this particular representation of Black culture to latch onto. And the ultimate question is, "Why?"

Boyd (1997), a cultural critic and anthropologist, through one of his texts asks: "Am I Black enough for you?" Through the text he critiques the ways in which American popular culture and media construct the image of African American males. His basic assertion is that in the popular media industry, extremism sells, and therefore the majority of images of Black males reflect ethos of hyper-sexuality and nihilism. Boyd challenges these constructions and further explores the generational shift among the Black community that precipitated the ease of finding such nihilistic images in the Black community. What is important about this is that the images of Black men are seductive to say the least: strong, sexual, violent, physical, rhythmic, rebellious. But they are also controlled due to

the equally powerful images of ignorance, self-destruction, urban decay, joblessness, irresponsibility and oftentimes buffoonery.

The most noticeable example of this in contemporary media is the gangsta rapper. The pioneers of gangsta rap held an "I just don't give a fuck" attitude, but that was also tempered by a grittiness that belied a message of caution. Artists like NWA (also known as Niggaz wit Attitude), Ice-Cube (one of the founding members of NWA), Ice-T, and others injected strong, critical statements about race, poverty, violence, and resistance in their lyrics. Not to say that early gangsta rappers always had a positive message or that they were easy to find. Oftentimes Ice-T's songs were cautionary tales that spent most of the text praising violence, misogyny and material excess with a final verse about how the "game" can take you down.

The newer and more recent gangsta rappers seem to have that "Hollywood gloss" on their image. The videos on MTV and BET make everything seem fun and free spirited. In front of great beats they spit incredible rhymes (I do have to give them credit for their talent) about drug dealing, murder, promiscuous sex, baby-mama-drama (problems with the mother(s) of their children), getting high, and other excessive, precarious behavior. 50 Cent, one of the most popular rappers today, used the fact that he was shot multiple times and lived as a marketing tool, highlighting how hard and real he is compared to other artists whom are just playing a role. Similarly, Tupac, considered one of the greatest rappers ever and tragically murdered in the streets of Las Vegas in 1996, regularly exploited his days as a drug dealer and champion of Thug Life.

All the while, what then do we make of the power of these images? In a social environment in which BET, MTV, and VH1 have swamped popular culture consumers with images of virile young Black men driving extravagant cars, drinking (or wasting) copious amounts of expensive alcoholic beverages, cavorting with gangs of beautiful women dancing in bathing suits, and bragging about how cool, violent, masculine, and paid they are, what do we expect people to walk away with?

But the image is seductive and palatable for a number of youths that do not come from the cultural spaces that bore the people being represented in the media, Flipp being one of them. A significant part of the problem is there exists an "empty space of representation" (Guerrero, 1995) of Black men in film and other avenues of media. Guerrero states:

> When we view Black men in our media, their representations generally fall into two reductive, disparate categories. On the one hand, we are treated to the grand celebrity spectacle of Black male athletes, movie stars, and pop entertainers doing what all celebrities are promoted as doing best, that, conspicuously enjoying the wealth and privilege that fuel the ordinary citizen's material fantasies. Yet in simultaneous contrast to this steady stream of glamour and glitz... we are also subjected to the real-time devastation, slaughter, and body count of a steady stream of faceless black males on the 6 and 11 o'clock news. Significantly, this news is coordinated with a wave of neo-blaxploitative, violently

> toxic, ghetto-action flicks, which too often package and sell the extermination of Black men as entertainment, while profiteering filmmakers offer up shallow alibis about only depicting "what is real." Emphasis in original text (395)

Guerrero's point is fundamental in considering how a White boy from Iowa or anywhere else for that matter is swayed by a particularly dangerous and misguided notion of what it means to be Black. In a media wasteland that more often than not presents a destructive binary construction of Black males and youth, the images tend to get twisted. At the end of the day, gangsta rappers are successful, rich artists that are projecting a carefully crafted image that plays on the public consciousness in particular ways; they (artists, record companies executives, producers, etc.) are aware of the fact that some consumers are interested in a ride on the "wild side."

By the same token, media tends to not offer serious critical examinations of what it means to be a Black or White youth in a generation that is well removed from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s but are also deeply entrenched in a period of rising police brutality, unemployment, the Los Angeles riots of 1992, resurging segregation, and failing urban schools along side a rising Black middle class, rising Black homeownership, rising Black college graduation, and on and on. Guerrero's point is that the binary construction of black males does not leave many options for creating complex, nuanced understandings of Black culture for any consumer of the U.S. media. Thus, in a context in which there are not many Black faces and families to reflect multiple

realities of the Black experience and culture, White youth are left with few avenues to understand and engage with Black culture, and this fact leaves a hole in the possibility for White youth to think more critically about their own culture and background.

But another important issue remains. Why did the participants largely reject stereotypes and other representations when thinking about what it meant to be White or Black according to the film? This is an important question because whether or not stereotypes are employed, there nonetheless remain constructions and images of Blacks and Whites and others. Plot lines and characters contain cues for the viewer to differentiate among characters in terms of race, class, gender, and other identities. Errol suggests that what makes a good film is when the filmmaker eschews stereotypes:

> **Errol**: When we see filmmakers dealing in stereotypes its kind of standoff-ish. Its like, "Why does he have to present it this way?" Why does he have to regurgitate a stereotype to make some point? Is there a more intelligent way of making a point, delivering theme. I feel offended when I see some films out and out stereotype. Like even in this film we had Flipp charging Jay with being a redneck. Well how is Jay anymore a redneck than Flipp really is! So, you know, is it true that real people in real life stereotype? Yes, and if you are going to make a film about how people stereotype then I think that would be a valuable film. But for directors to use

stereotypes and just thrust them upon an educated audience, it think... I don't know.

Gloria: It's cheap.

Errol made a similar point about *Crash*. But the problem with Errol's point is that the film is satirical and is meant to challenge stereotypes, not only of Black culture and people but also of White culture and people. The refrain of the film that is consistently asked of Flipp is, "Why do you act so Black," implying that there are ways of "acting White." It ultimately proved difficult for the group to actually express what "acting White" meant because they were preoccupied with trying to dismiss stereotypes, a politically correct social practice, that they did not see the stereotypes as spaces in which identity is constructed, represented, and consumed. Their unwillingness to embrace all the stereotypes channeled through the film forced a situation in which criticism against Flipp was promoted, the embrace of Khalid was promoted, and the complication of both was thwarted. I am not making an argument for the embracing of stereotypes out of hat; I am suggesting that stereotypes are useful in helping us understand how groups are constructed in media and society. Given that it becomes necessary to utilize stereotypes in order to understand how we see various groups and then we can deconstruct those stereotypes in order to more critically explore the social and cultural constructions that mediate how we understand and interact with those like and unlike ourselves.

Mastering the Form: The Hypocrisy of Assimilation

The crux of this film is the process of assimilation. What does it mean and what does it take to assimilate into a culture? If one does adopt characteristics and values does that necessarily lead to acceptance? Is there an appropriate path to assimilation and what does that imply? Apparently, as Michael stated, Flipp has it all wrong because he latched onto stereotypes.

As a society we are accustomed to witnessing non-White people assimilate into Whiteness, but except for Eminem (or to a lesser degree Vanilla Ice), we are not accustomed to seeing a White youth talk Black, walk Black, dress Black, etc., despite the fact that images of Black youth cultures are spread across the mainstream media and are increasingly used to defined what is cool and hip in a national and global context. In Cornel West's classic collection of essays, *Race Matters* (1993), he speaks about what he calls the Afro-Americanization of White youth:

> The Afro-Americanization of White youth has been more a male than female affair given the prominence of male athletes and the cultural weight of male pop artists. This process results in White youth—male and female—imitating and emulating Black male styles of walking, talking, dressing, and gesticulating in relation to others. The irony in our present moment is that just as young Black men are murdered, maimed, and imprisoned in record numbers, their styles have become disproportionately influential in shaping popular culture. (36)

Throughout the discussion of *Whiteboyz* the participants made interesting points about assimilation. Most salient is the notion that Flipp is somehow inappropriately assimilating because he relies largely upon stereotypes found in popular media. Although this is in some ways unavoidable, as the teachers expressed in the previous section, Flipp is held in reproach for his process. As Errol points out:

> Flipp isn't integrated first into the Black culture and therefore takes on. I mean, his only exposure seems to be in the music videos he and his friends watch. And so he hasn't really lived it.

Errol promotes this notion of "living" a culture, an important point since we can think of culture as a fluid, living concept that is constructed within daily social interactions (Erickson, 2001). But it begs the question of exactly what aspect of Black culture should Flipp be trying to live out? It is clear that the group does not value the images Flipp uses as his template for understanding Black culture. Ultimately, Flipp as well as his boys, become the butt of a cultural joke. Although Hoch, the film's writer, intended for the film to be satirical he also meant for the film to be challenging.

Seeing this play out on the screen and through the discussion was interesting. Humor became an important point in which the hypocrisy of assimilation began to appear. In commenting on an early scene in which Flipp, Trevor, and Jay were rapping and posing with each other Mary said:

> In the beginning, when they go to his house and he's got his "homeboy" pants that are falling on the floor. And (Trevor's) the

worst of the three. They were all horrible. But, in any case, I just thought that was a scream.

Mary made this statement describing Trevor, one of Flipp's boys. Trevor is drastically different from Flipp in that Trevor's parents are wealthy and he does not embrace Black culture to the extent Flipp does. To Trevor, Flipp is cool, and by extension Blackness is cool. But at this point in the film, the beginning, no one can make the assertion that Trevor does not truly have a respect and will for Black culture. It begs the question of what exactly is funny in the scene? This is not limited to Mary. There was a round of laughter during the screening and I have personally laughed at the scene when watching. But again, what makes this funny? Seeing a group of marginally capable young brothas sportin' a low sag and a hoodie is a representation that has been burned onto the public's consciousness. That is expected and reflective of a group of Black boys participating in an appropriate cultural act. Race becomes the central issue because seeing these White boys try is not met with "nice try but practice a while," but with hopeless laughter. The joke is that these White boys even tried to "act Black."

Although the scene is meant to illicit a laugh, the act performs an important function if not challenged. It bolsters the notion of what is legitimate and what is not legitimate in terms of assimilation and in terms of defining what it means to be White or to be Black. Laughing at the "joke" or image says, "It is silly for a White person to act in such a way." With that said I know the claim can be made that perhaps the scene would have been just as funny if it were a group

of Black male teens. Well perhaps, but that does not dismiss a reality that unfolded through the conversation.

Analytically here is the trouble. We have this situation in which a White teen in a film attempts to assimilate into Black culture but can only rely on a narrow spectrum of images to serve as a guide, the problem with media's representation of non-White groups. The participants judging this act find the use of stereotypes inappropriate, however the White teen is stuck with the problem of not having more outlets for Black culture at his disposal. The question that resonates here is should the participants (as well as any other education professional) be as hard on Flipp as they are being? Perhaps the teachers are not taking into account that what Flipp is working with is common across the breadbasket of the United States. Youths engage with these new, often transgressive identities through electronic media but not in physical life, sometimes because they do not want to and sometimes because they cannot. Should Flipp be constructed as a negative character by the participants as a result of the lack of cultural resources he has available?

On the other hand, Flipp's alter ego in the film is Khalid. Khalid is Black, middle-class, respectful. The group's overwhelmingly positive reception of Khalid aids in making an interesting point. Errol and Mary point out the essential problem with assimilation:

> **Errol**: But what's kind of curious since we're on this topic is here you have Khalid, and you walk into his house. Things are very proper. Very middle class. Huge house. Fairly affluent family,

probably. And so it doesn't strike us so much when an African American buys into that sort of lifestyle and becomes more White, if you will, depending on how he's viewed. But the minute a White kid takes on that stereotypical Black gangster role its like, "Wow is he bizarre." You know what I'm saying?

Mary: Yeah. Is it is it, like its okay to go into the dominant culture but its weird…

Errol: To go out

Mary: … to go out to a subculture?

Errol: And adopt that as your (identity)

Mary: Yeah. I don't know. I'm trying to understand that.

The question of assimilation proves to be a troubling point for the participants. It is difficult to resolve this inherent contradiction of assimilation. Historically and institutionally when we think of assimilation we consider the process through which a group with less power, influence, or resources masters the ways of the dominant group or accepts the values, ideals, dispositions, and practices promoted through the dominant hegemony. That is what is "supposed" to happen. But if one chooses to assimilate from the dominant into the marginal as an act of resistance (or confusion for that matter), then one is somehow in breech of some social edict members of a society are expected to follow.

Of course Khalid's assimilation into Whiteness would look smoother than Flipp's assimilation into Blackness. Khalid was physically surrounded by wide representations of White people, White culture, and White epistemologies. On

the other hand, Flipp's primary exposure to Black folks was through the images he received through popular culture.

Ultimately, one could ask, "If Flipp wanted to be Black then why didn't he watch *The Cosby Show* or *A Different World*?" I would say that Flipp did not see himself reflected in those shows, much like many Black folks who did not see their realities but a middle-class fantasy reflected in them. Flipp was a working-class youth that had few options out on the plains of Iowa. Adopting this subculture was his attempt to break free of that space. But what is fascinating is that as you view this film, Flipp is frequently asked why he is acting Black, but no one ever asks why anyone is acting White, not in the film or the discussion among the participants. The focus of criticism in this film spotlights a White youth's attempt to assimilate into a Black subculture to dreadful ends. In effect, the film acts as not only a text that complicates race and culture but also as a cautionary tale that warns against embracing the culture of the oppressed or marginalized.

For the members of a staff at a school in which Black students lodged complaints of isolation and cultural miscommunication, the taken-for-granted comfort with non-White assimilation into, and inadvertent support of, Whiteness is an especially important area for exploration. Flipp allows a retroactive examination of assimilation. By looking at the stumbling blocks toward assimilation Flipp faces, we can more closely consider the experiences of non-White students and citizens and think about why they are or are not successful at assimilation and what we think of them if they are not.

Missed Opportunities: Revealing Empty Spaces in the Discussion

The central question for the discussion of this film was what does it mean, through the text of the film, to be White and Black? Although the conversation centered primarily on the notions of stereotypes and assimilation, the secondary question, there were a few key conversations related to both that surfaced but then just as quickly disappeared. Florio-Ruane and DeTar (2001) uses the metaphor "hot lava" (Glazier, 2000) to help explain the phenomenon of conversation participants' tendency to "veer discursively away from difficult topics" (Florio-Ruane and DeTar, 2001, p. 115). Summarizing the findings of work with autobiography book clubs among teachers, They explain:

> Using the metaphor "hot lava" from the playground game in which children attempt to run as fast as possible from one point to another without dipping their feet into the imaginary substance, Glazier argued that book club conversations could be relatively smoothly orchestrated to do the same. However, that avoidance of conflict and difficulty had the effect of shortening speakers' engagement with a topic. (115-116)

"Hot lava" was felt across the conversation, but the following topics seemed to have a particular aversion to the group. Not to imply that there was or was not conscious willingness to disengage a topic, but these particular issues were key to the text of the film as well as problems the school was attempting to address.

The issues of Whiteness, the film's use of the words nigga and nigger, and the impact of class were all points raised that received affirmative responses

from the group. However, the group tended to steer away from these issues without further, deeper investigations of the phenomena as seen through the film.

The disengagement of Whiteness was particularly troubling for me considering all the participants were aware of the fact that I had hoped they would talk explicitly about what it meant to be White. As stated above, the prime spot in the film in which to consider what it meant to be White was through Khalid. Unfortunately the group was not able to really dive into that territory. This is a testimony to how difficult it is to engage something that is so entrenched in our consciousness as normalized. Defining Whiteness or even offering a list of identifiers of Whiteness is a challenge that requires a level of direct instruction in order to help people even begin to know specifically what to look for.

In spite of the fact that the participants never actually explored what the film was implying about being White, the notion of White privilege was especially interesting since the question, "Why do you act Black," was a common refrain in the film. Again, this query implies that there is a way to "act White," and not acting White somehow puts one into a subordinated or objectified position. Within the context represented in the film, White privilege is seen throughout, especially when considering the habits and behaviors, styles of dress, processes of assimilation, and language that is considered appropriate throughout the film.

In spite of the film's preponderance of commentary on racial privilege, the group did not spend much time discussing it. When it was discussed it was in relation to privilege being extended toward Flipp, Jay, and Trevor or the privilege denied of Khalid at a party, but not when it was in relation to the throngs of other

White characters in the film. It is not that the notion of privilege is wholly not discussed. Rather, privilege was specifically named once. Nora and Mary exchanged:

> **Nora**: There were inferences to White privilege I think in terms of, well. I had the sense that a cop was not gonna shoot a White guy.
>
> **Mary**: Well at first (the cops) went for Khalid because he was the only Black kid. So he was the one they were gonna take. And then, I thought that Flipp's standing up was as much to a part of being cool, and to be taken by the police because that was the cool thing to do as it was to defend his friend Khalid. I was actually grateful for it though because I thought (Flipp's) girlfriend would be snagged because he dumped whatever drugs he had on her when that whole thing happened... They certainly went after the Black kid.

Discussing a scene at a party, in which Khalid is profiled and arrested, there is admission that White privilege is in fact a part of the story. The conversation moves to another example of White privilege.

In the following passage, Errol, Mary, and Michael were discussing the drug buy-gone-horribly-wrong that is central to the film's climax.

> **Errol**: And in Chicago, Darius gets shot and killed, and there's the exchange (with the police) and Flipp is just standing there watching it all happen. They didn't draw on him.

Mary: Okay, so when those two policemen drive by, what do they see?

Errol: They saw (Jay) standing by the pick-up truck and that didn't seem right.

Michael: They saw two White guys on the wrong side of town.

Mary: That was interesting because they were two White policemen and they saw two White guys and got suspicious.

Nora: Because normally you don't see White guys in that part of town.

The avoidance of White privilege is glaring in this exchange. I give full marks to Mary for opening the door, and the others for clarifying that the police officers were skeptical because there were two White teens standing by a pick-up truck in a Chicago housing project. Where the group loses marks is that they did not go further to discuss the exchange between the police and Jay and Trevor. The officers instructed them to get out of the area rather than asking if they had any drugs or weapons, which Jay did. We have heard countless stories of DWB (driving while Black) in which Black drivers are pulled over, questioned, and searched for no clear reason. As a matter of fact, this was an important scene in Crash. However, the group did not take up this line of analysis and in effect left the impact of White privilege unengaged, unquestioned, and unchallenged. This reiterates that notion that in spite of good intentions and a critical eye, the impact of White privilege can remain silent in conversations.

The discussion around the use of nigga and nigger in the film was lacking as well. Nigga and nigger are strange and troubled words in the English lexicon. The controversy that accompanies the words emanate from a history rooted in dehumanization and racism, or resistance and perseverance depending on which word is in question. At this time I will table discussion of the group's response to nigga/nigger. The following chapter contains a more detailed analysis of this crucial event in the hopes of drawing more attention to the antiquated and unproductive ways in which citizens and educators deal with the phenomenon of nigga and nigger.

Finally, class is also an undermined aspect of the film. I do not wish to imply that class did not come up. As a matter of fact, there were occasional references made to the fact that Khalid was middle-class. Regardless, the power and role of class in shaping opportunities, world-views, and motives did not get much play. Anne, once again, was the participant that explored class to more deeply connect with Flipp:

> **Anne**: In reference to Flipp and Jay, they were poor. They were in families that were struggling. And um, like their refrigerators were empty. And they were hungry. They went over to Trevor's house to chow down you know? And so there was some part of their reality that was disenfranchising from their own community in Iowa.
>
> **Mary**: I think that's important. I mean that refrigerator was scary.

After Mary affirmed Anne's statement, she moved the conversation to inquire about Tupac Shakur, a pioneer of hip-hop and gangsta rap. I do believe that

Mary truly thought Anne's statement was important, but that does not necessarily substitute for a further critical analysis of the role and representation of class and how class shapes our expectations of race.

Flipp and his friends spend their time drinking 40 ounces (of beer or malt liquor), smoking joints, fighting, rapping and daydreaming. These activities point to a hopelessness and confusion in the face of limited economic possibilities in a labor market that is increasingly centered on service-oriented jobs that do not offer much material return or possibilities. In turn, an alternate reality and desire is manifested, one that begs excitement, but the essential problem Flipp has is that in his yearning for an alternate identity that takes him outside the blandness of his own context, he makes assumptions about the reality of the representations he employs to create a new cultural frame, such as the real danger of making drug deals, how Black folks communicate, and the feelings many Black folks have about living in poverty.

But I must point to myself and how I structured the activity when thinking about what the participants responded to and what they did not. I played a significant role in shaping the context for this screening, from offering the synopsis to choosing when to ask a question. Discussing class was not as high of a priority as compared to race and culture. Addressing how I framed the discussion and other concerns could have significant impact on how conversations about race and other issues can be mounted.

Closing

In the final analysis, the discussion around Whiteboyz was a lively and engaging conversation among a group of education professionals; it was a truly exhilarating experience. However, the group never actually pointed to specific examples of Whiteness, taking Nora's cue that the film is not good for examining such phenomenon since it utilizes stereotypes. In place of a conversation about how the film constructs Whiteness and Blackness, the conversation focused on the problems of stereotypes and assimilation. In and of itself it was an important and useful conversation, but if we are to ever popularly understand race and work to change the status quo of race relations at some point we must consider how and why Whiteness has been normalized and unmarked.

The next chapter will explore the taboo subject of nigga/nigger. The reason I chose to explore these words in a separate chapter is because the film depicts White people using a word that has been constructed over the last few years as untouchable. Moreover, the use of nigga/nigger was multifaceted. Regardless, the group never engaged the issue until it was brought up well into the discussion. This aspect of the conversation is important to the discussion around what it means to be White because it is the one space in American life in which White people are not in a privileged position. Flipp and his boys challenge this notion and urge us to consider critically the power and trajectories of these two troubled words.

CHAPTER VI

DODGING THE "N-WORDS"

For readers sensitive to the issues of race, be advised that the following (chapter) contains marginally gratuitous use of the N word. And by N word I mean nigger… There, I said it.

Adapted from Chappelle's Show (2003)

"… 'Cause a nigga gotta do what a nigga gotta do to be da nigga dat he tryin' ta be…"

A White corporate executive talking to another White executive

Taken from a sketch on Damon Wayan's "The Underground" (2006)

Nigga/Nigger have a strange, complicated place in the U.S. social landscape. The words are soaked in a history of dehumanizing images and memories alongside resistance and self-definition. Some consider them harsh words whose hard sounds rake much of the public's consciousness. At the same time, some consider nigga to be a term of affection, brotherhood, and solidarity. Today there are frequent pleas to "put the n-word on the shelf" because of the painful and uncomfortable memories that are evoked at its utterance. From Oprah to Howard Dean, the political right and the political left, derision and sickness is directed toward nigga/nigger to the extent that they are linguistic public enemy, number one.

This was a particularly difficult chapter to write. Not that accessing the theoretical ideas was difficult, but it was spiritually difficult. I must admit that I am not necessarily comfortable with hearing White people use nigga. I use it frequently depending on the situation. For example, my little brother and I use it between ourselves all the time, and we even utilize nigga in all the definitions Smitherman delineates. I also use it among other Black folks that feel comfortable with its use, as a matter of politeness to those that do not. Gena, my beautiful and brilliant wife, and I occasionally have discussions about its use, and have decided they are not words we want our child exposed to for as long as possible. Occasionally I use nigga in front of my White friends, but they do not use it in response. I would claim that this chapter is just as much about my own torrid relationship with nigga/nigger as much as my participants.

Simultaneously, the definition, or common usage, is being challenged by not only Black folks but also White folks, Latinos, Asians, and on. Youth culture does not always share its older generations' large rejection of the words and are engaged in their own dialogue about the appropriateness of their use. But people from previous generations have come along to challenge the ways in which we think about nigga/nigger, and these messages have been spread throughout the world through our various media and words of mouth. Today's youth are the products of generations of cultural building and shifting that interjected new, transgressive and resistant methods for engaging nigga/nigger. It is arguable as to whether or not this is a good or bad shift. That is merely the tip of the iceberg. Nigga/nigger is a fascinating site to see the intersection of

language, power, and identity and the poststructural language turn that allows for such phenomena to happen.

This study is one of those sites. In this chapter I explore why the participants did not discuss the use of the words nigga and nigger in the film *Whiteboyz*. This was the third film in our series, and "the N word" had not yet come into our conversation. The participants in the discussion around *Whiteboyz* did not seize the opportunity to take up the issue of "the N word," and my analysis suggests a few possible explanations for why that was the case.

Dropping the "N" Bomb

Ten participants were in the room for the viewing of Whiteboyz: 8 identified themselves as White, 1 Black, and 1 Latino. As in previous screenings, I opened with a prompt. This film, ostensibly, is about Flipp, a White, working class male from a small Iowa town. Flip, embraces hip hop, primarily the gangsta rap genre, and he adopts an alternative identity, one rooted in Black culture. In turn, throughout the film he displays how he understands Black culture. Throughout the film he is asked, "Why do you act Black?" To orient the participant, none of which had seen or heard about this film, I offered them a few comments about the history of hip hop and the role of race in its process (Appendix F). I asked them to consider some important questions as a way of bracketing their reading:

> Flip, the main character of the film you are about to watch is caught in a supposed identity crisis. Whose crisis? Does he really

> understand the lifestyle he praises? As you watch this film consider what it means to be White, to be Black, as expressed through the film. What is cultural identity and how does one come to assimilating into a culture and does assimilation mean understanding and/or acceptance?

As the participants were moving into their forty-fifth minute of dialogue, nigga/nigger had come up only once. That was in reference to a scene in which Flip (a White male) called Khalid (a Black male) "his nigga" after they had been wrongly arrested at a party. One person in the group asked a question to clarify the dialogue, and the fact that Flip called Khalid "his nigga" did not come up again. I wondered if it would.

A discussion around the authenticity of the characters and the director's skill to create complex characters was trailing to an end. Carl, the only Black man among the participants involved in the conversation said:

> What I'd like to discuss is the different ways they used the word nigger. What do you think about that? Because even here at school, we have kids that use the word, Black and White. And the White kids look at it as a freedom of speech thing.

After Carl made this assertion he was met with a round of confusion and disbelief among the rest of the group, which was all White people, except for one Latino, and that assertion was never quite assuaged across the conversation. For example:

Mary: Wait a minute. White kids say the word as how? Give me an example.

Carl: They use it talking to other kids.

Mary: White kids or Black kids?

Carl: Black kids.

Nora: They do?

Carl: Yeah. Yeah,...

Nora: Just like Flip did?

Carl: ... they don't really know the history...

Nora: And they're trying to say I'm cool?

Carl: Naw. They're just using the word with their Black friends.

Gloria: Really?

Their disbelief that a White student would freely use nigger or nigga around Black students or other White students highlights the taboo construction of the words. Carl offered an upfront explanation ("The White kids see it as a freedom of speech thing...") while the others never quite moved past the fact of the matter in and of itself.

In a latter conversation, Anne, who was largely quiet during this subject of the discussion, expressed her discomfort with the word, but supported Carl's contention about White students using nigga/nigger among themselves and to Black students:

When Carl brought it up he was talking about the White kids using it, and I'm not comfortable with the White kids or Black kids using it.

> I was raised that that was a negative, derogatory term and should never be used... But yeah, I have heard students using it outside my door. I listen for how it is being used before I say anything. And usually it is never used as an insult or anything like that.

The group's confusion about the validity of Carl's claim and why White youth would break social taboos hampered the conversation. In not taking up a critical conversation that everyone clearly felt was a troubling subject, the group inadvertently delimited some important possibilities. They ultimately cut off the possibility of a critical conversation about the functions of nigga/nigger, the quality of social relations among racial groups in schools, the influence of media and popular culture, using language as a tool for resistance and identity, and why they feel the way they do about nigga/nigger. To wit, the group never broached how or why Black youths use nigga among themselves or how and why permission to use nigga is granted to non-Black youth by Black youths. That conversation ended, but that issue was never assuaged.

Actions like this and teachers' cautious engagement of nigga/nigger serve three important functions: ensuring the acquiring of "permission" to even utter the word as a way to avoid social and institutional backlash, using politeness for avoidance, and making statements on professionalism.

Permission

The notion of permission is fundamental to nigga/nigger since the complicated words can illicit violent responses if used inappropriately. As Gloria

expressed in response to a White student's use of nigger to a group of Black students, "He didn't have permission." She is speaking to a passage in the discussion in which the group explored the use of nigger by a White student, Jason, in the previous school year. Jason, while joking with a group of Black students, stated nigger, claiming that since they were all getting along and joking, they would know he meant no offense. To the contrary, the students were incensed and Jason was lambasted. The Black students, all members of the school's Black Student Union (BSU), reported the incident to Anne who was the nearest teacher, other school personnel, and the faculty advisor for the BSU.

Eventually, Jason asked if he could apologize to the BSU and did so explaining that although his dad frequently used the word as a slur he did not, and he did not intend for his use to be taken as a slur. In a latter conversation with me, Jason expressed his regret and confusion. He posed the classic rhetorical quandary for many White folks, "Why is it that Black people can call each other nigger, but if I do it then it is wrong? I really meant no disrespect."

The film discussion participants, upon hearing that Carl was referring to the "Jason incident," dismissed Carl's "freedom of speech" point by constructing the White student, Jason, as a provocateur and rabble-rouser. As Mary stated, "... He's an edgy, edgy, edgy kid, and I can see how he would make anybody mad." Gloria referred to him as "dangerous." In effect, anytime a White person uses nigger, regardless of that individual's frame of mind or intent, a crime is being committed and social practices associated with nigger/nigga are

reinscribed to restrict people from using the words. After the initial group conversation, Anne explained her understanding of Jason's intent:

> I know Jason and I know the incident they were talking about because I was in the library when it happened. I know that Jason thought he was being cool and it was not perceived that way. I remember speaking to Jason and telling him that it was not okay. And I remember the whole freedom of speech thing coming up. But, you know, its like yelling fire in a crowded theater. That's just a word you don't use. Its not a friendly word and I remember bringing in the principal to nip it in the bud so that it didn't cause a lot of problems for the school or for Jason as well.

The use of nigger by a White student was not dismissed entirely, but his use was primarily viewed through a specific discursive lens. They understood the words' use by White people as a primarily negative act, regardless of intent. When asked about the use of nigger by White people, Nora fell back on the rejection of Jason, constructing him as someone that was out to insult and provoke. Therefore his use of nigger was "nothing shocking." But Carl was not limiting his statements to Jason; Jason was merely an example. Carl was also commenting on well meaning students that are reflecting trends that have been emerging in popular media and culture for quite some time. The group did not go past Jason, and in turn did not examine the myriad ways in which nigga/nigger are used in the film and in the school.

Avoidance to be Polite

The proliferation of nigga/nigger is forcing U.S. society and schools to come to grips with the functions of race, language, and power. However, notions of politeness or political correctness inadvertently steers people away from the difficult conversations that teachers need to engage confine that conversation. As Carl later expressed:

> I thought they were trying to get around it (talking about nigga/nigger). I was being very plain. They were trying to get around it by bringing up inferences and comparisons. They were avoiding being straight up with it. Being educators they couldn't just let it die. I think they are well-intentioned people, but everybody has their way of dealing with controversial issues. I deal with it one-on-one. Gotta deal with race one-on-one... I can't see how we can have a serious conversation without it. They wanted to be polite and dance around it, but sometimes you just can't.

Carl's declaration that since they are teachers "they couldn't just let it die" is a bold and important statement. It seems that in spite of a desire to engage "hot lava" (Glazier, 2000) issues like race, that engagement is predicated on notions of "appropriate" handling of issues.

Race in and of itself is a controversial and loaded topic for teachers (Howard, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Paley, 2000). Extending that discussion to the subject of nigga/nigger is a veritable "no man's land" in schools. Simply stated, nigga/nigger are bad and ought not be used because they are offensive and can

hurt people's feelings or they (more precisely nigga) are confusing. This is noble indeed, and I do not mean any sarcasm in that statement. But when teachers engage their educational pedagogies and practices, they bring with them the assumptions and values furthered through their profession, as well as their home and community social norms and values. As Cherryholmes (1988) states, "... We have internalized appropriate rules and ideologies, have accommodated ourselves to dominant power relationships, and are more concerned with performing expected actions than with analyzing them" (p. 6). Carl's insertion of nigga/nigger into the conversation was not only a challenge to the conversation participants but also a challenge to the institution's inability or unwillingness to adequately engage the staff or students in a critical conversation about the changing discourse around nigga/nigger in today's cultural and social context.

Professional policing

The fact that these conversations were not mounted made it especially timely as the customary pattern for engaging nigga/nigger began to emerge, most notably referring to them as "the N-word." Tom was the first participant to respond to Carl with an actual statement rather than a clarifying question:

> **Tom**: In one of my classes we had a big discussion on the n-word and the Black kids told me they don't mind it because it shows they're above that. It doesn't have the effect on them it might have had decades ago.
>
> **Mary**: With us old folks.

Tom: Right. (some chuckles)

This is a short statement, but it expressed something very powerful. Up to this point, apart from the script clarification, no White person in the group voiced nigga or nigger. When Tom finally did, he immediately displayed the taboo of nigga/nigger by engaging them through code, "the N-word." In effect, even in critical conversations among a group of highly trained, veteran teachers, nigga/nigger are so dangerous that stating them as objects of study is virtually impossible.

Additionally, he stated that his class had a "big discussion" about nigga/nigger. The class did not have a critical discussion, or interesting discussion, or passionate discussion, but a big discussion. Stating it as such raises the yellow flag of caution and reinscribes the taboo associated with nigga/nigger. The problem in this is that if a word cannot even be uttered among a group of professional educators, it is left unchallenged, misunderstood, and reserves all the power in which that silence confers.

Mary spoke to the issue of using the linguistic shorthand of "the N-word," explaining that for her it is only acceptable to use nigga/nigger when reading directly from a text:

> If I am quoting from a book I will read the word. Um, sometimes I will say it, like you just said, "the n-word," but I feel so silly saying that. The word says "nigger" here and I'm gonna say "n-word"? That's weird. But, I talk about it with my students.

Other teachers echoed Mary's sentiment of putting out feelers and caution horses. Nora expressed, " I will use it if it is a direct quote, but I always warn my students and try to get permission so I don't offend anybody." The fear of insult is nothing to take lightly in this district, or any other for that matter. Grace recounted the story of a Black teacher at another school in the district whom attempted to get a fellow White teacher fired when he said nigger while reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

So an expectation of professionalism called for restraint from using the words, unless permission is granted. Again, this sort of gate keeping of nigga/nigger inadvertently continues to reinscribe the power associated with them. It also quietly points to another phenomenon in education. There is seldom direct critique about a pair of words that yield considerable power in the sociocultural context of the U.S. Nora and Mary posed their use of the words as matters of prewritten texts. There was no talk of how they help students understand and critique the history, significance, and cultural borders and boundaries of nigga/nigger.

These three issues, permission, avoidance to be polite, and professionalism are interrelated phenomena that were seen through their discussion about nigga/nigger. Taken together, one feeds off the other in a feedback loop. In order to talk about nigga/nigger you must seek permission. But in seeking permission one must avoid or use coded language to seek permission. This is the way a professional should engage the words. This is a problematic practice because it sustains a discursive model that continues to

relentlessly construct nigga/nigger in dangerous, taboo ways. Ultimately this discursive model restricted the White teachers (any teacher for that matter) from using and critiquing the term nigger in their conversation following the film, even after a Black man gave them permission.

Nigga/Nigger: A Precarious Language Turn

In this section, I examine the teachers' discussion through the epistemological lenses of structuralism and poststructuralism and situated meaning and cultural models.

Errol: But are (White kids) saying nigger or nigga? Because it would make more sense if they used nigga because doesn't that come from rap and it means something quite different than nigger.
Carl: Well it means different things to different generations.

Nigga/nigger both challenge structuralist notions of certainty, wherein our definitions are affixed to some notion of truth (Eagleton, 1983). When considering these words we can clearly see the impact of a post-structural turn wherein traditional notions of social fact and assignments to rigid, binary categories deconstruct (Cherryholmes, 1988; Eagleton, 1993). Meanings are not fixed. They are in effect shaped by social, cultural, political, historic, and economic factors that influence the employment and practice of ideas. It would be easy to "put nigga/nigger on the shelf," as they say. But to do that creates an

impossible condition in which human agency and culture building is delimited. Allow me to give you a brief moment in the social history of nigga/nigger to illuminate.

At the end of the 1960s, Richard Pryor, one of the most influential comedians of the 20th century, was about to perform in a Las Vegas casino club. At the time Pryor modeled his stand up routine after Bill Cosby, attempting to embrace Cosby's "universal themes" and appeal. But Richard had a drastically different upbringing than Cosby. Richard's grandmother ran a brothel. His mother was a prostitute. His father was a hustler. At the same time, the Black Power Movement was taking hold and the political and economic needs of the Black community were not safe, despite the advances of the Civil Rights Movement and federal legislation. Brothas and sistas continued to have pressing issues of identity, political efficacy, and empowerment to address in the wake of the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy, consistent police brutality, integration backlash, increasing urban poverty, and an escalating war in Southeast Asia. Pryor found himself paralyzed and could not go on and deliver a routine that, to him, did not speak truth about contemporary society in the U.S.

When he reemerged a little less than a year later he had a new, groundbreaking persona, the Crazy Nigga. As he said in the concert film *Richard Pryor: Live and Smokin'* (1971), which was filmed during this transitional period, "I quit bein' a Negro. I gave that shit up... No room for advancement." Pryor began to use nigga as not a slur but as an identity that represented the resisting

oppressed. Simply, he made a bold statement: if you are going to call me a nigger and treat me like a nigger, then I will be a nigger, but you may not like what my understanding of a nigger is. By freely using nigga, a subtle language shift emanating from African American English Vernacular (Rickford and Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 1994) or African American Language (AAL) (Smitherman, 2006) Pryor and others challenged the status quo and reengaged a term that was largely a device of power for Whites.

In the Black community there are several ways to use nigga that range from the affectionate (such as, "Oh, Julius is my nigga!") to the pejorative (as in, "Why niggas gotta fight every time we come here?"). There are at least nine different uses for nigga in the Black community (Smitherman, 1994). On the other hand, historically when White people have used nigga, or more precisely nigger, it has been used as a dehumanizing slur meant to keep Black folks in their place (Kennedy, 2002). However, those sharp lines of ownership and license to use nigga/nigger are blurring. As Smitherman (1994) tells us:

> The frequent use of nigga in rap music, on "Def Comedy Jam," and throughout Black culture generally, where the word takes on meanings other than the historical negative, has created a linguistic dilemma in the crossover world and in the African American community. Widespread controversy rages about the use of nigga among Blacks—especially the pervasive public use of the term—and about whether or not Whites can have license to use the N-

word with the many different meanings Blacks have attached to it.

(p. 168)

Compared to many other popular films, Hollywood or independent, nigga/nigger are employed in *Whiteboyz* far more than most fare. Throughout the film we hear Flip and his "posse" of White male youths consistently referring to each other as niggas. In these instances, nigga was utilized as a term of endearment, a practice they borrowed from their Black rap and popular culture idols, a move that challenges the traditional rules for engaging nigga. At other points in the film, nigga is shifted to nigger, and always encapsulated a negative message. In one scene after Flip's dad has been fired from his job, he sees Flip posing and profiling in the mirror while listening to one of his favorite rap songs (which is also using nigga). His stepfather descends the stairway and Flip notices him out of the corner of his eye. With contempt, his father asks, "What are you, a nigger now?" Similarly, near the film's end Jay, one of Flip's posse, accuses Khalid, who is Black, of "setting up his boy" and calls him a nigger.

When discussing nigga/nigger it is key to differentiate between the two words. Nigger has a deeply rooted history in oppression, dehumanization, and violence. It is a term that is a fraternal twin of Whiteness, for as the notion of White was created and institutionalized, nigger was a tool to describe the less-than-human other, with growing derision. Across the history of social relations in the United States one would be hard-pressed to find examples in which nigger was employed by a White person toward a Black person in which there was not a negative implication. More importantly to today, the prevailing image of nigger's

use has represented ignorance, antiquity, and marginalization. Nigger is just a word we don't say. Its place in history has a well-carved space, one that cannot be redeemed. Even in my own experiences, and I have been refereed to as a nigger more than once, it has never been done out of respect.

Nigga on the other hand is quite different. It is a word of resistance. Largely spoken by African Americans the word is derived from nigger, but due to linguistic and contextual shifts nigga became its own entity and enigma. From jump Black folks have been using nigga self-referentially. That is why the word is so complicated; it was always used in multiple ways in the Black community. Today, because of the factors cited above, White youths and others are beginning to feel freer in their use of nigga, not nigger but nigga. Herein lies the issue for my participants. If nigga and nigger are two different words, should we treat them the same? How do we best incorporate these discussions into curriculum? And, how do we help our students understand the practical and theoretical means for navigating the issue?

What it is? What it ain't?: A Structuralist Read

From a structuralist point of view, nigger has signified a racial slur that had the intent to marginalize and dehumanize Africans and African-Americans. On the other hand, nigga embodies a number of meanings that are mediated by tone, context, and intent (Smitherman, 2006). The difference rests in the notion that Black folks that pioneered and practice the use of nigga are literally speaking through a different language code than White folks. It is a common rule in

African American Language (AAL) to drop the final (-er) and replace it with a soft (a) (Smitherman, 1999). AAL has been defined as a rule-governed pattern of speech a majority of African Americans have spoken at some point in their lives (Rickford and Rickford, 1999). As the Linguistic Society of America states:

> The systematic and expressive nature of the grammar and pronunciation patterns of the African American vernacular has been established by numerous scientific studies over the past thirty years. Characterizations of Ebonics as "slang," "mutant," "lazy," "defective," "ungrammatical," or "broken English" are incorrect and demeaning.
>
> (http://linguistlist.org/topics/ebonics/lsa-ebonics.html)

There seems to be a tendency to embrace Black culture when it comes to the entertainment industry (Cashmore, 1997) but to embrace the language born out of the culture's struggle and progress seems to be asking too much. The subtle shift in language created a new word and opened possibilities of use that had not been explored. This did not begin with Hector Pryor; it has been an ongoing negotiation since the Ante-Bellum era (Smitherman, 2006).

But for many, AAL has not been legitimated as a separate, distinct, and legitimate form of communication for the Black community; it is collapsed into "standard English" and in turn considered "improper." Therefore, when a White youth says nigger when joking with a group of Black friends, it is possible the White youth does in fact mean nigga in a positive context but is not aware of the fact that the subtle language shift is necessary. A significant part of the problem

here is that we do not teach our students that there are valid, structural differences between "standard English" and AAL. These are issues of power and pedagogy that must be explored in secondary schools and teacher preparation programs.

I have attempted to mount this mission in my own teaching and professional development. I have offered many classes and groups a concise listing of the grammar and morphology of AAL, constructed by Dr. Geneva Smitherman in 1999 for a class on African American Language at the Michigan State University. In personal conversations I have offered and referenced studies and texts that legitimate AAL as a valid, rule-governed system of language, but people continuously disregard the experts and revert to the popular social construction of AAL as improper, ignorant, and bad English. In effect, the fundamental misunderstanding and illegitimacy that nigga and nigger connote different signifiers is buffered. I do not think people intend to be dismissive or insulting, but it shows the power of hegemony. It is very difficult to change longstanding social practices and cultural values. Thinking about AAL as valid is a fairly new discussion at the elementary and secondary education levels and just as new in the U.S. at large. As I will show, this is a difficult shift because of the ways in which we have come to learn about what we think is legitimate and what is not.

The place of AAL in schooling is changing (Delpit and Perry, 1998) and our social understanding of nigga/nigger is also. My participants are caught in a quintessential paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1996) and like all paradigm shifts there are

some that will just roll with it and there are some that will resist and continue their own practices. But the question is begged: Why?

Through a structural analysis, the use of nigger as a pejorative is expected to be the sole use and convey some sort of truths: First, Black people are niggers and no one else. Second, the term is always derogatory. In our liberal-minded social context the reality of that derogation has transformed into a general distaste for and censoring of the word. Not only is it offensive to those that are objects of the derision and dehumanization nigger is meant to provoke, but also White people are deeply offended by the word, as it reminds them of a racist history and re-engages White guilt for past (and current) racist practices.

The participants in the conversation generally embrace a structural notion of nigger because of their insistence that nigger is never a safe word for White people to use and rarely a safe word for Black people to use. The teachers projected the notion that nigger and nigga always conjure ill images of degradation and inhumanity, and regardless of the relationship only Black folks can be niggas and by extension (although no offense is intended by this statement) niggers.

But structural analysis is insufficient for thinking about the proliferation of nigga/nigger throughout culture and society in the U.S. Cherryholmes sites three key insufficiencies of structuralism (1988). First, the individual is removed from the center of meaning. Human beings have agency and are the actors of power moves and meaning making. Individuals collectively have the ability to shape and reframe meaning and nigger/nigga, although the source of much unease,

does not operate renegade outside human thought and action. Second, the structuralist tendency to examine snapshots of language and meaning at a particular time avoids the role of "historic cultural traditions and values" (p. 31). The belief about nigga/nigger rests on the idea that it was always a pejorative and further disregards the fact that communities and cultures can cross borders and boundaries to forge new meanings and discourses. But Cherryholmes' third criticism is his most important. The inherent assumptions of structuralism do not hold up, primarily the fact that definitions are not fixed. Meanings do not adhere to a "transcendental signifier" that words and meanings can be held in relation to (Eagleton, 1983). In the case of nigga/nigger, the teachers, although unable to clearly state why, connect nigga/nigger to larger notions of justice, equality, humanity, and politeness. All of those are noble indeed, but what is just, equal, humane, and polite also shift depending on context.

Play, Context, and Videotape: Using Post-structuralism and Discourse Analysis for Thinking about Nigga and Nigger

Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to take a post-structural language turn in our analysis of nigga/nigger. Structurally, words are constructs encapsulated and only make sense within a particular structure. But as Derrida tells us, in language there is a great amount of play within language and as such definitions of words can and do in fact shift (from Structure, Sign, and Play). Nothing is sacred in language. Because of the notion that definitions are social

constructions mediated by context, politics, and power, the meanings and uses of words may change with time.

These shifts in meaning are matters of truth, power, and discourse. From a pragmatist point of view, Cherryholmes explains, "Discourses dominant in a historical period and geographic location determine what counts as true, important, or relevant, what gets spoken, what remains unsaid" (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 35). The popular discourse around race has defined nigger/nigga as taboo and out of bounds. Therefore it is much more difficult to even utter the word. Ultimately the control of the word was extended to the only Black man in the group, the only one who had the "right" to use it since it has been used against him.

Anne expressed this phenomenon in a conversation after the post-screening discussion. Anne is a divorced mother of two boys, now men. Her ex-husband was Black and she is a Native American although easily mistaken for White. She does not like the word and bristles when she hears it, and did not appreciate it when her boys began to use nigga among each other. However, as she goes on to say, she can understand how a cultural group's reframing of a term can be a powerful act:

> My oldest son said to me that we are taking the power back by using the word in a different way. By us using this word we are taking its power to be used against us. That's about the only thing that made sense to me about the whole thing. I could kind of understand how a word has power and has meaning... My sons

> are Black, so by their using it, that made sense to me. They could use that word and take the power back by sort of reframing it culturally. But it still is not comfortable for me to hear White people using it with their Black friends. I just can't get past how I was raised.

In effect, her sons along with many others are shifting the discursive rules that govern nigga's uses. Although aware and understanding of that move, Anne, as well as the other participants, continue to be uncomfortable with the use of nigga. That begs the question of why? It is insufficient to just tell people, more directly teachers, that there are no transcendental signifiers, or that language shifts. I would argue that on a "gut" level and an intellectual level they understand that. But those ideas do not assuage their feeling about the word or make them more comfortable with engaging nigga or nigger for critical discussions or otherwise.

Considering these issues through situated meanings and cultural models as discursive analytical tools can help get to the heart of the above question. "Both of these involve ways of looking at how speakers and writers give language specific meanings within specific situations" (Gee, 1999, p. 40). Humans have the tendency to observe and recognize patterns of behavior and usage in the social and physical world. Across anyone's life span, differences between words like shoes, pants, weather, or broke remind of us of certain pattern and our minds accept general trends of meaning that emerge from those patterns and interactions with others. "A situated meaning is an image or pattern that we assemble 'on the spot' as we communicate in a given context based on our

construal of that context and on our past experiences" (p. 47). For many, nigger's situated meaning emerges through patterns that reflect pervasive negative use and social chastisement for its use. Parents tell their children it is a "bad word." Television shows like Roots reflect this pattern. Hearing members of the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacy groups use nigger reflect a certain pattern. And almost always, nigger is heard as a slur from White people lodged at Black people. For many of my participants, these patterns of use have sustained for over forty or fifty years, and in effect makes it nearly impossible for them to break or think outside those patterns.

Parallel to that phenomenon, cultural models do not make it any easier either. Cultural models can be thought of as "explanations" (p. 42) of the patterns gleaned from situated meanings. These explanations are guided by sociocultural interactions and are also largely unconscious to the individual. Gee offers a strong analogy for helping to clarify how cultural models function, which I must quote at length:

> Cultural models are rather like "movies" or "videotapes" in the mind, tapes of experiences we have had, seen, read about, or imagined. We all have a vast store of these tapes, the edited (and, thus, transformed) records of our experiences in the world or with texts and media... Cultural models can become emblematic visions of an idealized, "normal," "typical" reality, in much the way that, say, a Bogart movie is emblematic of the world of the "tough guy"... (They) are also variable, differing across different cultural groups,

> including different cultural groups in a society speaking the same language. They change with time and other changes in society, as well as with new experience. But we are usually quite unaware we are using them and of their full implications, unless challenged by someone or by a new experience where our cultural models clearly don't "fit." (p. 60)

Gee's understanding of cultural models is especially relevant to my participants in that White youths using nigga or nigger as something other than a pejorative is outside their "videotape" about the use of nigger. It is a use that does not vibe with most previous encounters. As Anne put it, "I just can't get past how I was raised." She is not alone in this feeling, but the notion of cultural models points to another important point. These "videotapes" can look quite different across cultural lines and can be edited, reassembled, and reframed to fit the needs and experiences of that culture (Gee, 1999). When Black youths engage nigga, although its impetus a shifting of nigger, it has become much more; it has become a device that shattered a particular cultural model.

The discussion of the White teachers in this study showed tensions in the cultural model and situated meanings that are generally used to think about nigga/nigger. Those dictate an engagement shrouded in taboo, unease, regret, and distaste. Unfortunately, those ill feelings prevented them from taking advantage of an opportunity to wrestle with a very difficult issue for our youth and society. Not that they would have been able to solve this social quandary, but if a critical conversation is not mounted then creating pedagogical tools that can

help youth negotiate these issues will be further hampered. After all, the ultimate purpose for engaging in the film series was to become more comfortable with engaging in conversations about race. The conversation around nigga/nigger is a fundamental part of that discussion. As Carl put it, "I can't see how we can have a serious conversation without it."

This is not an argument advocating widespread use of nigga by Black folks or White folks or any others. It is an analytical explanation of nigga/nigger's place in a conversation among a group of predominantly White teachers in which they avoided and, once prompted, minimally engaged the subject by reverting to contemporary, liberal dismissals of nigga's use. The power of nigga (and nigger) cannot be denied. But constant pleas to "put nigga/nigger on the shelf" only functions to reinforce the power that has been conferred onto the word(s).

Perhaps the key to this linguistic, social, and cultural quagmire is not further attempts to extinguish nigga/nigger from the U.S. lexicon. Perhaps as a society we are charged with engaging the word(s) to first fully understand the myriad ways in which they function. Then we must assist the youth, students, in understanding not only their histories but also how language, culture, and power intersect generally. Perhaps as the current youth culture and subsequent youth cultures negotiate the words, forging for themselves an understanding of contexts, tones, and relationships that mediate nigga's/nigger's uses, will the power it wields over all of us diminish. Like everything else, time changes things. And regardless of how we feel about it, nigga and nigger are no different.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: RESOLUTIONS AND BIRTH OF THE AUTEUR

After working with these teachers for more than a year I like to think I have experienced many important lessons for discussing race and Whiteness with teachers. As this process unfolded and in the subsequent construction of this dissertation I also realized that I end with many more questions than I began, a common result of conducting research. This final chapter does not provide neat answers tied in a pretty bow, only my initial understanding of the impact of this study on my participants and myself.

As a reminder, this study began with three specific questions. First, as a pedagogical tool for professional development around diversity issues, in what ways do educational professionals talk with one another about race, in the context of viewing particular films? Second, how do elements and aspects of Whiteness enter conversations about race? And finally, what can I learn as a teacher educator and professional developer about how to use film effectively? The following final paragraphs are ruminations on these central questions, closing with a few key questions for future study that arose across the execution and writing of this project.

Teachers Talking Race; Teachers Talking Film

What was particularly interesting about this group of professionals is the fact that they were all very understanding of and interested in the notion of race and the role race plays in schools. Throughout the film series it was clear to me

that the participants were understanding of the major issues associated with talking about race; I do not want to take that away from them. Additionally, and I must tip my hat to this staff in general, nearly 20% of the staff ultimately participated in this research. Many others had voiced their interest but simply were not able to fit the film series into their schedules. In short, the staff at this school was considerate of the importance of mounting conversations about race.

As the discussions ensued it grew clearer to me that they were generally understanding of notions like White privilege, stereotypes, the boundaries of institutional racism, and other factors, but as stated earlier, with limited time there is only so much a group of ten can talk about. But what was especially interesting to me was the fact of their openness about their own confusion and questions regarding the complexity of race and race relations in schools and society. Although they did not have a *direct* conversation about what it means to be White (a la the *Whiteboyz* discussion) they nonetheless were engaged and savvy about the contradictions of assimilation, identity, and privilege.

I am conflicted, as a result, by the nature of their discussions. On one hand it is a testament to the inclusion of these issues in multicultural education professional development and teacher preparation. On the other hand, in light of their skirting of Whiteness, there is a reiteration of the "silenced dialogue" (Delpit, 1988) around the institutional embedding of Whiteness and White privilege. As the film series came to a close, it became clear to me that explicit, direct instruction and engagement of the construction of Whiteness is wholly necessary to help education professionals move from solely focusing on racialized others to

a more inclusive nuanced conversation about how all of our racial identities and positions complicate institutional opportunities.

Selective? Vision: Seeing around Elephants

The fact that my participants never actually took on the task of describing what it meant to be White, at least what it meant to be White as represented in the chosen visual texts, was disappointing but not surprising. As expressed earlier in this dissertation, in the field of Whiteness Studies it is a common assertion that Whiteness is the water in the fishbowl many teachers are swimming in; in other words, the extent to which Whiteness has become normalized makes it difficult to dislodge from that reality in order to deconstruct the idea (Dyer, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; Morrison, 1993; Pollock, 2004; Roediger, 1998).

In many ways this research reiterates much of what we already know about addressing Whiteness, and White privilege for that matter, in schools and popular culture. But what is particularly interesting here is that we are not dealing with a group of resistant individuals that do not want to investigate these issues or a group of folks that felt the messenger had a proverbial ax to grind and in exchange chose not to open up. To the contrary, this was a well-intentioned group of seasoned professionals who all identified themselves as politically and socially liberal, and invested in social justice. What this research points out is the extent to which mounting a conversation about Whiteness is a difficult process, for all involved.

An important question asked of all research is how does the data collected shed light on a particular context? Within the halls of NHS, as a result of Dean Patti's desire to change the culture of diversity and the charges made by that brave group of Black students, race was put onto the front-burner of issues the staff needed to engage. This film series, although it did not necessarily provide the participants involved with new language and theoretical constructs to explain racial phenomena, did have a powerful affect on them. That affect made openly discussing race less intimidating while also revealing ideas and experiences about one another these colleagues did not know. By the same token, if we consider this research through a larger lens and consider U.S. society writ large, finding more effective and safe ways of helping all citizens objectively look at the experience and impact of race is fundamental to our advancement.

It reminds me of President Bill Clinton's Conversations on Race Initiatives of the latter 1990s. Although it was important for citizens across the country to hear about the experiences of others, not having common texts to analyze racial representations and experiences added to the typical devolution of those conversations, wherein we find ourselves talking at each other and trying to defend the reality of marginalization or denying the reality of privilege. This film series opened the participants to a conversation that they was not going to find resolutions but was going engage, safely, constructively, and ultimately powerfully. And as stated above, providing the facilitator with much fodder to further plan and structure future activities that could explore topics.

I realized that the film series was merely the first step in a long process. The film series was a way of gauging where the participants were in discussing these issues. How confident were they in their own knowledge about race and Whiteness? I was able to ascertain a baseline for engagement for future discussions, and based upon what was revealed throughout this experience it is clear to me that the affective component of the experience put them all in a space in which they were more open to discussing the elephant in the room—Whiteness.

Becoming an Auteur: Using Film with Teachers

As of the writing of this section I have considered seven points that have resonated most with me as I considered my data, my relationships, and my memory. These points I will carry with me as I continue to stand on the vanguard of opening this fundamentally key stream of engagement. To recapitulate the essential point from the beginning of this writing: As the United States becomes increasingly diverse while the teaching force stagnates as a predominantly White force, understanding how Whiteness has shaped and continues to shape institutional practices and expectations, we must begin to critically examine those practices and expectations alongside assessing the needs and dispositions of non-White groups that also function within institutions. As the cliché tells us, if we do not know our past we will not know our future. Similarly, if we do not know what we are asking (and in many cases demanding) a growing critical mass of

our citizens to assimilate into, we will be doomed to continue inequitable practices.

Know Thyself and Use What You Got

At the end of Chapter 3 I explored the controversy around whether or not a Black man can successfully talk to White people about Whiteness without coming off as though he has an ax to grind. Having navigated this process and as I put the finishing touches on this piece, I have learned something deeply important about that question. The answer is yes. But it depends on the individual.

I was successful in getting my participants to open up in part because I gave them a great deal of time and space to learn who *I* was as an educator and human being. Over the year before they even walked into the first screening they were able to see my range of emotions and have group and individual discussions with me about my ideas and history. I was revealing of myself because I assumed that if I expected them to *buy into* these ideas that they would need to see that I too could be open and interested in these ideas as matters of social justice for all, as opposed to a proverbial ax to grind in whole and singular support of Black folks.

This required using a number of tools in the human emotional toolkit. I told jokes, reciting lines verbatim from Bill Cosby, Hector Pryor, George Carlin, Dave Chappelle, etc. if the situation warranted. I showed empathy for their confusion about feeling "damned if they did and damned if they didn't" in

interacting with Black students. I displayed anger, when appropriate, about the ill treatment of variously oppressed peoples around the world. (During this research the genocide in Darfur and the U.S. government's tepid response, as well as the Iraq War were major topics). I displayed confusion and uncertainty, the marks of new learning, when talking about race and other issues related to diversity. My participants understood that I was seeking my own answers alongside them, and they appreciated that.

The short of it is, be you as you go out there. Be open. Be respectful. Be honest. Be real.

Careful Construction of the Task

As the screening of *Whiteboyz* began, I asked the participants to do the following: As you watch this film, consider what it means to be White and to be Black. My intent for asking this question was to prompt them to look at the differences between the White and Black characters. Not just the roles they occupied but more substantively how they behaved, their expectations and the expectations of them, the attitudes they emoted.

In retrospect I made a serious error with my participants. My question for them to consider at the beginning of the film was, "According to this film, what does it mean to be White and what does it mean to be White?" Although I found this question to be clear in its intention, I now understand how confusing it can be. The question ought to have been:

> Based upon what you see represented in the film, describe in as much detail as possible who is White and who is Black. Consider how they act and behave, how they dress, how they talk, the values and themes the characters promote or dismiss, and other points that may arise for you while screening the text.

I realize that I am constructing for the participants a structure for reading the film. In this structure, the basis for culture reduces to behavior, dress, talk, and values. But to really get flipped, I am also imposing that there are in fact differences among characters based on race and I expect them to see that.

When engaging teachers in a critical reading of a text, like any student, it is key to consider culturally relevant strategies in order to best reach them. When considering the information you can get from them as individuals, coupled with ideas culled from literature about the group(s) the participant belong to, pragmatic decisions about structuring thinking are useful. Those constructs can be problematized and deconstructed later (and hopefully will). But the quality and scope of the question upfront needs to be helpful to viewers. In the typical amounts of time allotted for professional development, guiding them down these complicated paths is fundamental.

Knowledge Is Power

Yes. The more you know about the film you are viewing and the theories that help explain the various sociocultural or cultural theory issues that may arise the better. But those bodies of knowledge pale in comparison to knowing the

people you are working with. The participants voiced that a part of the reason they enjoyed the sessions and felt comfortable was because I was based in the building. I had the opportunity to see them teach. I observed them with their students. I also got to know them very well, before, during, and after the film series.. In short, over time trust and interest was built among us. We began to dig each other as professionals and people.

For them this was a totally unique experience. It was rare for a consultant to actually get to know them. Usually a consultant preached to them from a stage, in front of a PowerPoint. Or, a consultant would come in and toss around assumptions and tell them what they are not doing. (Funny how stereotypes always keep coming up). But for them, I took the time to understand them and where they were coming from. Simultaneously, they had the opportunity to become familiar with the ways in which I understood issues of race and culture and how I felt that all institutions must address White privilege.

Using Film for Professional Development

Using film with in-service teachers, for me, is it. Think about the lives of teachers for a moment. From 7:45 until 3:30 their days are packed! At NHS, most teachers have meetings during lunch, daily! Most of them have families. Many are taking evening classes. Some are caring for sick parents. Some are caring for their grandchildren because the parents are addicted to drugs. Some are battling breast cancer. These are real, honest stories of a group of professionals that really try to make their school the best place in the world,

according to themselves. This leaves little time for extra reading, professional development weekends, conferences, retreats, and whatnot. Therefore quality activities in which they feel engaged, safe, and encouraged must be strategically planned and placed in their week. Film can allow for that, and be entertaining as well.

I thought about trying to back this up with a bunch of supporting literature but that seems rather silly and pointless. Discovering any activity that people can enjoy and provokes their thought is legitimacy in itself. Like Gloria said in an off-hand remark at the close of *Whiteboyz*, "Hell I could stay here for another hour. This is the highlight of my week (lol)!"

But in terms of a pedagogical strategy, film works so well because it helps mine the affective dispositions of the participants. Film is a visceral experience that is felt in intellectual, emotional, and spiritual ways. Considering those shifts is important in affecting the roots of individual philosophies and pedagogies. Using film is less about offering handouts, formulas, frameworks, and lesson plan and more about the chance to experience complicated ideas.

The talk allows the teachers the chance to experience each other in new and revealing ways. Tom told me, "I love this. I mean these guys are really smart and see stuff that I didn't even consider. But now when I'm at home I look for more of this stuff." Now whether or not this experience directly impacted their teaching is beyond the scope of this project. But for one thing, I think it is a mistake that teaching is becoming increasingly about accountability. On top of that, for the participants that participated in all the conversations, they felt more

comfortable with having discussions about race among themselves, with their classes, and at home. The point is that the experience had an undeniable affective component that struck at how they think about these issues as individuals. In order to push the conversations about race in this country we must first engage the individual, then move to the institution.

What Was That I Said?

This is simple. Participants must have easy access to the discussions, just in case. To remedy this, technology like podcasting, iMovie, and blogs can offer accessibility to participants. With podcasting one could allow the discussion to be downloadable to an MP3 player or a hard drive. With iMovie the facilitator or working with the others, can make their own film of the experience, focusing on the major themes of the discussion. The conversation could also be posted on a blog and allow for comments in a closed or open community. Each of these are easily accessible ideas and can model technology uses for students.

The Pen Is Mighty

This project was designed for the participants to keep journals. However, because of personal circumstances and time constraints for the teachers, journals fell to the wayside. I toiled for a while about whether or not to press the issue, but I figured that there was something to be said about the fact that they ultimately chose not to journal.

I reiterate the fact that teachers are just busy. Professional development has the difficult task of being engaging and sustaining and usually it is neither. Regardless, keeping track of one's thoughts as they move through an experience like this, one in which many feelings and ideas are traded, is important to growth. Like Nora stated, "I would love to keep track of my thoughts and experiences, but by the time I get done with school, see my kids, fix dinner and whatnot, I am way to tired to write some more." This is an interesting challenge for educators. Although we tend to promote particular practices for teachers, how realistic is it for them to incorporate those new ideas into their practice and daily life?

Express Your Self

One cannot be a fly on the wall. Trying to get teacher to talk about race is not a spectator sport. Although just having them talk was a good strategy for this particular activity I find that to get to the deeper conversations I must be on the forefront of pushing my participants into the darker spaces of critical reflection and engagement. Since I was still trying to consider effective paths for working with the teachers, the conversations turned out to be good tools for understanding what are the most comfortable and most salient issues for discussing race. But if I could do it again I would be much more direct with my questioning and use the experience for not only an assessment but also teaching opportunity.

If there is one thing for me to take away from this story is that ultimately talking about race is hard. My purpose as a teacher educator is to create

conditions in which teachers and students feel safe enough to actually talk about things.

The Birth of the Sequel: Questions and Tasks for Future Inquiry

As a final note, with all research comes the creation of new questions. Across this work I formed new questions, new generations of questions that were born out of the initial three. Looking back at those questions I found that what resonates most is further investigation of how representations function and what impact do representations have in shaping the ways in which teachers interact with students? As the participants began to talk about what they saw in the films I wondered why they latched onto some things more than others. For example, the character of Flipp Dogg was a complete reversal and recasting of the stereotypical construct of lower class Black males. Was the unappealing nature of his character, as largely described by the participants, a transference of the popular disdain for other characters? Additionally, how would the participants dealt with flesh and blood Flipp Doggs that do in fact exist? Another way of stating the above question is how do representations shape the ways in which we interact with real people?

Alongside those question I also am wondering what a class based upon what I gleaned from the participants' conversations would look like. Unfortunately I was not able to create a workshop or mini-course for the participants (or whole staff for that matter) that further explored the issues that rose during the film series. I would like to replicate this model of engagement

and mount another ethnography in which we are actually able to step back and academically explore issues.

Finally, in reference to the "n-word" chapter, I think it would be important to study the use of "dangerous" or undesirable speech in classrooms and schools. I could see a whole series of research in which words like nigga/nigger, bitch/ho, esse, fag/faggot, dyke, etc. are viewed and heard in popular film and compared/contrasted to their use in real life. Schools are so-called microcosms of society and these words do not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon. I think as an enterprise of education we should further investigate how the visual representational use of these words actually vibe or not vibe with their daily use.

With that said, my popcorn is gone. I have taken my last swallow of pop. And the credits are beginning to roll. I hope to see you again, at the movies in a school near you...

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STUDENT AND TEACHER EMAIL EXAMPLES

Student

I have a huge issue with the fact that I'm being (singled out all the time). I feel as if I'm treated like I'm the only black student in some classes. (I in no way shape or form feel safe) in certain areas and I don't feel as if I can tell all my teachers when I have a problem. I want to have this meeting to let the teachers know what is going on so they know how I feel. I want the teachers to know how I feel because they might think that they are doing nothing wrong in their eyes but in mine I'm being mistreated. I also want to create the building block for the every black student currently attending and those who are going to attend in the future, so that they will have a better high school experience than mine.

A couple weeks ago a incident occurred in the art room, and when I tried to go back to my class I was told I couldn't go back into he class or else I would've been suspended. I was later told to go to another location where I was told I'm always around trouble and that usually I'm the reason why there is trouble, so sit in the halls like you normally do. I took great offense to the comment because I felt as if that person was telling me most of the time I'm the reason problems happen just because I'm around them. I would have liked to have felt as if the person was optimistic, I would have liked to hear its ok we will deal with this instead of usually you are the problem, Just do what you normally do and sit in the halls.

Earlier this year I was taking a class. This was a class that had very little deadlines and little work. This class was more-so a class that you did at your own

pace as long as you did the work. I would talk but my work would be done, but kids from different classes would be around me and talk so it would be even louder. When the talking became a problem a teacher told me that I wasn't doing my work and that I could no longer be in the class but I could take it as a CR (community resourece course). I was mad but at the same time I felt hurt because here is a teacher telling me that I can not be in a class anymore because of other people and because they are by me I'm in the wrong and I have to leave. It would've been better if this person had at least put in the time to hear my side of the situation or try to help instead of trying to kick me out of the class.

Last year during registration I was going to register for a class. A teacher told me that they didn't think it would be a good idea for me to take this class because it was hard and they didn't think I was going to do well. At first I was very angry, but the more and more I thought about it, it killed my pride. This is because year in and year out I go to school to try to prove that I can do well and as well as or as better than some high students. Thus for this teacher to tell me that they think I cant do well in this class because it was hard made me feel as though I was not smart enough to take it. If the teacher had told me that the class was hard but they were there to help me and that we would be able to get through it, I would have felt a whole lot better because I would've felt that the teacher believe in me and in my intelligence.

I think staff needs to learn how to deal with different races. I think if they take situations in a positive manner then the results would be greater because students can handle optimism better than criticism. I think I can learn to not be so

impatient when it comes to teachers and what they say. I also believe that I can take more time to show so more teachers that I actually care that there is a relationship between us so things can be said so comfort and safeness are present. I feel teachers have a lot to work on but at the same time I think if I'm not doing things properly then I can't expect them to change and I haven't changed at all myself. I feel maybe I should point the thumb before I point the finger in some situations.

(Emailed essay from an anonymous student, 5/10/2005)

Teacher

When I was in grade school, I often got a "needs improvement" in the "thinks before speaking" column. To this day, I try to think before speaking and writing so that my words, spoken or written, will not be misunderstood.

December 1st felt like a scene from The Crucible for me, a day of finger pointing and near hysteria. I often refer to that day with sorrow, confusion, anger and exhaustion. I felt constrained by the meeting's format and rules. Then, I watched those who made the rules break all of them. Body language betrayed your anger, sorrow, confusion and exhaustion – the same feelings I was feeling, but in your case, many of you rolled your eyes and tore from the room. I tried to stay calm, collected and cooler than I really am. It's important to stay cool, because cool people can listen better, and this meeting is intended, I think, to help us talk and listen to each other. When you roll your eyes and leave a room, you don't look into anyone's eyes. I want students who are upset with something

I've done or said to deal with it, talk to me. As I write this, I don't know how many of you have been in my classes to have read the following section from the opening day hand-out I give all my students. Here it is:

> Please speak with me if you have a problem at any time of the term. It's counterproductive for you to stew over some concern we can work out in minutes of conversation. I try to spend many lunches in the room so we can speak at leisure. All too often, it's hard to accommodate a lot of you between classes. I will not teach Blocks II, III, or VII this year, so I will be free to speak with you then too. Thursday, after forum, is also a good time for a conference. I have also given you my phone number. I never charge for advice about thesis statements even when I'm cooking (I have a microwave in my office).

Maybe what you will want to discuss is not related to a thesis statement. But, whatever it is, I'm open for discussion and eager to improve my professional and personal relationships with all my students and colleagues. So, please heed the above. Don't roll your eyes; don't bolt from the room. Lock eyes with me, and let's talk.

(Email from an anonymous teacher, 5/10/2005)

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY APPENDIX

Qualitative research by its nature is messy and sloppy business. The advantage of conducting quantitative research is that the process is typically pristinely laid out in advance and the researcher must, as rigorously as possible, stick to the plan presented. There is an assumption of objectivity in quantitative research and the researcher generally attempts to construct herself as merely collecting data that will ultimately be tabulated and calculated. Formulas are imposed and eventually, in the final analysis, the numbers are supposed to speak for themselves. Qualitative research, specifically fieldwork, is not necessarily like that because at any given moment the research can move from objectivity to subjectivity. This brings up questions of validity that oftentimes cannot be simply answered in qualitative research paragigms.

In the appendix to *Streetcorner Society*, William Foote Whyte speaks to the trouble of "realistic descriptions" in reporting qualitative research and why he chose to write a detailed explanation of his classic study:

> It seemed as if the academic world had imposed a conspiracy of silence regarding the personal experiences of field workers. In most cases, the authors who had given any attention to their research methods had provided fragmentary information or had written what appeared to be a statement of the methods the field worker would have used if he had known what he was going to come out with when he entered the field. It was impossible to find realistic accounts that revealed the errors and confusion and

personal involvement that a field worker must experience. (Whyte, 1981, p. 359).

The point I take away from Whyte's declaration is that since qualitative research and field work is tempestuous at best, in order to address the validity issue one must speak explicitly about the process through which the research was mounted.

A great deal of back story and context is provided in Chapters 1 and 3 of this reporting and I will not readdress that here. The purpose of the following paragraphs is to inform the reader about the process data collection and the attendant factors that shaped the ways in which the data was collected and analyzed to the end in which they are represented in this work.

This work is an ethnographic study that utilizes a grounded theory approach for analysis. When deciding to mount this research I only had questions but no preconceived notions of answers. I was not seeking a specific answer nor was I seeking to apply a specific theory to the situations. In fact the primary research questions called for me to "stand back" as much as possible to see what would happen. The findings generated through the grounded theory approach allowed me the theoretical space to let the participants and the data they solicited to stand for itself. As a participant observer, my presence was just as much a part of the story within this research as any of the other participants. But, to play on the term participant observer, I also tried with the most assiduousness to be an observant participant, as carefully as possible collecting

information as I navigated my way through a highly political context that had its own culture and characters (some of which are named in the study and many of which are not) with their own motives.

When I was asked to come into this context as a diversity consultant, March of 2005, I was given free reign by the dean to explore as much of the school as possible. I spent days in the hallways observing student interactions; in the main office, counseling office, and Community Resources office observing daily interactions; in classrooms observing student and teacher interactions. I spoke candidly with students, some randomly and some by suggestion of staff members. I worked closely with the faculty advisor for the Black Student Union. I interviewed teachers and other school support staff members to get their interpretations of experiences at the school. I attended after school programs and school wide functions that were significant parts of the school culture. For example, Field Day is a day near the end of the school year in which the entire school goes to a park to have a picnic and play games. Similarly the graduation ceremony is a particular point of pride because all the graduating seniors are given time to give short speeches. I attended staff meetings, department meetings, school improvement team meetings, and PTA meetings. At the end of that school year I gave a summary report to the staff in which I asserted my initial praises of the school while also suggesting that they more deeply investigate critical multicultural pedagogies with an emphasis on the role of Whiteness in the shaping of institutional practices.

At this point conducting research was not a part of the picture. But the dean asked me to return for another school year since the work had just begun. Over the summer I began to think about activities I could do with the staff and students to further the conversation about diversity and race. During that period of brainstorming, the idea of the film series germinated. But now my role was somewhat different. Now I was a part of the staff and as the year began there were a number of teachers who were skeptical of my presence and a few were wholly resistant. Some of the teachers even made calls to the teacher's union. This made it very difficult to just walk around with a notebook and tape recorder recording conversations.

I spoke with Dean Judy about my plans for staff and student development and she was pleased and encouraged by the ideas. She gave me clearance to conduct research on the film series and I subsequently received university clearance shortly after.

Data collection was difficult. Since I could not walk around with recording equipment for fear of intimidating other staff members many of the conversations I had with folks I had to commit to memory and wait for the opportunity to be alone to record them either on my laptop computer or on my tape recorder (I used an iPod with a microphone attachment so that I could immediately digitize the recordings). I also, occasionally, had to wait until later in the evening to construct my field notes, sometimes based on memory and sometimes based on scraps of paper. Occasionally I would call "allies" that may have been part of a conversation to help fill in holes. My fieldnotes were designed to provide as

much information as possible regarding what people said (word for word if possible), the context of a conversation, who was involved, etc. Many of the fieldnotes were helpful in establishing the backstory for this research.

In terms of the actual screenings and post-screening conversations I had considerably more freedom to be open with the fact that conversations were being recorded. The participants were aware of and consented to being video and audio recorded. All individual interviews, pre-screening conversations, post-screening discussions, and some informal interviews were either videotaped, audio taped, or both. After recordings were made, they were transcribed for later analysis.

In order to analyze, I did not go into the analysis with a prefabricated set of parameters or categories I attempted to seek evidence for. Rather, I kept the key research questions in mind throughout the process, regularly reminding myself of where I began the research by reviewing introductory notes and the accumulated fieldnotes. The themes gleaned from the data were a result of the triangulated data I was able to ascertain.

Triangulation of the data was ensured through the interviews, ethnographic fieldnotes, and the audio and video documentation of discussions. This allowed me the ability to refine my memories of experiences. More importantly, the video and audio allowed me the ability to actually see and hear their comments and understand the dynamics of the affect of the experience the participants went throughhe descriptions represented throughout this text came from both being a participant observer (which places me right alongside the other

participants) and reviewing the fieldnotes and recorded data. By a constant comparative approach to the data, it was possible for me to not impose my initial responses and inclinations but to harness themes that consistently emerged through the conversations. Similarly, by way of triangulation of the data and seeing repeated patterns of particular themes convergent validity occurred in which the repeated patterns from independent streams of data allowed me to infer what was happening was in fact valid. The themes that emerged came from my understanding of what the participants solicited and not my own preconceived notions of what I believed should have happened.

To close, when I began this project I merely had an idea for a professional development activity in which I encouraged a group of professionals to talk about Whiteness. These conversations were not generic conversations about race, but were intended to be specific conversations about Whiteness. The process for selecting the films became an important part of the study and data collection because rationale undergirded my decision to move from *Crash* to *Whiteboyz.* As expressed in Chapter 3, *Crash* ultimately served an important purpose of introducing a general conversation about race. *Whiteboyz* on the other hand served to urge a conversation about Whiteness in particular, the ultimate point of the film series. When entering the conversation about *Whiteboyz* I had anticipated that they would spend the allotted time specifically discussing what it meant to be White, but alas they did not do that. That was not a bad thing because the themes they discussed are equally important to understanding how conversations about Whiteness do and do not happen. At every step in the

process I tried my best to be open to whatever my participants solicitied, even when it clashed with my own presuppositions and expectations.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT PROFILES FIGURE

Figure I below provides more detail on the participants represented in this study.

Figure I: Participant Profiles

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Subject Area or School Role	Years Teaching	Years Teaching @ NHS
Anne	55	Native American	Female	History	10	8
Carl	70	Black	Male	Community Servces	--	7
Gloria	47	White	Female	Office Support Staff	---	11
Grace	60	White	Female	English/ Speech	33	29
Hector	29	Latino	Male	Teaching Aide	2	2
Keith	49	White	Male	English	23	14
Mary	64	White	Female	English	26	21
Michael	45	Latino	Male	Teaching Aide	3	2
Nora	58	White	Female	History	37	19
Tom	65	White	Male	Social Studies/ Civics	37	10

APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teaching and Pedagogy

1. How long have you been a teacher? How long have you been a teacher at this school?
2. What drew you into the teaching profession?
3. How is this school similar and different from the high school you attended?
4. If you were to express your pedagogy in one sentence what would it be? How is your pedagogy different from others'?
5. What broad factors played a role in shaping your pedagogy? What do you want to accomplish as a teacher?
6. How do you go about deciding what should be taught in your courses?
7. Describe a good student. Examples?
8. Describe a bad student. Examples?
9. How are your constructions of good and bad students similar to and different from constructions expressed by colleagues? By popular culture?
10. A common assertion about teaching is that a good teacher can reach every student. What do you think of that statement and why?

Professional Development

11. What professional development programs and activities captured your attention and helped your practice?

12. What makes an effective professional development activity/program? In regards to race?

Race, Culture, and Multiculturalism in School

13. How do issues of race and culture fit into your pedagogy and practice?
14. An assertion by some African American students in this school is that teachers do not care about them because teachers do not get to know them as individuals or try to understand Black culture. Have you witnessed this dynamic?
15. What issues about race seem to be raised in this school? In your personal life?
16. Have you ever traveled internationally?
17. How do you define yourself culturally? Racially? What is the difference?
18. Have you ever felt like you were a minority? If yes, can you recount the situation and your perspective on the experience? If no, why do you think not?
19. Do you have any non-White [Black, Latino, Asian, Native American, etc.] or foreign-born family members?
20. When you hear the term "racial relations" what does that mean to you?
21. Describe racial relations in this school as you see them.
22. Have you seen a change in race relations in this school since you began teaching here? In the community?
23. How do you go about finding out students' needs and interests?

24. What are the major difficulties in addressing multicultural issues in this school?
25. If a student told you that you were culturally biased, how would you respond to this assertion?
26. What differences do you see or detect between White students and non-White students? Between Black students and non-Black students? Between Asian students and non-Asian students?
27. What civic, cultural, and educational activities do you offer your students?

Film

28. What do you hear from students about what is popular in media (film, television, music)?
29. How often do you watch movies, at home or at the theater?
30. What are your favorite types of film? Why?
31. Name some film roles, positive and negative, that captured your attention and comment on why they affected you personally.
32. Name some films that that you found particularly powerful. What themes and characters resonated most about these films?
33. Do you use films in your own classes? If not why? If yes, why and how?
34. How does film affect people's attitudes and beliefs? How has film affected your own? Explain.
35. Do you have any other questions or comments not covered thus far?

APPENDIX E: *CRASH* FRAMING ESSAY

"America is a giant game of tag. Somebody, you're it." I heard that quote on a VH1 show that attempted to give a somewhat comedic and stereotypical view of how Blacks are constructed in U.S. culture and society. The statement was made in reference to the "new niggers," Arabs. The statement rings true in light of the fact that throughout American history, one group or another has always been held suspect and scrutinized for their differences. Unfortunately, contacts among different ethnic and racial group can be characterized as strained. True, coalitions have been made across racial and ethnic groups, but the road is long and hard. In the end, it seems like these groups crash into each other as a result of the unique yet similar experiences of individuals that just so happen to be a part of particular groups.

The film Crash, released in the spring of 2005 has built an important place in American popular culture. It has been hailed as the most honest and accurate depiction of race in film. Paul Haggis best describes the roots and intent of the film in the production notes of the film. He states:

> I have lived and worked in Los Angeles for over twenty-five years now, and like anyone living in an urban environment for that length of time, I thought I was relatively aware of problems involving race and class. Then one night, while coming out of a video store in my neighborhood, I was car-jacked at gunpoint. That event, a collision of two worlds that normally don't intersect, forced me out of my complacency. I began considering the lives of my attackers. I

became acutely aware of my own urban isolation. After 9/11, the subject seemed, to me, to become even more urgent, and I felt compelled to start writing what would eventually become CRASH.

My aim with this film is to explore how intolerance is a collective problem. I did not set out to offend or to ignite controversy, but to look at many different people, each with his or her unique perspective. Film enables us to walk, however briefly, in the shoes of strangers. In that sense, I hope that CRASH succeeds not so much in pointing out our differences, but in recognizing our shared humanity. (p. 3)

The success of the film was largely fueled by the notion that it told the truth about how people really are, a questionable proposition. Whose truth is being told?

The film premiered in the midst of a contentious war, a harshly divided, controversial government, a shift in cultural politics, and a movement of politics and social policy toward conservative positions. There are growing attacks on Affirmative Action, social service programs, and women's rights. Additionally, there is growing sentiment that it is time to treat all individuals as equals, in spite of all social and economic markers displaying sharp inequities. The debacle fomented during the Hurricane Katrina disaster force the country and world to stop and take notice of the glaring inequities largely hidden from popular culture.

Crash swept across the country and has taken a strong place in the pantheon of great films. The film grossed over six times its budget, $6 million. Premiering at the Sundance Film Festival it was quickly picked up. Now it has

been nominated for numerous awards and is a front-runner for the Best Picture Oscar. Because of its bravery, fine acting, impressive and compassionate story, *Crash* pulls us and forces us to question not only who they are but who we are.

As you watch the film consider the following: How is racism defined through the film? What does it mean to be White, or non-White? And, choose a character or two that most resembles your own racial background. How would their story change if they were a different race?

APPENDIX F: *WHITEBOYZ* FRAMING ESSAY

Over 70 percent of the consumers of hip-hop music are White, predominantly White teen-age middle class males. At its inception, hip-hop was a music of the street, of the community, the Black community to be exact. In the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, parks would be bumpin in the 70s and early 80s. Block parties were blastin in full effect. There were a few white folks into it. Debbie Harry, lead singer and new wave goddess of Blondie, found the music cool and vital, a wonderful backlash to the over produced disco music that had a corner on the Black music market. Blondie's chart topping song "Rapture" was the first rap song to achieve such status, even though technically it was not a rap song, a rap was just in it, and weak rap at that.

For the most part, throughout the 80s, rap music was the domain of the Black community. It was not until 1986 fusion of rap and rock with Run-DMC and Aerosmith's collaboration on a remake of the Aerosmith rock classic "Walk This Way" that rap became accessible to the White, popular market. Almost immediately after that, the Beastie Boys, a trio of White Jewish punkers, released their groundbreaking debut album *Licence to Ill*. Now I gotta give it to the Beasties, that album is the shizznite (as my hip young brothas would say)! The album went number one on the Billboard chart and ushered in the new generation of rock and roll, and rather than three chords and the truth, these new cats were coming with two turntables and a mic.

As the 1980s came to a close, a new genre of hip hop was beginning to take root in South Central Los Angeles. Pioneered by the group NWA, or Niggas With

Attitude, gangsta rap eventually evolved into one of the guiding forces of the hip hop market. Gangsta rap was fearless, no bullshit. Them niggas brought it for real; they spit beautiful yet often painful rhymes about what it is really like to live as a poor Black man on the depressed streets of urban America. Why this was so fresh is because before then there was little talk about what was going on in the community. Hip-hop was originally about partying and having a good time. That was the role of the MC, to get the crowd hyped and ready to dance.

Employing a heavy dose of braggadocio, sexuality, and verbal acrobatics were the elements for engagement. Back in 1981 Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five's classic, "The Message," was the first popular rap song to address serious social and economic issues related to living in urban poverty, but NWA, near the end of the decade, took it quite a few steps further through their unabashed, honest, and stark polemics on police brutality, drug dealing, hopelessness, and... bitches and hoes. (To be fair, most artists that use the term bitch are referring to a specific set of women whom are loose in morals, out for money, and manipulative of men to get what they want. They do not mean all women. For example, Tupac frequently talks about bitches but also writes eloquently about the virtues of Black women and the love he had for his mother. There is a difference and they are aware). Gangsta rap spread like wildfire, partly because of the controversy surrounding the content and language of the genre. "Fuck tha Police", NWA's first smash chronicled their disdain for corrupt, abusive cops. Popularly they were derided for their utterances, but most of those people did not listen to the song.

Throughout the popular American press in the late 80s and early 90s, there was a steady stream of reports about the new cultural scourge. In the midst of that, White boys in an ever-expanding economic and cultural radius were beginning to become enchanted with the stories of money-over-bitches, drug empires, gang bangin, and reckless promiscuity. The problem with gagnsta rap is that NWA (and the subsequent members that launched their own solo careers, like Dr. Dre, Ice-Cube, and Eazy-E) was the first and virtually last gangsta rap to speak politically about what was happening. Ice-T, the Geto Boys, and Too Short are other such artist, but for quite some time there was a dearth of artist that were able to convey similar political and ethical urgency transmitted through NWA and T. Not to say they were not out there. But the fact of the matter is that the record companies narrowed the market so much that a very particular image was furthered through gangsta rap and hip hop overall.

The images that gained popular currency in rural and suburban America did not include social and politically minded hip hop, as evidenced by album sales. Artist like Chuck D, KRS-1, Speech of Arrested Development, and more currently Mos Def, Talib Kwali, Immortal Technique, and Dead Presidents, although they were and are popular and important to the history of hip hop, they did not seem to have as much sway over the market as the gangsta rappers. Why? How is it that the stories woven by these Black guys from environments so drastically different than the majority of the consumers consuming their product have such a profound impact on the ways in which those White boys saw the world?

Flip, the main character of the film you are about to watch is caught in a supposed identity crisis. Whose crisis? Does he really understand the lifestyle he praises? As you watch this film consider, based upon what is represented in the film, what does it means to be white, to be black? What is cultural identity and how does one come to assimilate into a culture and does assimilation necessarily mean understanding or acceptance? Enjoy.

APPENDIX G: POST-SCREENING FACILITATION PROTOCOL

1. What are your immediate reactions about the movie?
2. What was the plot of the film?
3. What major themes about life and society do you think the film attempted to convey?
4. Describe the characters.
5. Who was a virtuous character? What about the character moved you to that judgment?
6. Who was a villain? What about the character moved you to that judgment?
7. Which character did you most identify with?
8. Which character did you least identity with? Or, were there any characters you could not relate too?
9. What range of emotions did you feel watching the film? At what points in the film?
10. Describe the scenes or elements of the film that ring true to you, and explain why they seem realistic and plausible. Do they remind you of any real life experiences?
11. Describe the White characters.
12. Describe the non-White characters.
13. How would you describe or interpret racial relations as represented in this film?
14. How would the film be different if [a character's] race was different? Why?

15. How is power portrayed in the film? Who or what is powerful in the film and how can you tell?
16. Is the film an accurate reflection of real life?
17. Do you see some of the situations portrayed in the film in real life?
18. How do the themes and characters in this film relate to life in schools?
19. What issues about the film not covered do you find important?
20. What messages or images do you take away from this film and how might they relate to your personal life?
21. Why do you think this film has become popular? Whose point of view or gaze is presented or dominates?
22. What racial stereotypes are introduced or perpetuated by the film?
23. How can this film be used to help students explore issues of race?
24. Are there any issues not yet raised about the film or race you would like to entertain?

APPENDIX H: KATZ'S WHITENESS TYPOLOGY

The following figure summarizes a construction of Whiteness based on the work of Judith Katz. See citation below.

Figure 2: Katz's Whiteness Typology

Rugged Individualsism
- Self-reliance
- Individual centered
- Independence
- Autonomy
- Control of environment

Competition
- Be number one
- Win at all costs
- Winner/loser binary

Emphasis of Scientific Method
- Objectivity
- Rationality
- Linear thought
- Cause/effect
- Quantitative emphasis

Family structure
- Nuclear family as social unit
- Paternalist
- Early independence for children

Decision-making
- Majority rules
- Hierarchical

Action orientation
- Master of nature
- Must act
- Aggressiveness

History
- Centers story on Western Europeans
- Rooted in ancient Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian traditions and thought

Protestant Work Ethic
- Hard work=Success
- Work before play
- Delayed gratification

Status, Power, and Authority
- Wealth=worth
- Respect authority
- High value on ownership of property, goods, and land

Time
- Time as a commodity or "Time is money"
- Rigid time schedules

Future orientation
- Plan (save) for the future
- Delayed gratification
- Progress is *always* a good thing
- "Tomorrow will be better"

Communication
- "The king's English"
- Written tradtion
- Avoidance of conflict
- Minimize emotion
- Politeness
- Avoidance of personal life

Aesthetics
- European "high culture" standard
- Female beauty=blonde, thin, blue-eyed
- Male attractiveness=economic status, power, intellect

Adapted from Judith Katz, "White Culture and Racism: Working for Organizational Change in the United States," The Whiteness Papers, 3, Roselle, NJ: Center for the Study of White American Culture.

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