

Profiles of White Teachers Doing the Work  
The Pedagogy of Shifting from Colorblindness to Addressing  
One's Role in Structural Racism

by

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## ABSTRACT

This creative nonfiction dissertation study sought to describe the process by which three self-identified White teachers—who are engaged in structural initiatives in their schools, districts and/or communities for racial equity—transitioned from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism. The following overarching research question guided the study: What are three self-identified White teachers’ perceptions of their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism? The study also addressed the following sub-questions: (1) What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers’ processes of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism? And (2) How do these pedagogical pivot places contribute to new ways of knowing in teachers’ shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism? This study contributes to the literature on White teachers’ process of shifting from colorblindness to racial consciousness and understanding white supremacy. It offers implications for shifting ideologies of White pre-service teachers and teachers in schools.

However, efforts to dismantle structural racism need to extend beyond helping White teachers to understand their role in upholding white supremacy and fighting against structural racism to better meet the needs of their diverse students. Schools in the United States function to reproduce the hidden curricula of whiteness and work. Because schools are amplifiers of the ideologies of the greater society, by disseminating the findings in the form of creative nonfiction, the study attempts to extend this work

outside of schooling and into society to address the problem of structural racism in society.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Evil asks little of the dominant caste other than to sit back and do nothing. All that it needs from bystanders is their silent complicity in the evil committed on their behalf, though a caste system will protect, and perhaps even reward, those who deign to join in the terror.”

-Isabel Wilkerson, 2020a, p. 246

As a researcher working in solidarity to address structural racism in education, I acknowledge my positionality as a White, middle class, English-speaking, cisgender female that in many ways belong to the oppressor and/or dominant identity groups in the U.S. It is important to mention that in my understandings of anti-racism and racial equity in education and creative nonfiction writing, I do not lean solely on my experience as an educator, researcher, and writer. My understandings are informed by researchers and writers of Color, prominent in the fields of education, literary journalism, and creative nonfiction. Some of these researchers and writers are James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Roxane Gay, and Isabel Wilkerson, along with Drs. Venus Evans-Winters, Zeus Leonardo, Cheryl Matias, Ernest Morrell, Jodene Morrell, Sonia Nieto, and Bonnie Wozolek. I acknowledge that I still have much work to do to dismantle how oppressive and dominant culture centered beliefs and ways of being live in me, especially as a White person.

\*

“Come join us for lunch,” Pam<sup>1</sup> said as we walked our second graders in orderly lines down the hallway to the cafeteria during the first week of the 2012 school year. It was my third year as an elementary teacher, and I had just started teaching at a new Title I public school in New Jersey. All the K-2 teachers usually ate lunch together. I preferred to work through my lunch, but being the new teacher, I knew I needed to get to know the rest of my team. I picked up my lunch in the classroom and walked into the staff lunchroom. I saw all the K-2 teachers, minus myself, sitting together.

These six middle-aged White women had pulled two of the small circular tables together. I looked across the room. On the left, three pre-school teachers, also White women, ate lunch around a table. At the back-left table, sat Regina, the kindergarten paraprofessional. She was the only person in the room who was not a teacher and was not white. She was African American. She sat, tall, quiet, and calm, as she ate her lunch alone. I looked over at the K-2 group. Their backs turned to Regina; their laughter and chatter filling the air. For a moment, I stood in the entrance unmoving.

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) scholar Cheryl Matias (2013a) has called attention to the urgent need for White teachers to investigate their whiteness. She, along with other racial equity advocates, cautions that those who neglect or dismiss their self-examination perpetuate the “structure of race and white supremacy in education and society” (p. 68; Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Evans-Winters & Twyman Hoff, 2011; Helms, 2020; Howard, 2016; Leonardo, 2004).

In *Caste, The Origins of Our Discontent*, Pulitzer Prize author and journalist, Isabel Wilkerson describes a **caste system** as “an artificial construction, a fixed and

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<sup>1</sup> All names of characters in scenes are pseudonyms unless otherwise specified.

embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant caste whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distinct from one another and in their assigned places” (2020a, pp. 39-40).

In the United States, our four-hundred-year-old caste system ranks human value according to **race** (Wilkerson, 2020a). Races are groups that are politically and socially constructed according to skin color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and used to authorize structural racism (Matias, 2013). Although race lacks any associations with observable traits or behaviors, it is forced on each person at the beginning of their life, without the ability to change it through their actions (Helms, 2020, p. 6). This is because specific political interests, founded in white supremacist racial hierarchies, have sorted people in our society according to race, to justify and maintain hegemonic power, modern slavery, and colonialism (Allen, 2009; Brown, 2021; Matias, 2013).

“Here, we saved you a seat,” Kathy said motioning to the empty chair beside her and Pam. Pam turned away from her conversation with the rest of the table, welcoming me. The teachers laughed and shared stories of their summer vacations in between bites of sandwiches, yogurts, and salads. I glanced at where Regina sat. She didn’t hear or pretended that she didn’t hear Kathy’s invitation. She continued staring somewhere across the room and took a bite of her sandwich. Regina looked down as she brushed off the crumbs that had gathered on her dress.



I felt my neck and ears flush. My mind raced, “Why is it that there is only one Black teacher in the entire school, but most of the paraprofessionals are Black? Why didn’t anyone invite Regina to sit with them? If I reject my new team’s invitation and go sit with Regina instead, will they reject me? Will I lose my insider status?” I walked over to my saved seat with the table of White K-2 teachers and sat down. I pretended to listen to my colleagues discuss visiting their kids and grandkids over the summer and their vacations to the beach and upstate New York. I tried to quell my guilt in upholding the unjust hierarchy. Was it a positional hierarchy? A racial hierarchy? A mixture of the two? Do these teachers not see it?

On that day, partially aware of the racial hierarchy in our school, thanks to the awakening from my critical literacy course I was taking as part of my master’s program, where we analyzed perspective, power, and positioning alongside intersecting social identities (Crenshaw, 2015; Jones, 2006), I was ashamed of the character of our society. While I vowed to invite Regina to sit with me once I was not the brand-new teacher, I knew that it did not change the shame I felt for choosing to side with the established racial caste system. Because of this critical literacy course, three years into my teaching career, I had started to notice the relationships between power and racial inequality in education. While I might not have had the words to describe it at the time, my ideologies of colorblindness were starting to crack to reveal where whiteness manifested in education and in myself.

**White supremacy** is the tacit assumption that White people are a superior race, allowing for the sorting of those labeled White to have more power than those labeled

nonwhite. This **whiteness**—or social construction of valuing white culture, ideology, racialization, experiences, ways of knowing, emotions, and behavior—can only be defined in relation to the racial other (Matias et al., 2014). When race dynamics are considered “normal,” white supremacy can be maintained (Gillborn, 2005; Matias et al., 2014). This whiteness is embodied racial power (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), exerting dynamics of racism on people of Color and dynamics of whiteness on Whites (Matias & Boucher, 2021). With white supremacy’s belief of superiority comes an ideology of entitlement and expectation of preferred treatment and power for White people, while devaluing and othering people of all other races (Helms, 2020). This **white privilege**—which permeates everyday life—is ensured through a “process of domination” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137) in both laws and cultural norms (Alexander, 2011).

**Structural racism** is the pervasive hierarchical system based on white supremacy that produces inequity. This hierarchical system provides White people with power, privilege, and superior treatment at the expense of other races (Black, Native American, Asian, Latino, Arab, etc.). Structural racism consists of the following aspects of society (Leonardo, 2004, 2009):

- History— provides the underpinning of white supremacy
- Culture— normalizes and perpetuates racism
- Institutions and policies— create society’s political and economic relationships/rules that validate and strengthen discrimination and oppression of nonwhite races

Specifically, in the United States, white supremacy has served (and continues) to justify and normalize the dehumanization of Black, Indigenous and people of Color through slavery (Douglass, 2018; Du Bois, 2008; Smith, 2013) and extermination (Zinn, 2015), global colonization and imperialism (Chidester, 2014), mass incarceration (Alexander, 2011; Morris, 2016; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011) housing and lending discrimination and segregation (Coates, 2014; Desmond, 2016; Rothstein, 2017), employment discrimination (Alexander, 2011; Brandon, 2003; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), anti-immigration laws and exclusion acts (Jefferies, 2014; Valadez et al., 2021), English language only legislation (Garcia et al., 2013; Gomez & Cisneros, 2020; Jimenez et al., 2014), inferior and segregated education (Howard, 2007, 2016; Lewis & Manno, 2011), harmful stereotypes and myths (Allen, 2009; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005; Yi et al., 2020), and microaggressions (Hayes & Juárez, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009). White supremacy also continues to justify and normalize the dehumanization of people who identify as LGBTQ+ (Wozolek, 2017; 2020).

In schools, white supremacy shows up in a variety of harmful ways, through “tracking, teacher beliefs, funding inequities, school disciplining, and overrepresentation in special education” (Matias et al., 2014, p. 292; Matias & Boucher, 2021). The racial hierarchy is apparent in the moral dispositions of White teachers, psychologists, and administrators in positions of power at schools in urban communities of Color “to serve, to give back, to help, etc.” (Matias & Boucher, 2021, p. 10; Yoon, 2012). Yet these same teachers, psychologists and administrators lack experiences with these communities.

**racial prejudice + social power = racism**

(DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014a, p. 115)

\*

Twenty-two second graders in powder blue polos and khaki pants were scattered in triads around a large classroom carpet embellished with a map of the world. The children each held a cloud made from blue construction paper. Chatter filled the room as students discussed with each other their hopes and dreams for the school year that they would write on their clouds. I walked from group to group, listening in to what the students shared. Over by the easel, Isaac timidly told Brandee and Kionna that he hoped to learn to read chapter books. Under the horseshoe table, Khadija's pony beads at the end of her braids made a soft percussion rhythm as she swayed her head from side to side. She giggled as she told Andres and Deon that she dreamed of doing more math.

Two years before my encounter with Regina, I had started my first teaching job, I was thrilled to be a second-grade teacher at a high-poverty public school serving predominantly Black students. Towards the end of my fifteen-minute commute from my suburban home to the school, I drove through streets lined with tired rowhomes and an occasional liquor store, Caribbean market, or chicken restaurant on the corner. Black men and women sat on the steps of their homes. While I would eventually learn that many of them worked a night shift, at the time, I viewed my students and their families from a deficit lens of individualism and meritocracy. I assumed many of the parents were unemployed. I was not alone in this assumption.

On one of these morning commutes to the school, my mind drifted back to a year earlier when I was still a pre-service teacher, student teaching at an urban Title I school two exits away on the New Jersey Turnpike. Sometime during that fall of 2009, I don't quite remember the day, I took the second graders either to specials or to lunch. After dropping them off at one of the "fun" times of the school day, I walked to the office to check my supervising teacher's mailbox. The new principal, Dr. Peterson, a petite middle-aged White woman with a brown bob and reading glasses leaned over the office secretary's desk (also a middle-aged White woman) rolling a few sheets of paper into a cylinder. While I don't recall her exact words, I remember hearing her sing-song voice saying something along the lines of, "It's just incredible. Every day when I drive through the neighborhood in the afternoon, or at lunch, there are just so many men sitting out in front of the houses. In the middle of the day!"

I would later learn from Dr. Peterson that she had been a principal at an upper middle-class suburban school that served predominately White students before there were budget cuts and she came to administrate at this Title I inner city elementary school that served predominately Black students in New Jersey. As Dr. Peterson finished her comment, I glanced over at them and saw the secretary nodding her head and voicing her agreement.

It was true, I thought at the time, not realizing my values and judgements were founded in colorblindness and a deficit mindset. I had not yet learned how the Jim Crow Laws had been refashioned to continue the legal housing, employment, and education discrimination against Blacks (Desmond, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2019; Obama, 2021;

Rothstein, 2017). I had not yet learned about the New Jim Crow, the War on Drugs and intentional legislation that has led to the mass incarceration of people of Color in the United States (Alexander, 2011).

Instead, in my colorblindness, I thought about how whenever I left the school and drove through the neighborhood in the afternoon, there were quite a few Black men sitting out on the brick row house steps or walking around the neighborhood. I pictured my neighborhood. No one sat out on the steps in the middle of the day unless it was a weekend. My parents, along with the other White and Filipino neighbors all went to work during the week. Why don't they want to work? I wondered. Is it drugs? Poverty?

As I reflected on why there were so many Black men sitting on the steps instead of working, Dr. Peterson continued talking to the secretary. I could have been standing at the copy machine, making copies of primary writing paper for the students' stories, or maybe I was leaving the office as I remember hearing her say something like, "You know, I'm not used to seeing that. You would think that they would want to work. It's just so different." She shook her head while rolling the papers into a tighter cylinder. "It's a very different life, different priorities, different values."

In the field of education, teachers possess their own values, which guide their perceptions and inform their interactions with students in the classroom (Biesta et al., 2015; Cummings et al., 2007; Pajares, 1992; Sharma, 2014; Veugelers, & Vedder, 2003). The interplay of the shared values of the classroom (promoted by the teacher) and the students' values (learned at home) may experience conflict when the majority of pre-service teachers and educators are White women (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Boser,

2014; NCES, 2018) serving an increasingly (racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically) diverse student population in public schools (Bonner *et al.*, 2018).

Colorblindness is founded in the belief that race does not matter, and therefore, allows for the denial of racial inequity, racial privilege, or racial oppression (Castagno, 2013). Political sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes **colorblindness** as an ideology that protects whiteness by: ignoring social identities such as race or gender while emphasizing the need to compare individuals instead of considering the role of social identities in inequality. When race is ignored, White people reason that individual ability and effort cause social inequalities instead of historical and present-day racism. White teachers who lack awareness of dominant ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege operate out of colorblindness and may perpetuate racism through deficit discourses and White, middle-class values that marginalize students of Color and students not considered to be middle-class (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Matias, 2016; Nash, 2013; Picower, 2009; Watson, 2011).

Matias (2016) explains it more succinctly: “there is a hidden curriculum of whiteness being taught to students, of Color and White alike. This practice of teaching structurally reinforces white supremacy and denies humanity to people of Color” (p. 7). Because of the hidden curriculum of whiteness and embedded ideologies of white supremacy, White teachers may struggle to understand student diversity they have not experienced before and are often resistant to altering their pedagogy to meet the educational needs of their students (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000; Tatto, 1998). Furthermore, our structural racialization has led to an “intellectual apartheid,” where we create

dependent learners who cannot access the curriculum, because instead of interrogating the ways that we structure inequities in education, we focus on “creating short-term solutions to get dependent students of Color to score high on each year’s standardized tests” (Hammond, 2014, p. 80).

On that day in the classroom during my first year of teaching, I stopped by the reading bench to listen to Toya, Tamia, and Anton. My favorite student, Tamia, was one of the smallest children in the class, but her afro puff easily added an extra six inches to her height. She knelt by the bench, waved her cloud in the air and exclaimed, “I hope to have everything for free!” I raised my eyebrows in panic. Was I not clear in my modeling? I wondered. Toya laughed. Anton declared, “Me too!” I knelt next to the group to confer in a lower voice. I explained to the group that we were discussing our hopes for school, for second grade, and that didn’t seem like a second-grade hope. Tamia’s eyes glittered, “Yes, it is! I dream of having free stuff! Everything free!” I didn’t argue. I stood up and walked to another group.

After school, I stapled our hopes and dreams clouds to the bulletin board by the reading bench. From the pile of clouds, I picked up Tamia’s to add to the board. “I hope for everything to be free,” I read, shaking my head. At seven years old, this is not a good sign, I thought. I knew that her father was in prison, and that Tamia had nine other siblings. Who is teaching her this? I wondered. Is her mom one of the people sitting out on the front steps every day? Unfortunately, I was one of those White teachers with white, working/middle-class values, who did not yet understand the legalized racial and



criminal injustice, oppression, and discrimination that my students of Color and their families had endured over the past 400 years.

Zeus Leonardo (2004) cautions that “[a]s long as whites ultimately feel a sense of comfort with racial analysis, they will not sympathize with the pain and discomfort they have unleashed on racial minorities for centuries. Solidarity between whites and non-whites will proceed at the reluctant pace of the white imagination, whose subjects accept the problem of racism without an agent” (p. 137). It took many years of critical dialogue (hooks, 1994) with colleagues, friends, and professors to recognize my racial identity, white privilege and the existence and harm of white supremacy structural racism on people of Color. However, when I started this dissertation, I did not realize how much more work I still had to do, and still need to continue to do in decentering whiteness and interrogating how whiteness manifests in me.

In January 2021, after studying the genre of creative nonfiction, I reread Evans-Winters’ (2019) *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry: A Mosaic for Writing Our Daughter’s Body*. In her book, Dr. V writes qualitatively to change society by advancing racial justice and to bring healing to her community. She challenges the qualitative norms by pursuing research and writing that is considered radical according to the standards of traditional qualitative research and western epistemologies (V. Evans-Winters, personal communication, January 27, 2021). Her personal, complex, and nuanced stories about herself, her family, friends, and students, woven with theory, history and policy impacted my understanding of what counts as knowledge, research and academic writing.

I discussed Evans-Winters' book, along with the role of politics in research, with my advisor, David Carlson. Carlson reminded me that all research, like teaching, is political (hooks, 1994). Even not choosing to make research political is a political decision, because the choice to not be political endorses the current hegemonic structures. I was moved to work in solidarity with Evans-Winters, writing creatively to advocate for racial justice. I hoped to help address whiteness and White teacher resistance towards anti-racist education (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020) by writing creative nonfiction profiles of White teachers' processes of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and implementing both idealist and realist strategies to advance racial equity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

\*

Wilkerson (2020a) states, "a caste system makes a captive of everyone within it" (p. 295), and with each generation, we continue to maintain our disfigured relationships. In our narcissism we have dehumanized all non-white castes to convince ourselves of our innate superiority and unearned deference, we have also dehumanized ourselves (Matias, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020a). Many or most White people become uncomfortable discussing their position in America's racial caste system, because they must acknowledge that their racial group is the one that has historically "conquered, enslaved, and oppressed People of Color." (Helms, 2020, p. 217). However, we, White people need to be taught and need to understand their own costs to maintain white privilege as the accepted and taken for granted law of the land; otherwise, racism is unlikely to be eradicated nor are White people able to develop psychologically healthy or navigate in our "multicultural society

except through domination, suppression, and massive denial of reality” (Helms, 2020, p. 25; Matias, 2016).

In working to dismantle our racial caste system, **Critical Whiteness Studies** (CWS) seeks to problematize “the normality of hegemonic whiteness,” while pointing out that whites tend to “deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics” (Matias et al., 2014, p. 292). However, this CWS work should always be conducted while centering the oppression and harm that people of Color endure from white supremacy by including the voices, experiences, and stories of people of Color (Matias & Boucher, 2021). Recently, Matias and Boucher (2021) sought to remind that “CWS should never stop examining the impact of whiteness on people of Colour, as well as on whites. It is the interconnectivity of the two groups under a system of white supremacy that binds our liberation together. Thus, to disaggregate our research by narrowly fixating on whites alone would recenter whiteness; worse yet, it would cut off the remaining humanity that binds us together” (Matias & Boucher, 2021, p. 14).

One day in the fall of 2021, during the time that I was gathering material for this dissertation study, I found myself reading a book, recommended by Carla (one of my participants), on whiteness by critical whiteness scholar, Cheryl Matias. I sat up abruptly and closed the book; Cheryl Matias’ words still reverberated in my head: “*Instead, I have asked Whites to do the emotional work to stop racial microaggressions, dismantle their white privilege, and, by doing so, promote a more humanistic relationship with society. The person must first look at her/himself before assuming the role of white ally*” (Matias, 2016, p. 172). The crying white theater mask on the cover looked up at me. My mind

swarmed with concern about the new revelations of whiteness showing up in me. I still have so much work to do, I thought.

Two weeks prior, after one of our phenomenological interview sessions, I had emailed Carla for titles of any significant books that were central to her story of transitioning from colorblindness.

“Definitely Cheryl Matias’ book *Feeling White*,” she replied.

I ordered the book and started to read it. I had expected to find some useful quotes to weave into Carla’s profile. I had not expected the book to initiate a tornado of racialized emotions.

Now, I sat analyzing how and when I had re-centered hegemonic whiteness in places where I thought I had been advocating for racial equity. Maybe I should not even be doing this study, I thought. I haven’t done enough emotional work of deconstructing my discomfort with whiteness (Matias, 2016, p. 72). What if I’m doing more harm to people of Color than contributing to racial justice?

Instead of uniting as a group on a quest for domination (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Matias, 2016), Matias (2016) calls for whites to “do the emotional work’ of deconstructing their discomfort with whiteness, which in turn will lead to stronger possibilities for whole-hearted engagements of racially-just educational projects” (p. 72). As Whites decide to abandon racism, they have to accept that they are at best, “antiracists white racists” (Matias, 2016, p. 94) who have benefited from racism in particular, observable, definite ways (Helms, 2020). White teachers who teach in communities with large populations of students of Color, need to commit to dismantling the “racist

approaches, ideologies, and curriculum that go unnoticed” in schooling and marginalize their students of Color (Matias, 2013, p. 76). But they cannot do so until they have done the emotional work to interrogate how whiteness shows up in them and dismantle their white privilege (Matias, 2016).

### **Global, National, and State Political Context**

While I have shared some of my personal journey in coming to the dissertation topic, it is important to note the global, national, and state-level political context in which this dissertation study evolved. By the spring of 2020 as I was beginning to assemble my dissertation committee and select a dissertation topic, COVID-19 had ravaged the globe. The level of human suffering and loss of life was staggering and would only continue to increase well into 2021 and 2022. The pandemic contributed to crises in food security, public health, and employment and labor issues (Chriscaden, 2020, October 13). The World Health Organization expressed concern at the global 25% increase in anxiety and depression resulting from the pandemic (Brunier, 2022, March 2). Additionally, essential workers and particularly healthcare workers’ health and safety was at greater risk to the virus. In spring 2022, the World Health Organization reported that we’ve lost 6.2 million people globally due to COVID-19, and 987,000 in the United States (World Health Organization Website, April 14, 2022).

While the virus impacted everyone, and while racial disparities and the oppression of people of Color in the United States Healthcare system are not new injustices (Stern, 2005; Williams & Rucker, 2000), when states released data showing that the percentages of Blacks affected by and deaths of Blacks from COVID-19 were “more than twice as

high as the proportion of [B]lacks in the overall population (Chowkwanyun & Reed Jr., 2020), the racial disparities and suffering of the Black community became even more prominent from COVID-19 (Zelner et al., 2021). These disparities also extended to Native American (Yearby & Mohapatra, 2020) and incarcerated (LeMasters et al., 2022) communities as well. Additionally, racially motivated anti-Asian verbal and physical abuse, harassment, and hate crimes increased as people projected the cause of the pandemic to those with phenotypes racialized as Asian (He et al., 2021, November).

Besides the gravity of conducting research during a pandemic that broadcasted the oppressive impact of white supremacy on people of Color, in the United States, we were also grappling with the police killings of Black men and women. In May 2020, as I was reading for my comprehensive exam, I, along with our nation, was shook by the video footage that showed a White Minneapolis police officer's murder of George Floyd, a Black man arrested for using a counterfeit \$20 bill (BBC News: US & Canada, 2020, July 16). Despite the lockdown from the pandemic, people took to the streets nationally and globally to protest police brutality and the dehumanization of Blacks.

While Floyd's murder served the largest catalyst for Americans to call for police reform and racial justice in the killing of Black men and women, Floyd had not been the first Black man killed at the hands of police, and he would not be the last (in fact, Newsweek would publish an article one year after Floyd's murder that documented another 229 Black people killed by police in that year [Rahman, 2021, May 25]). Approximately three months before Floyd's murder, three White men chased down and killed Ahmaud Arbery, a twenty-five-year-old Black man jogging through a

neighborhood in Georgia (Kennedy & Diaz, 2021, November 24). About two months before Floyd's murder, in March 2020, Breonna Taylor, a twenty-six-year-old EMT, was shot eight times and killed by police during a raid in her own apartment in Louisville, Kentucky. About one year after Floyd's murder, on April 11, 2021, Daunte Wright was shot and killed by police during a traffic stop in Minneapolis. Currently, in April 2022, as I finalize my dissertation, news headlines of another police shooting of a another Black man have made their way to my New App. Patrick Lyoya, a twenty-six-year-old refugee who in 2014 fled from violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, was shot in the back of the head while being restrained by police at a traffic stop in Michigan (Clifford, 2022, April 14).

The murder of Black people due to police brutality, alongside the disproportional deaths in the Black community due to COVID-19 were, in a sense, a wakeup call to me as a White person with the choice to do research that sides with the hegemonic structures that enable police brutality and racial disparities in the healthcare system, or to do research that challenges the hegemonic structures and has the potential to help with creating a more equitable and just society. While I don't want to dismiss the history of suffering and oppression that people of Color, and specifically Blacks, have endured in the United States, the global and national political context during 2020-2021 was significant in shifting me further from my own colorblindness and manifestations of whiteness to work in solidarity with those who were already advocating and researching for social justice.

In addition to the global and national political context during the time that I designed and conducted this dissertation research, I also want to acknowledge the significance of doing this work in Arizona. Arizona has a long history of legislating to uphold white supremacy and disenfranchise and silence people of Color, particularly in education. For example, in 2010, Governor Jan Brewer signed a law that banned Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American Studies program. The program, which is considered an ethnic studies program for high schoolers, shifted from the predominately white Eurocentric history curriculum found in schools, as it was designed to highlight Mexican American contributions to United States history and culture. Teachers supporting ethnic studies program argue that ethnic studies programs "give students a pathway to break the cycles of poverty, violence, and incarceration that so many communities of color face" (Depenbrock, 2017, August 22).

However, supporters of Governor Brewer's ban saw the Mexican American Studies program "as a plot to indoctrinate children with ideas about white people as racists and people of color as their victims" (Stephenson, 2021, July 11). Seven years later, in 2017, a federal judge would overturn a portion of that ban on the grounds of racism and discriminatory intent (Depenbrock, 2017, August 22). Yet, in 2021, during a time of national protest against police brutality, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, along with other state governors and legislators across the United States, continue to legislate against any pedagogical decisions that point out disparities related to social identities and power. Ducey's bill bans critical race theory and teaching about topics on race and inequality (Lardieri, 2021, July 9). This law serves as one more example of how Arizona



continues to uphold structural racism and preserve benefits for Whites by silencing critiques of whiteness and the voices and votes of people of Color (Oxford, 2021, July 1). It is in this current state context that I conduct this research in attempts to shift our state from preserving structural racism to dismantling it.

This study sought to understand the process by which three self-identified White teachers transitioned from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism, and are engaged in structural initiatives in their schools, districts and/or communities for racial equity. The following research questions guided the study:

- What are three self-identified White teachers' perceptions of their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism?
  - What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers' processes of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism?
  - How do these pedagogical pivot places contribute to new ways of knowing in teachers' shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism?

This study contributes to the literature on White teachers' process of shifting from colorblindness to racial consciousness and understanding white supremacy. It offers implications for White pre-service teachers and teachers in schools. But more than that, the bottom line is that it's not just about helping White teachers to understand their role in upholding white supremacy and fighting against structural racism to better meet the needs

of their diverse students. This study is also about helping to do this work in society outside of schooling. We know that schools are amplifiers of the ideologies of the greater society. And, we know that schools in the United States function as a “de facto socioeconomic sorting mechanism... the primary place where economic futures are cast and people are sorted into their roles in society” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). If we do not work to change structures in the greater society, we may make some small shifts, but not the necessary significant shifts needed to dismantle structural racism; hence, my decision to disseminate the findings at creative nonfiction (CNF) profiles to reach a wider public audience.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

Five chapters comprise this dissertation. In chapter one, I shared about my journey and the scholarly literature that have contributed to the dissertation research design. I also provided an overview of the study and my rationale for undertaking the study. I concluded this chapter by discussing the significance of the study and identifying how I intend to contribute to the field of education research. The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows:

#### **Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework**

In chapter two, I first introduce speculative realism (Shaviro, 2014) as guided by Alfred North Whitehead as the theoretical framework that will inform my research design. Then, I review previous research informed by speculative realism and Ellsworth’s (2005) pedagogical pivot places. In chapter two, I also present the problem of White teachers who act out of colorblind racism because they do not understand dominant

ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege. In addressing the problem, I review the scholarly literature on critical whiteness studies and White teacher education and preparation that has helped to shape and inform the research questions and study. I close the chapter by reviewing the literature on creative nonfiction relevant to the research topic.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

In chapter three, I present the research study design to address the research questions. Chapter three includes the following sections: (1) methodology, (2) participants, (3) recruitment, (4) methods to gather the material, (5) material analysis, (5) validity, (6) reflexivity, and (7) honoring the participant. In each relevant section, I detail the alignment between that section and the methodology and theoretical framework.

### **Chapter 4: Findings**

In chapter four, I present the findings as three creative nonfiction profiles. The first profile is Carla's Story. The second profile is Maya's Story. The third profile is Jennifer's story.

### **Chapter 5: Assertions and Implications**

In chapter five, I discuss how Carla, Maya, and Jennifer's pedagogical processes of transitioning from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy contribute to and in some ways contest the existing literature on White teachers' awareness of racism and white supremacy. I also examine the teachers' stories through Helms' (2020) model of White identity development. I conclude with implications for teacher education and next steps in research looking forward.

## **Appendices**

The dissertation concludes with appendices of interview protocols described in the methods to gather the material section.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I aim to do five things: (1) introduce the theoretical framework that informed my research design, (2) review previous research informed by speculative realism and Ellsworth's (2005) pedagogical pivot places, (3) present the problem of White teachers who act out of colorblind racism because they do not understand dominant ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege, (4) review the scholarly literature on white teacher education and preparation that has helped to shape and inform the research questions and proposal, and (5) review the literature on creative nonfiction profiles relevant to the research topic. This chapter is divided into two sections: *Theoretical Framework* and *Literature Review*.

In the first section of the chapter, the *Theoretical Framework*, I will address aims 1 and 2. First, I will introduce speculative realism as guided by Alfred North Whitehead as the theory to frame the study. After providing an overview of speculative realism, I will define Ellsworth's (2005) concepts of pedagogy and pedagogical pivot places, situating these concepts in speculative realism. Then, I will review the relevant literature in the field of education that is informed by speculative realism and Ellsworth's (2005) pedagogy/pedagogical pivot places. Throughout this section, I describe the affordances of using speculative realism and Ellsworth's (2005) concepts of pedagogy and pedagogical pivot places to frame the study of White teachers' pedagogy of value shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism.

## Theoretical Framework

*“In each moment of our life, we take in all of our past experience and all of our new experiences, and we create ourselves out of them, deciding who we will be in that moment”*

(Mesle, 2008, pp. 52-53).

In this study, I draw on speculative realism, as guided by Alfred N. Whitehead, which explores manners, modes, and contingent interactions of being and thinking as opposed to fixed states of being (Shaviro, 2014). Speculative realism is based on a philosophy of *becoming*, where the world is not made up of things. In a philosophy of *becoming*, the world is composed of events and relational processes. Illustrated in Mesle’s (2008) quote above, all things are changing: becoming and perishing in active, reciprocally connected processes (Mesle, 2008).

Even though some things change very slowly, unnoticed by the human eye, Whitehead notes that all things change. Hence, there are no constant, static givens, and the world is never static or completed. Thus, the definition of life is change. With this definition, being exists in the becoming. *How* a thing—a subject or object—comes into existence comprises *what* that thing actually is (Shaviro, 2014). Each process of becoming creates something original that has never existed before. But things do not stop becoming. Things “continually alter and transform themselves” in new and unanticipated ways, through embodied experiences with other things (Shaviro, 2014, p. 4). This interaction and transformation are the result of the deep connectedness of all things.

In the following sections I will explain how speculative realism provides a useful and coherent framework for studying the pedagogy and pedagogical pivot places of an individual's value shifting through process, through *becoming*. I will do this by first describing Whitehead's (1967) views of the role of experience in becoming and perception and causation. Then, I will show how Ellsworth's (2005) interpretation of pedagogy aligns with speculative realism's process of becoming.

### **The Role of Experience in Becoming**

The role of experience is central in becoming. Whitehead, disputing Cartesian dualism, states that the brain is part of the body. Experience is both physical and mental. The brain, as part of the body, experiences (Mesle, 2008). Humans are unable to separate themselves from their living, experiencing bodies. He argues that there is nothing separate from the experiences of subjects, meaning that experience cannot exist independently either. Mesle (2008) explains that, for Whitehead and speculative realism, experience comes from "that which is lived" (p. 43). With each new experience, the body brings to it, all its past experiences, co-creating a new experience (Whitehead, 1967). Each new experience has its own world, its own distinct position. Each experience results from a unique context and spatial-temporal situation. Because of the diversity of experience, and because each new experience requires interpretation as "memories, emotions, plans, hopes, fears, and possible reactions" (Mesle, 2008, p. 59), no two humans share the same story.

In addition to positing that no two humans share the same story, Whitehead also posits that no one entity (human or thing) is the same from moment to moment. Each new

experience contributes to the changing of the body because the body is composed of parts in process. In this process, time is defined as the flow of events becoming and perishing. The body is made up of individual, numberless “drops of feeling,” all interlaced by their experiences with each other (Mesle, 2008, p. 39). Each feeling changes the one who feels, meaning that the entity is no longer the same. The entity (human/thing) becomes a different entity than before the feeling (experience) (Shaviro, 2014). Whitehead holds that all entities have equivalent reality because they all behave relationally in the same ways and are composed of the same properties. For Whitehead, facts and values are not discrete categories. Values are a characteristic attribute to existence. Each thing attributes value to itself and others. Because of this, fact and value are intertwined (Shaviro, 2014). What is valued is that which is applicable—that which informs us about the world we experience and dwell in (Mesle, 2008). Aesthetic emotions are what supply us with strong perceptions of value (Whitehead, 1967).

### **Perceptions and Causation**

We humans presume that causation exists because through the process of becoming, we experience causation through each moment. We think that each experience is caused by the collection of past experiences (Mesle, 2008). There are two different types of perception: (1) perception through presentational immediacy; and (2) perception through causal efficacy.

Perception through presentational immediacy is perception by sense. We build a phenomenal world through sensory experience. This means that as the body takes in the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures of the world, the brain constructs our



understanding of the world from this sensory input. Sensory perceptions are the only exact data that we can gather of the physical world (Whitehead, 1967). However, the phenomenal world does not ever completely match the given, actual world. Our understanding of the physical world is a surmised idea, meaning that our experiences interpret the world to our perceptions (Whitehead, 1967).

Perception through causal efficacy happens when nature engulfs and overwhelms us. Feelings from this engulfment flow into us. With a foggy consciousness from half-sleep, sensory input fades. Then, we have uncertain feelings of influences from unidentifiable things surrounding us (Shaviro, 2014). In causal efficacy, we experience the world, then interpret our experience, building our worlds from the bigger world of causality. We experience the world as we create ourselves from it (Mesle, 2008). For Whitehead, all experience is embedded in causal efficacy. We accept causation because through experience we perceive that we are a part of a causal web. We experience causal forces within the web that require us to revise our interpretations formed by our perception by sense. Our social constructs evolve, ever so slowly over time, from these causal webs.

### **Pedagogy & Becoming**

Ellsworth (2005) defines pedagogy as the force responsible for the continual learning and making of the self— where “particular movements, sensations, and affects” of one’s body, brain and mind engage in events existing outside of the sphere of language (p.2). Pedagogy’s association with knowledge illuminates new ways of thinking and is the “experience of learning the self”, others or the world (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 12; Carlson,

2019). The body's time and space are key in understanding each learning experience. In this experience, much like Whitehead's relational process of becoming, the "self" is continually made and remade through learning experiences. Ellsworth (2005) posits that if "the experience of knowledge in the making is also the experience of our selves in the making, then there is no self who preexists a learning experience. Rather, the 'self' is what emerges from that learning experience" (p. 2). Pedagogy, therefore, transforms knowledge, self-experience, perception, comprehension, valuing, remembering, relating, and the future (Ellsworth, 2005). Ellsworth's definition of pedagogy as the continual learning and making of the self aligns with Whitehead's (1967) protest of inert knowledge and claim that "there is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations" (pp. 6-7). For Whitehead, education serves to help people grow in the art of using knowledge for the express purpose of producing "active wisdom" (1967, p. 37).

Whitehead (1967) asserted that there exists a rhythm of education—of learning Life—consisting of a cycle of romance, precision, and generalization. While romance, precision, and generalization exist in each stage of the cycle, one of the three dominates in each of the stages. When romance dominates, the learner encounters new "[i]deas, facts, relationships, stories, histories, possibilities, artistry in words, in sounds, in form and in colour" (Whitehead, 1967, p. 21). In romance, the learner realizes unexplored relationships and experiences romantic emotion, excitement, and freedom. When precision dominates, the romantic emotion and freedom shifts to the background as the learner gathers the general rules, aptitudes, and truths about this new phenomenon

(Whitehead, 1967). When generalization dominates, the learner practices, or puts into use, what they learned in the precision stage. In this rhythm, education begins by inducing initiative and ends promoting initiative, whereby knowledge gives way to wisdom.

Both Whitehead and Ellsworth emphasize the process (rhythm) of becoming in the learning of the self and life. Thus, drawing on speculative realism and Ellsworth's definition of pedagogy provides a useful framework for studying pedagogical processes of value shifting as a relational process of becoming and making of the self through one's lived experiences.

In order to locate the pedagogy of learning the self, others and the world, Ellsworth (2005) recommends looking to pedagogical pivot places—which are transitional spaces: “times and places of knowledge in the making”—because these times and places are also “the learning self in the making” (p. 2). Pedagogical pivot places are spaces where individuals process “the movement between inner and outer realities and experiences” (Carlson, 2019, p. 97). In these spaces, these experiences serve as catalysts that shift people to new conditions of knowing. Studying values with a lens of speculative realism allows the researcher to dig deep into a person's value shifting, examining their perceptions of causation within their causal web as a complex relational process. Through a lens of Ellsworth's pedagogy, I seek to study White teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical pivot places in a pedagogy of learning the self in relation to systemic racism and white supremacy.

## **Speculative Realism in Educational Research**

In educational research, speculative realism has been used as a theoretical framework to challenge the invisible acceptance of anthropocentric domination in education and research. For example, in studies addressing colonization in environmental and sustainability education (Clarke & Mcphie, 2020), speculative realism specifically challenges the colonization of both human and other-than-human beings (human supremacy) and emphasizes the interchangeable composition and relations of human and non-human nature (Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2016; Regnier, 2016; Walsh *et al.*, 2020). Speculative realism has also been used to advocate for social justice pedagogy without relying on “transcendent, human exceptionalist arguments” (Cole & Rafe, 2018, p. 378). In art education, speculative realism has served to guide university mapping of different ecologies of practice (i.e., arts, humanities, and sciences) that are more than human in their co-composing of learning environments (Rousell, 2017). Thus, researchers use speculative realism to push against the nature/culture binary (Gannon, 2015).

Whitehead’s theory of speculative realism has been used to advocate for new conceptions of pedagogy: Atkinson (2017) has posited two forms of pedagogy in art education that are influenced by Whitehead: (1) relational pedagogy, and (2) a pedagogy of immanence. In relational pedagogy, the demarcation between teacher and learner is fluid. Relational pedagogy exists in co-becoming in classrooms—the “coming together of the different times (and their diverse ontological structures) of human lives that rub up against each other in a particular time and space of living” (Atkinson, 2017, p. 130). In a pedagogy of immanence, the “unknown” is approached without preconceived criteria,

during each learning encounter, there is an emphasis on the extensive possibilities in the process of becoming. Teachers are discouraged from asking questions formed from their understanding of the learning task, because questions formed out of established criteria may confine the learner's affects and potentials of becoming in the learning encounter.

Relational pedagogy and pedagogy of immanence pursue the “subjects-yet-to-come” instead of “economies of performance” (Atkinson, 2018, p. 18). They shift the focus away from instructing learners in order to acquire prescribed knowledge and skills and towards facilitating an environment where learners, materials and bodies experience learning events that are significant to them and “lead to transformation and the invention of new worlds” (Atkinson, 2018, p. 20). However, in his descriptions of these pedagogies, Atkinson (2017, 2018) privileges contexts of schooling and museums for the enactment of these pedagogies. As Whitehead (1967) and Ellsworth's (2005) theories suggest, becoming and learning are not isolated to contexts of schooling, but are the act of living life. Using speculative realism as a theoretical framework for the study of the process of White teachers' value shifting regarding structural racism and white supremacy will be a new contribution to the scholarly literature.

### **Ellsworth's Pedagogy in Educational Research**

In educational research, Ellsworth's (2005) work has been used to challenge prescriptive curriculum and dissemination of knowledge to students in schools, calling for pedagogy that is open to liminal spaces and that does not anticipate a certain answer/outcome (Sojot, 2018). For example, Higgins & McFeetors (2019) employed Ellsworth's (2005) pedagogical pivots to push back on STEM education's prescribed

curricular destinations that privilege the cognitive over the relational in learning. Additionally, environmental education scholars have advocated for pedagogical design influenced by Ellsworth, based on the consideration that socio-ecological learning occurs between what is thought and what is sensed as bodies engage in intersubjective experiences (McKenzie, 2008; Wason-Elam, 2010). Powell and LaJevic (2011) have drawn on relationality, place, and embodiment to call for designs of urban pre-service teachers' places of learning to exist beyond the classroom—to places in the city, community, and neighborhood—in order to “orchestrate pivot points in which students and teachers can link imagination with reality” (p. 50).

Scholars have also used Ellsworth's (2005) concepts of pedagogy and pedagogical pivot places in studies seeking to understand how spaces other than educational institutions engage learners in pedagogical pivot places in the world outside of schooling. Studies have examined pedagogical pivot places between time in socially engaged and arts-based events such as mapping (Berg, 2018), knitting (LaJevic & Powell, 2012), mural making (Hanawalt, 2016), and painting competitions (Pelosi, 2015). These types of pedagogical pivot places encourage opportunities for students to investigate art making, place and space in order to complicate understandings in their learning of the self, as well as push back against fixed neo-liberal models of education (Hanawalt, 2016; Pelosi, 2016). While Leahy's (2014) study took place in the world of schooling, she revealed and criticized the force (pedagogy) of risk, expert risk knowledge and neoliberalism shaping health education instruction in Australia.

Pedagogical pivot points (places) have also been used to describe partnership places that allow for more fluid conceptions of identity; examples of this include artist studios (Kenny & Morrissey, 2020), gardens (Pelosi, 2016), and community writing centers (Rousculp, 2014). At partnership places, roles imposed through institutional and societal conventions are not as prevalent. Hence, these places function as pedagogical pivot places, where people experience identity formation and the learning of the self by putting “the inside and outside in relation” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 37; Kenny & Morrissey, 2020).

While Ellsworth’s (2005) pedagogy and pedagogical pivot places have been used to explore learning beyond formal contexts of schooling, as well as advocate for less prescriptive curricula, and to investigate the pedagogical forces outside of schools that create the curriculum, Ellsworth (2005) has not been used to explore the pedagogical pivot places of teachers in relation to their values on white supremacy and structural racism. Therefore, I situate my study in Ellsworth’s (2005) concept of pedagogy, in order to study White teachers’ perceptions of their pedagogical pivot places in a pedagogy of learning the self as they came to an understanding of white supremacy and structural racism.

### **Literature Review**

In the second section of the chapter, the *Literature Review*, I will address aims 3, 4, and 5. First, I will present the problem of White teachers who act out of colorblind racism because they do not understand dominant ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege. Then, I will review the scholarly literature on White teacher

education and preparation in teaching diverse students that has helped to shape and inform the proposal. The review of the literature is organized as follows: *White Teachers Operating from Values Founded in Colorblindness; Culturally Relevant, Responsive & Sustaining Pedagogies; Racial Inequality, White Privilege & Teaching Diverse Students; White Teachers Who Get It*; and concludes with research questions informed by the literature and theoretical framework. Finally, I will review the literature on creative nonfiction profiles related to the research topic.

### **White Teachers Operating from Colorblindness**

In the field of education, teachers possess their own values, which guide their perceptions and inform their interactions with students in the classroom (Biesta et al., 2015; Cummings et al., 2007; Pajares, 1992; Sharma, 2014; Veugelers, & Vedder, 2003). The interplay of the shared values of the classroom (promoted by the teacher) and the students' values (learned at home) may experience conflict when the majority of pre-service teachers and educators are White women (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Boser, 2014; Matias, 2013a; NCES, 2018) serving an increasingly (racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically) diverse student population in public schools (Bonner *et al.*, 2018). Often, when conflict is present between teacher and student values, teachers struggle to understand student diversity they have not experienced before and are often resistant to altering their pedagogy to meet the educational needs of their students (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000; Tatto, 1998). When White teachers lack awareness of dominant ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege, they may unknowingly relate to students in a way that sustains colorblind racism (Baggett & Simmons, 2017).



When teachers act out of colorblind racism, they marginalize and harm students of Color while upholding White middle-class standards and values (Castagno, 2013; Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Hammond, 2014; Howard, 2016; Matias 2016; Yoon, 2012).

Evans-Winters' (2019), personal experience growing up in Chicago is representative of how the hidden curriculum of whiteness replicates hegemonic structures (Leonardo, 2004) that allow Whites to construct themselves as raceless and the standard of normal American while othering and oppressing those who are not White.

In our Black communities at home, like Black segregated communities in South Africa, schools pushed White teachers, books and images down our throats; police harassed, beat up, and locked up our Black men; and Black people were homeless and our neighborhoods were overcrowded.

Meanwhile, outside of our neighborhoods, White people seem to have plenty; they were the doctors, lawyers, librarians, teachers, police, and they were the ones in charge of our fate as they comprised the local, state, and federal government. My generation was being schooled by White teachers who never mentioned to us that we were black people, spoke of racial equality, or discussed culture. (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 52)

Scholars have attempted to understand and strategize how to solve the problem of helping teachers—with values that are relatively stable and resistant—to change in order to create classrooms and learning experiences that honor students with diverse identities and values (Aronson et al., 2020; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2009; Fergus, 2017; Garmon, 2005; Haddix, 2017; Jaber et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Matias, 2016; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Tatto, 1996; Warren, 2017; Williams & Evans-Winters,

2005). In the pursuit of providing equitable educational experiences for all students, scholars and educators concerned with teacher education and preparation continue to work to dismantle white supremacist ideologies and their explicit and implicit oppression of student of Color in schools.

### **Culturally Relevant, Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogies**

*“Every culturally responsive teacher develops a sociopolitical consciousness, an understanding that we live in a racialized society that gives unearned privilege to some while others experience unearned disadvantage because of race, gender, class, or language. They are aware of the role that schools play in both perpetuating and challenging those inequities.”*

Hammond, 2014, p. 55

For the past twenty-five years, initiatives to promote teachers’ use of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies have made significant progress towards an awareness of the need for more equitable learning opportunities for students marginalized by hegemonic pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2014) and multicultural curriculum (Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 1992) seek to support teachers’ deep understanding and appreciation of students’ experiences and lives while connecting curricular content to the students’ lives. One goal of culturally responsive teaching is to stop the cycle of forcing ethnically diverse students to minimize or abandon their cultures in order to learn white middle-class cultural norms (Gay, 2002). However, despite advancements in preparing teachers to use culturally responsive teaching and multicultural curriculum (Bonner *et al.*, 2018), teacher education programs using multicultural and diversity courses to prepare future teachers to adjust the pedagogy

for diverse students often fall short of bringing about White teachers' analysis of the ways in which whiteness advances structural inequities in education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; Farnsworth, 2010). When White teachers do not recognize how whiteness advances structural inequity, they operate out of colorblindness, and the multicultural curriculum becomes a tool to protect whiteness (Castagno, 2013; Howard, 2016; Matias, 2013b; Yoon, 2012).

### **Racial Inequality, White Privilege and Teaching Diverse Students**

In her research on teacher education programs and teachers' resistance and/or acceptance of teaching practices based on their values and beliefs, Tatto (1996) advised that a critical goal of teacher education programs should be to change teachers' beliefs. If preservice teachers do not consciously examine and discuss their dominant values that drive their classroom practices, they will perpetuate the hegemonic status quo (Stuart & Thurlow; 2000; see also Hammond, 2014). Additionally, they are likely to remain "materially and psychologically invested in a meritocratic, hierarchical educational system" (Evans-Winters, 2009, p. 150).

Warren (2017), seeking to deepen White teachers understandings of racial inequality, white privilege, and teaching diverse students, has recommended the following revisions to teacher education programs in order to support teachers' perspective taking and preparation for culturally responsive pedagogy: (1) field experiences where teacher candidates are the racial minority and encouraged to enter these field experiences as humble and curious learners instead of as knowledge producers; (2) critical classroom discourse that facilitates teacher candidate reflection on how their personal perspectives and experiences help or hurt their pedagogical decisions

when working with students who are different from themselves; and (3) incorporating counternarratives and history of oppressed people into each education course to support teachers' continual reflection, self-evaluation and revision of their values and perspectives about racial inequality. While these revisions are a step in the right direction, Matias (2013a) questions the effectiveness of culturally responsive training for White teachers who lack prolonged relationships with people of Color and time spent in urban communities of Color.

While Warren's (2017) recommended revisions are helpful, they do not ask pre-service White teachers to examine whiteness and structural racism. To address this, some scholars (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014b; Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Matias, 2016; Matias et al., 2014; Helms, 2020) have called for the inclusion of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) readings for White teachers in order to help them (1) to understand how the white imagination influences perceptions of race dynamics and impacts relationships with students of Color, and (2) to deconstruct the ways in which "white communities are normalized as good communities" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 303).

Some scholars note that critical race theory and critical whiteness studies courses have provided spaces for White teachers to engage in conversations that lead to understandings of white supremacy (Aronson, 2017; Crowley, 2019). However, other studies counter that neither white race consciousness nor antiracist pedagogy has proven to increase teacher inclusivity in diverse classrooms or improve academic achievement of students of Color who live in poverty (Brandon, 2010; Watson, 2011, 2012). Instead, some scholars argue that the focus should be to target White teachers' deeply embedded

notions of deficit thinking that influence their interactions with students of Color (Brandon, 2010; Nash, 2013; Hammond, 2014).

There are mixed findings on the effectiveness of institutional programs in preparing pre-service teachers to interrogate their beliefs and assumptions rooted in racist ideology (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Bennett *et al.*, 2019). Some of these findings point to the curricular design and/or misalignment of the course goals with the teacher education program's philosophy (Tatto, 1996). Other findings point to the colorblindness of predominantly White teacher educators training White pre-service teachers (Gordon, 2005). In studies that document how professors of Color seek to problematize the normality of hegemonic whiteness in teacher preparation courses, pre-service White teachers have been found to resist and subjugate the anti-racist curriculum in order to maintain whiteness and white fragility (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Evans-Winters & Twyman Hoff, 2011; Matias, 2013b, 2016; Matias *et. al.*, 2014; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). These pre-service White teachers often resist and subjugate the anti-racist curriculum by directing hostility and harassment towards their professors of Color, who become the targets of the pre-service White teachers' microaggressions. Matias and colleagues (2014) found that pre-service White teachers reacted to confrontations with whiteness in the following ways: emotional disinvestment, an absence of a critical understanding of race, emergence and reemergence of white guilt, and recycling of hegemonic whiteness (p. 289). These reactions are concerning as they impede White teachers' ability to be anti-racist teachers. Matias (2013b) problematizes this and asserts that if White teachers are going to be culturally responsive educators for their urban

students of Color, White teacher candidates “must first accept their teacher educators of Color” (p. 54).

In a review of the scholarly literature on how researchers address the concept of white privilege in teacher education using critical race theory, Bennett *et al.* (2019) found that even when White pre-service teachers developed understandings of race-based privilege in their courses, they struggled to connect race-based privilege with systemic inequities. Furthermore, veteran White teachers struggle to connect racial identity and privilege with structural racism. For example, Bell (2020) researched the process of how White teachers’ understanding of themselves evolved from (self-described) racially invisible teachers to (self-described) hyper visible White teachers in the context of predominantly Black schools. While Bell (2020) found that White teachers experienced overtly racialized interactions, heightened racial awareness, and an increased perception of racial victimization, he noted that once the teachers left their predominantly Black schools and returned to their white spaces, they lost awareness of their racial identity. This is concerning as it contributes to the perpetuation of white privilege, allowing Whites to claim innocence in maintaining structural oppression (Leonardo, 2004; Matias & Boucher, 2021).

### **White Teachers Who Get It**

In considering how to design a study that addresses a need in the scholarly literature, I drew from Johnson (2002, as cited in Castagno, 2013), Delgado and Stefancic (2012), and Leonardo (2004) because their contributions to the literature have helped to provide insight into possible pedagogical pivot places and participant inclusion criteria.

Johnson (2002, as cited in Castagno, 2013) sought to understand how White teachers

moved past colorblindness to being aware of race and racism. She found that White teachers became aware of race and racism through developing close relationships with people of Color, participating in social justice organizations with racially diverse members, and/or personally experiencing discrimination and marginalization. Johnson's findings hint towards a possible pedagogy of the learning of the self and possible pedagogical pivot places in the process of becoming.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) helped to inform my participant inclusion criteria. Within critical race theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) describe three groups that educators might align with when addressing white privilege and systemic inequities in education: idealist, realist, and middle ground. Idealists claim that racism and discrimination within society are found in language, thoughts, and attitudes. Therefore, idealists seek to change individuals' perceptions of race and deficit thinking towards minority groups in order to end racism. While realists recognize the role of individual perceptions in racism, they assert that racism and white supremacy exists structurally, through racial hierarchies. Therefore, realists seek structural reforms that lead to better opportunities for minority groups more than changing individual perceptions. The middle grounders tend to consider both cultural and structural as important areas to target in working to end racism.

Bennett *et al.* (2019) note that teacher educators tend to implement idealist strategies to change preservice teachers' perceptions regarding white privilege and structural racism as opposed to realist strategies that would encourage fighting for structural reform. While recognizing the importance of idealist strategies in working

against oppression, Bennett *et al.* (2019) problematizes the absence of realist strategies in teacher education, stating that teacher educators preparing preservice teachers for teaching in diverse students “are remiss if they do not address systemic inequities with goals of inspiring systemic reform” (Bennett *et al.*, 2019, p. 913). They recommend for teacher educators to prepare preservice teachers with strategies to work for structural change in schools (i.e., forming partnerships among teachers, families, and administrators to address inequities in AP classes, retention, high levels of achievement and graduation [Bennett *et al.*, 2019, p. 895]).

During recruitment, I sought participants who considered themselves to be in the middle ground, meaning that they were engaged in both idealist and realist strategies to address white privilege and systemic inequities in education, working towards racial equity. Because “whiteness is systemic, institutional, and ideological,” I looked for teachers who were not only working to change individual perceptions and discourse, but who were also working to make changes at the institutional and ideological levels (Castagno, 2013, p. 120). Additionally, scholars (Leonardo, 2004; Matias, 2016; Helms, 2020) assert that discussions of white privilege need to shift from merely acknowledging the oppressed to acknowledging and scrutinizing white supremacy in ways that focus on labeling the oppressor. For this reason, it is important that the participants have an understanding of their role in the oppression of people of Color.

This study arose out of the need to understand the process by which White teachers recognize their role in upholding white supremacy and go on to implement both idealist and realist strategies to fight systemic oppression in their schools and



communities. The dissemination of this study contributes to the body of research, pointing to possible reforms in teacher education programs to support more White teachers in ideological shifting as well.

### **Research Questions**

After reviewing the scholarly literature relevant to the problem of White teachers who act out of colorblind racism because they do not understand dominant ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege, alongside the scholarly literature on critical whiteness studies, white teacher education and preparation in teaching diverse students, I proposed the following research questions:

- What are three self-identified White teachers' perceptions of their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism?
  - What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers' processes of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism?
  - How do these pedagogical pivot places contribute to new ways of knowing in teachers' shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism?

### **Values, Personal Experience & Creative Nonfiction**

This section seeks to explain why creative nonfiction is an appropriate form of dissemination for the study. First, I will define creative nonfiction and describe how creative nonfiction has been used to communicate with both public and academic

audiences. Then, I will provide a brief overview of the profile (a subgenre of creative nonfiction), followed by examples of profiles that address the subject's value changes.

Our values are created (or changed) in moments of emotional response triggered by our personal experiences (Locke, 2012). These personal experiences involved with forming values can be ones in which a person is involved directly, or indirectly, such as through the story of someone else's personal experience which resonates with the one listening. In the pursuit to cultivate epistemic empathy (Jaber et. al, 2018)—where we can realize and appreciate others' values and lives—creative nonfiction provides an accessible dissemination method to help shift the public's values. Creative nonfiction writing seeks to make true stories read like fiction, captivating readers with fact. Gutkind (2012) defines creative nonfiction as “true stories well told” (as cited in Leavey, 2020, p. 44). The writing is a balance between style and substance, scene, and information. Ordinary news reporting and writing tends to value timeliness, proximity, and summary narratives; but creative nonfiction writers value the use of literary craft to immerse the reader in the story and reveal larger truths (Hart, 2011). A well-written story goes beyond the character and plot points. It reaches toward something bigger. When it does this, it has the power to offer the readers an opportunity to make meaning for their own lives (Leavy, 2020; S. Viren, personal communication, April 14, 2022).

### **CNF for the Public**

When considering my dissertation's audience, I found myself reflecting on Leavy's (2020) questions: “At the end of the day, do you want to spend all of your time and energy producing work that is consumed by only an elite few who are just like you,

and likely only consuming your work to advance their own research agenda?” (p. 31). I did not want to do that. I preferred to use narrative that is accessible to the public in an attempt to foster connection, appreciation for new perspectives, and encourage empathy, self- and social reflection (Leavy, 2020). Some creative nonfiction publications that have been considered inspirational and eye-opening to the public are Matthew Desmond’s (2016) *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, Eli Saslow’s (2018) *Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist*, and Isabel Wilkerson’s (2020a) *Caste: The origins of our discontents*.

Desmond, a sociologist at Princeton University, conducted ethnography and research to document experiences and social policy in Minneapolis’ eviction culture. In his book, Desmond alternates narrative and research detailing eviction, poverty, and exploitation to advance the public’s understanding of this social problem. The book was ranked a New York Times bestseller and won the Pulitzer Prize, among many other awards.

Saslow, a Washington Post staff writer, conducted journalistic research to reconstruct the life and transformation of former white nationalist leader, Derek Black. His book is a narrative of Derek’s life, in essence a lengthy profile, tracing the evolution and popularization of white supremacist ideas in relation to Derek and his family’s timeline. His book offers the public a social and historical context of how white supremacy made its way to the mainstream, as well as how Derek, with the help of many college friends, disavowed white nationalism and realized the damage he caused to people of Color.

Wilkerson, a leader in the genre of narrative nonfiction, and winner of the Pulitzer Prize and National Humanities Medal, conducted journalistic and historical research to share narratives and stories of people impacted by America's racial caste system. In her book, Wilkerson weaves stories with history as she documents the eight pillars of caste that are foundational in the caste systems of America, Nazi Germany, and India. As she teaches readers the history of our country's hidden and fixed hierarchy of human rankings, she uses true stories of Blacks, including herself, who have suffered America's caste system to bring home the harm, oppression, and immorality of our racial caste system.

### **CNF for the Academy**

Creative nonfiction is not only relevant for the public audience. It can also be used to lift the level of academic writing, specifically in qualitative research. Two examples of books published where scholars used creative nonfiction to disseminate their qualitative research are Venus Evans-Winters' (2019). *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry: A Mosaic for Writing Our Daughter's Body*, and Robert Orsi's (2016) *History and Presence*.

Black feminist scholar and clinical trauma professional, Dr. Venus Evans-Winters uses creative nonfiction, among other creative genres of writing, to share her research in social and cultural foundations of education and offer critique or push the boundaries on educational policy and qualitative inquiry, grounded in Black feminist thought and critical race theory. In her academic book, *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry* (2019), Evans-Winters decenters whiteness and centers her experiences as a Black woman

scholar and the lived experiences of Black girls and women (p. 2). She uses creative nonfiction to craft a book that readers will want to read; Evans-Winters “mentally place[s] the reader in the physical environment where the study took place, and sophisticatedly breathe[s] life into research participants’ personal histories and commentary that emotionally connect the reader to the research subject” (2019, p. 1). Her personal, complex, and nuanced stories about herself, her family, friends, and students, woven with theory, history, and policy challenge traditional qualitative inquiry’s definitions of what counts as knowledge, research and academic writing.

Religious history scholar Robert Orsi (2013) critiques the study of religion in the United States, calling for an empirical, more realistic, and humane approach. His position on religious research is rooted in spending time in the field, observing “the experiences and beliefs of people in the midst of their lives” (p. 147). Orsi then combines the writing of concrete scenes from his time with participants in the field with academic literature and his posited theories. In his academic book, *History and Presence* (2016), Orsi used a case study approach, drawing on the lived experiences of Lizzie (p. 73), a Detroit housewife (p. 83) and Natalie (p. 86) to provide concrete stories of people’s experiences with radical presence to illustrate his findings on presence. With this approach, researchers experience religion in its context—in people’s daily lived experience.

Just as the above authors published creative nonfiction works that moved readers as they learned about the authors’ researched topics, through disseminating the findings of this study as profiles—complex stories of a person’s life—this study’s findings have the potential to resonate with a large audience of readers, and possibly contribute to the

process of some White teachers' ideological shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism.

## **Profiles**

The profile is a sub-genre of creative nonfiction, likened to a short biography. In the profile, a specific person is the basis for the story. The writer combines anecdotes, interview material, research description and events (both observed and recreated) to craft a short biography. Banaszynski (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) describes the purpose of writing a profile with specificity, to capture “the micro that illustrates the macro” (p. 66). While profile writers set out to interview and observe the subject and key actors to collect specific details and anecdotes to portray a complex character, they know that a good profile must be about something bigger, to link to a larger theme that will resonate with the readers in a longer lasting way.

When writing a profile, interviews are essential. In addition to interviewing the subject, Banaszynski (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) recommends that researchers reflect on the following questions: “Who are the people around him or her? Who will reveal something about that person? Who knows the defining moments that shaped his or her life?” and then seek out those people in order to gather rich perspectives and material for the profile (p. 66). For example, Gladwell (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) usually interviews about twenty key actors in the subject's life. He notes that his best material for crafting the profile comes from the key actors and not the subject. Tizon (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) advises researchers to interview and observe to answer the

question: “*Who is this person?*” (71). He further suggests that the story for the profile can be found between the subject’s burden and desire.

With the profile’s affordances of crafting a short, complex biography of a person’s life while at the same time connecting to a larger theme, the profile serves as a powerful medium to tell the story of a White teacher’s shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism in America. However, it is also important to recognize the limitations of the profile in its ability to present only one story of the person’s life. Despite capturing the complexity of a person’s story in the profile, it will not capture the multiple stories that the person lives (Gladwell as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007). Gladwell also speaks to the limitations of the profile in relation to time spent in the field: “Even when you spend a lot of time with people with your recorder or notebook out, you see them during only a few of the thousands and thousands of hours that make up their adult lives” (p. 74). It is important to keep this in mind when writing about the person and sharing their story. Because this study focuses on the story of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism, the profile will focus on capturing this one story in the subject’s life of multiple stories.

In the field of literary journalism, there are some profile publications that feature subjects who experience ideological shifts. For example, in the profile *Unfollow*, Chen (2015) details Meghan Phelps-Roper’s transformation process. The reader is moved by the scenes that reveal Meghan’s values and beliefs—founded in the Westboro Baptist Church—shifting through her experiences and interactions with people over the internet. Meghan’s pedagogical pivot places are detailed through a balance of substance and style.

By disseminating Meghan's pedagogy of value shifting through the profile, Chen wrote for a larger public audience. Had he written for publication in an academic journal, Meghan's pedagogical process would have been secluded to a smaller, scholarly audience, perhaps constrained to a genre with the reader experiencing the affect of reading a clinical report. Another example is when Marantz (2017) uses the profile to show the public how Mike Enoch transforms from a liberal to a white nationalist figurehead. While he carefully narrates Mike's pedagogical pivot places, he connects to the wider problem of white supremacy and alludes to how others might experience a white nationalist process of becoming.

### **Wrapping Up & Looking Forward**

In this chapter I sought to do five things: (1) introduce the theoretical framework that has informed my research design, (2) review previous research informed by speculative realism and Ellsworth's (2005) pedagogical pivot places, (3) present the problem of White teachers who act out of colorblind racism because they do not understand dominant ideologies of white supremacy and their own white privilege, (4) review the scholarly literature on white teacher education and preparation that has helped to shape and inform the research questions and research study design, and (5) review the literature on creative nonfiction profiles relevant to the research topic. In the following chapter, I present the dissertation research design consisting of the methodology and methods to address the research questions.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Overview

This chapter describes the research design to address the following research questions:

- What are three self-identified White teachers' perceptions of their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism?
  - What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers' processes of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism?
  - How do these pedagogical pivot places contribute to new ways of knowing in teachers' shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism?

This chapter includes the following sections: (1) methodology, (2) participants, (3) recruitment, (4) methods to gather the material, (5) material analysis, (5) validity, (6) reflexivity, and (7) honoring the participant. In each relevant section, I address the methodological coherence (Mayan, 2009) of the research design by explaining the method's alignment with the methodology and theoretical framework. Table 1. provides the research process timeline. The appendices include the interview protocols described in gathering the material section.

## **Methodology**

I approach this study using creative nonfiction methodology. To understand creative nonfiction as methodology, I will first define creative nonfiction; then, I will describe the role of creative nonfiction as methodology. Creative nonfiction writing seeks to make true stories read like fiction, captivating readers with fact. Gutkind (2012) defines creative nonfiction as “true stories well told” (as cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 44). The writing is a balance between style and substance, between scene and information. Ordinary news reporting and writing tends to value timeliness, proximity, and summary narratives; but creative nonfiction writers value the use of literary craft to immerse the reader in the story and reveal larger truths (Hart, 2011). A well-written story goes beyond the character and plot points. It reaches toward something bigger. When it does this, it has the power to offer the readers an opportunity to make meaning for their own lives (Leavy, 2020; S. Viren, personal communication, April 14, 2022).

Despite the commitment of creative nonfiction writers to honestly report and write, it is impossible to be completely objective and to capture all of what happens in the field—to portray the events, people, and complex worlds that we engage in—with absolute accuracy or truth. Our endeavors to recreate these worlds with words change reality to some extent. We select what we include from our material and leave out a considerable amount of what we have gathered from participants. McPhee (2017) states: “Writing is selection,” and selection begins as we start to gather material (p. 56). Research on cognition and memory has shown the unreliability of the human memory in reconstructing the past. Further complicating the notion of telling true stories, Hart (2011)

problematizes how creative nonfiction writers can represent the world accurately when any reconstructed story is an approximation of reality (see also Kramer & Hall, 2007). I also acknowledge that the concept of “true stories” is problematic. In this study, I attempted to tell the truth of the participants’ perceptions about their shifting. However, my own perceptions were also mingled in the process of writing their stories.<sup>2</sup> While I was committed not to add or deceive in my writing (Kramer & Hall, 2007), because I brought all of my previous experiences and feelings with me to this study and was in a process of relational becoming with participants and with the material gathered (Shaviro, 2012, 2014), it was impossible to write without subconsciously infusing my own past, perceptions and biases into the profiles.

While creative nonfiction has been used as a method in data analysis (Ge, 2019; Onstad, 2009), and dissemination (Day, 2019), creative nonfiction has rarely been used as a methodology. Often, when researchers have claimed to use creative nonfiction methodology, their study design reveals that they have just used creative writing methods to compose composite nonfiction stories and archetype narratives (DuFault & Schouten, 2020; Weight et al., 2020). While the authors claim to use creative nonfiction, both composites and archetypal narratives tend to be heavily critiqued by seminal creative nonfiction writers (Gutkind, 2012; Kramer & Call, 2007; Miller & Paola, 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, on two occasions, readers in my writing group, as well as our professor, Lee Gutkind, noted where a character’s inner point of view did not seem to align well or was confusing with the scene I had written. When I went back to review the transcripts and revise, I realized that I had unintentionally inserted some of my own perception and interpretation into the character’s inner point of view. While I was able to revise during these two occasions, there may be other instances in the writing where my own perceptions interacted and were written with the character’s perceptions.

Crotty (2020) defines methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design” that frames a researcher's choice and use of particular methods towards a desired outcome (p. 11). Each methodology holds an essence that guides the study design (D. Carlson, personal communication, March 22, 2021). For example, ethnography’s essence is cultural intent (Wolcott, 1985); narrative inquiry’s essence is story (Leavy, 2020); grounded theory’s essence is building theory of a process (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). If a researcher is designing a study using ethnography as methodology, the study must focus on culture. Creative nonfiction as methodology’s essence is telling a compelling, true story that resonates with readers (Gutkind, 2012). Therefore, in this study, I place creative nonfiction at the center of the study to determine my choice of research and writing methods. Each method of material gathering and analysis will serve to craft creative nonfiction narratives. This is the difference between the previous studies’ use of creative nonfiction and my study. Creative nonfiction is not just one portion of my research design; it is the central focus and desired outcome.

Graham (2016) has argued that creative nonfiction methodology implemented in biographical writing allows for the sharing of factual stories while facilitating greater innovation and hybridity than traditional biography reporting. Similarly, I draw upon creative nonfiction as methodology in order to generate knowledge that is engaging and compelling to a public audience. As a methodology, creative nonfiction provides the necessary framework that allows for a systematic approach to description that addresses my research purpose of crafting true stories of teachers’ transitioning from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy.

Creative nonfiction aligns with a theoretical framework of speculative realism because all the material gathered, human and nonhuman—documents, photographs, and artifacts—are “equally important in the production of knowledge” (Nordstrom, 2018, p. 219) and are in service of crafting creative nonfiction profiles. Creative nonfiction seeks to initiate aesthetic judgment for the readers by luring, alluring, seducing, repulsing, inciting, or dissuading (Shaviro, 2012, p. 4). All material is gathered, analyzed, and disseminated in service of creative nonfiction, making it more than human.

### **Teacher Recruitment & Participants**

After securing IRB approval for the study September 2021, I set out to recruit participants. I implemented purposeful sampling (Patton, 2005) to recruit three self-identified White public school teachers who live in the United States, and who fit the following inclusion criteria: (1) perceive that they have shifted from colorblindness to realizing white supremacy and the presence and impact of structural racism, (2) are currently employed as teachers, (3) and are implementing both idealist and realist strategies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) in racial equity work. Idealist strategies target individuals’ perceptions of race and deficit thinking towards minority groups in order to end racism. Realist strategies seek structural reforms that lead to better opportunities for minority groups.

Because I am seeking to contribute to the research and interventions of addressing constructs of white supremacy in the United States, particularly relating to White teachers’ awareness of structural racism, I have chosen the criteria that the participants live and teach in the United States. It is important that the participants be employed as

teachers at the time of the study, as well as plan to continue to stay in the teaching profession in the future so that their stories are currently connected to their identity as teachers. If the teachers are engaged in both idealist and realist strategies to address white privilege and systemic inequities in education, it will be more likely that their perceptions will align with what the scholarly literature considers to be racially aware White teachers who understand their role as oppressor within structural racism. Additionally, as Leonardo (2004) notes, the structural analysis and work is more effective in exposing and dismantling white supremacy than the individual analysis and reform.

I sought to recruit participants through social media groups, reaching out to antiracist and racial equity organizations, and through relationships with known educators.

### ***Social Media Groups***

I reactivated my Facebook account and requested to join sixteen Facebook groups focused on antiracism, antiracist teaching, and/or social justice in education. Once approved to join these groups, I reviewed their posting policy. Some of the groups needed administrator approval to make a post in the group, others did not require administrator approval. I was able to successfully post the recruitment advertisement in eight of the Facebook groups. I also sent messages to administrators in four of the groups to see if they would post the advertisement. From this recruitment method, I recruited two teachers to participate in the study. However, one withdrew from the study, perhaps because of the time commitment, or perhaps because of difficulty with being vulnerable in discussing one's whiteness.

### *Antiracist and Racial Equity Organizations*

In addition to social media recruitment, I googled and searched and emailed organizations and individuals involved with racial equity work and professional development in schools and academia (i.e., Dr. Kimya Nuru Dennis, Dr. Daniel Liou, Robin DiAngelo, Southern Poverty Law Center, NCTE). I emailed about thirty individuals/organizations to see if they might know teachers who would fit the criteria and be interested in the study. From these contacts' connections, I was able to recruit one teacher to participate in the study.

However, during this recruitment process, I realized that I was centering whiteness only after a person of Color who has a history of advancing racial justice in Arizona public schools called me out for my problematic behavior.

Good afternoon Danielle. Thank you for reaching out and acknowledging my recent case study. Also, for what you're working to accomplish.

Usually, people of the global majority, like myself, who are on the receiving end of racism are called upon to help reach out to those who benefit from white privilege. It can be exhausting. Like my ancestors, I continue to press, strategically, keeping the much bigger picture in mind. That said, I did forward this email out to individuals in my immediate network.

After realizing my problematic actions and apologizing for where I fell short, I then revised my recruitment procedures to try not to reach out to people of Color to recruit White teachers. In cases where I did reach out to people of Color, I only reached out to people of Color with whom I had previous relationships and who knew about the

study. I then switched to analyzing the Equity, Justice, and Antiracist Teaching National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE's) Annual Convention Program. I looked for presentations that addressed decentering whiteness in education presented by White teachers. I emailed two teachers. However, I was unable to recruit these teachers. One of these teachers responded, "Your research sounds interesting and necessary, but I simply can't commit the time to it." After hearing this response from a few other potential participants, I revised the study to decrease the amount of time for participants to interview from five interviews to three interviews.

### ***Relationships with Educators***

In addition to reaching out to antiracist and racial equity organizations, I also contacted educators with whom I had previously worked, as well as administrators or educators who were recommended to me by my dissertation committee members. Some of these individuals worked at universities, in Phoenix public schools, the Arizona Department of Education, or the Arizona Education Foundation. From these connections, I was able to recruit one teacher to participate in the study.

During the recruitment process, I responded to potential participants' email inquiries and met virtually with four potential participants to discuss the study purpose, commitment, and participant involvement.<sup>3</sup> Four participants signed consent forms; however, only three participants completed the study.

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<sup>3</sup> I conducted recruitment during the school year. I think that I would have had an easier time with recruitment if I had conducted the study during the summer when teachers might have had more time to participate in the study.



### ***Carla***

Carla is a self-identified White teacher in a public school district in Indiana. She has been teaching for twelve years. She started her career as a middle school Spanish teacher and now is a social emotional learning coach and middle school social justice teacher in a racially diverse district. Carla has two master's degrees in educational leadership and is currently working on a PhD in Urban Education. Carla serves on her district's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) team, leads professional development on culturally responsive teaching and racial consciousness, and is on the leadership team of two organizations doing racial equity work in the community.

### ***Maya***

Maya is a self-identified White teacher in a public school district in Minnesota, where she has taught middle school history for fifteen years. She has a master's degree in Experiential Education. Maya runs a podcast spotlighting the contributions and achievements of women, Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community in United States history. She also collaborates with a community organization to expose white community members to a more inclusive (“not all white dudes”) American history.

### ***Jennifer***

Jennifer is a self-identified White teacher in a public school district in Arizona. During her twenty-eight years of teaching, Jennifer has taught first-grade, fourth-grade, and middle school STEM. She has a master's degree in education, with a Bilingual (Spanish) and ESL endorsement. She developed a STEM program—robotics,

engineering, and aerospace—at her school which predominantly serves students of Color. Her intention is to increase the representation of people of Color and women in STEM, starting with exposure to STEM from an early age. She is currently working with the elementary schools and high schools in her district to create a STEM pipeline from the youngest grades through high school.

All three participants are White public-school teachers who live in the United States, and who fit the following inclusion criteria: (1) perceive that they have shifted from colorblindness to realizing white supremacy and the presence and impact of structural racism, (2) are currently employed as teachers, (3) and are implementing both idealist and realist strategies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) in racial equity work.

### **Key Actor Recruitment & Participants**

In addition to the three teacher participants, I implemented a form of snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to recruit nine key actor participants (Kramer & Call, 2007) in the teachers' circles of relations. Key actors are defined as the focal participants' family, friends, colleagues, enemies, rivals, and anyone in their circle of relations. The key actors varied according to the teacher and her story. The key actors relevant to Carla's story that I recruited were her brother David, her husband Adam, and a critical friend and colleague, Meghan. The key actors relevant to Maya's story that I recruited were two archeologists who have worked with teachers at Montpelier: Dr. Alexandra Jones and Dr. Mary Furlong Minkoff, her road trip partner, Jackie, and her husband, John. Dr. Jones and Dr. Minkoff do not have pseudonyms in this profile as they speak as experts in their fields about the work in which they are involved.

The key actors relevant to Jennifer’s story that I sought to recruit were a security specialist involved in one of her scenes, her husband, a former student who is studying STEM in college, and her daughter. Jennifer’s daughter was the only potential key actor who responded to the recruitment email. She said that her mother has been a role model for her colleagues in understanding racial colorblindness and that being a mother to a mixed-race daughter has taught them both a great deal about the topic. Unfortunately, she declined participating because she had just graduated as a paramedic and started a night shift job. The other three potential key actors did not respond. Because of this, I added the perspectives of two key actors—Raj and Ali—who do not know Jennifer but provided counter stories that center the experiences of people of Color in STEM higher education at Arizona State University.

### **Methods to Gather the Material**

It is important to note that the proposed methods that used in this study differ from conventional qualitative research methods in the intention of knowledge production. This study aligns with speculative realism, in that all material gathered, both human and nonhuman—documents, photographs, and artifacts—are “equally important in the production of knowledge” (Nordstrom, 2018, p. 219; Shaviro, 2014). In addition, all the methods and material gathered in this study will be in service of crafting creative nonfiction profiles. Writing creative nonfiction occurs in an ontology of immanence; the material always becomes more than itself, more than human (Shaviro, 2014). Creative nonfiction writers use the term material to describe their interview recordings and notes, observation notes, and notes or information gathered from other forms of research.

Creative nonfiction writers commonly use this material to write narratives. Because I seek to produce knowledge through narratives, specifically creative nonfiction profiles, material is a more appropriate term than data to use when describing this portion of the study.

I gathered the material from September 2021 to March 2022 using the following methods: phenomenological interviews with participants, semi-structured interviews with key actors, scene recreation interviews with participants and key actors, and gathering journalistic/creative nonfiction material. Each of these methods offered a systematic way to gather different types of material, all of which were used to craft creative nonfiction profiles. In the following sections, I describe each material gathering method and how it was used in the study. Then, I will explain the method's alignment with the methodology and theoretical framework.

### **Phenomenological Interviews**

The purpose of the phenomenological interview is for the participant to recreate his or her experience of the phenomenon and explain the meaning of this experience, from his/her point of view (Seidman, 2019). This semi-structured interview consists of three parts with each part lasting approximately 75-90 minutes: the first interview is about the past (life history like), the second is about the present, and the third probes things that came up previously (in interviews 1 & 2). Interview sessions are spaced out approximately 3 days to one week. Using this type of in-depth interviewing helped me to understand the details of the participant's experience from his/her point of view,

including feelings, opinions, perceptions, and understandings about the experience (Roulston, 2010; Roulston & Choi, 2018).

While I had originally planned to do three sessions of phenomenological interviews with the teachers, I received feedback from both participants and potential participants that they could not devote the requested amount of time to participate in the study. Therefore, I revised the study to be more respectful of the teachers' time. For Carla and Maya, I conducted the phenomenological interviews across two sessions. For Jennifer, I conducted the phenomenological interview during one session (See Appendix A for Phenomenological Interview Protocol and Revised Protocol).

I conducted the phenomenological interviews with participants first. Using phenomenological interviews first helped to inform future interviews with key actors and prepare for the scene recreation interviews. Gathering the participants' reconstructed, contextual experiences of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism provided a foundation for understanding the participants' process and offered stories of key events that were further explored with participants to craft creative nonfiction scenes.

Because phenomenological interviews ask participants to reconstruct their experiences in their contextual histories through storytelling, this method aligns with creative nonfiction methodology that relies on the story to drive the piece (Gutkind, 2012). When participants tell stories, they engage in a meaning making process. Seidman (2019) notes that in storytelling, people choose specific moments or details of their experiences from their stream of consciousness. The process of storytelling in

phenomenological interviews aligns with speculative realism's process of becoming as this method is an avenue that contributes to the participants' continual altering and transforming as they reflect on their life experiences in their phenomenally constructed world (Shaviro, 2014). These life experiences shared through storytelling will reveal possible pedagogical pivot places (Ellsworth, 2005) as the participant shifted from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

In addition to phenomenological interviews with participants, material gathering included interviewing key actors. Semi-structured interviews allow for researchers to ask open-ended questions and theoretically driven questions. This type of interview invites participants to share their lived experience, as well as explore the relationships between data and theory (Galletta, 2013). While the questions are open-ended, they are carefully related to the research topic. Each interview question is deliberately sequenced in the interview protocol, reflecting "the researcher's deliberate progression toward a fully in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study" (Galletta, 2013, p. 45). Although the interview protocol provides the same starting point for semi-structured interviews, Roulston (2010) explains that each semi-structured interview will not be identical. Because the researcher uses follow up questions to elicit further description based on what the participant shares, each semi-structured interview will have some variations.

After interviewing each teacher participant, I gathered material from key actors with semi-structured interviews. (See Appendix B for examples of Key Actors Interview

Protocol.) The semi-structured interviews with key actors typically occurred during one session of about 30-70 minutes.

When interviewing key actors, I asked both abstract and concrete questions to gather specific instances that ground the abstract. For example, after asking a key actor to describe the participant's personality, I followed up by asking the key actor to share moments/anecdotes that show this personality. I tailored the interview protocol for each key actor in order to learn more about specific events each teacher mentioned in her story related to the specific key actor, as well as to gather material that is significant in crafting a creative nonfiction profile. Interviewing key actors prepared me to write with more authority, portraying the participant more concretely and intricately. Interviewing key actors also served as a form of triangulation, as participant's perceptions of the self and their values may differ from other people's perceptions of the participant and his/her values.

Semi-structured interviews align with creative nonfiction methodology in a similar way to phenomenological interviews. The semi-structured interview seeks to gather insights and stories (although not likely as extensive as those gathered with the participant) about the participants' process of becoming through descriptions of their life experiences that will be added to the creative nonfiction profile. Conducting semi-structured interviews with key actors aligns with speculative realism because this method provides material that speaks to the events and relational processes with other entities involved in the process of becoming (Mesle, 2008). The material gathered from this method serves to add another layer of complexity in studying the participants' narrative

and reflection of their lived experiences as compared to the key actors' perspectives on the participants' lived experiences shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism.

### **Scene Recreation Interviews**

Scene Recreation interviews are integral for creative nonfiction writers writing about events that they did not witness. Scene recreation interviews aim to gather adequate material from the interviewee to reconstruct an event into a scene that is compelling for the reader. Scene recreation interviews may use a semi-structured interview protocol or be largely unstructured. I used a semi-structured scene recreation interview protocol as a guide during these interviews (See Appendix C: Scene Recreation Interview Protocol).

After the phenomenological interviews (and some of the interviews with key actors), as I began to develop a narrative line from the material that would carry each participant's profile, I selected specific events mentioned in the interviews that were relevant to the participant's shifting. I met with the participant and key actors (when necessary) for scene recreation interviews. During scene recreation interviews, I collaborated with the participants and key actors to reconstruct scenes from their past (Kramer & Call, 2007). In order to reconstruct a scene that is honest (factual according to the participant's/key actor's memory), concrete and captivating for the readers, I collaborated with the interviewees to help document:

- Sensory details: Sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes that might help to construct a sense of place and strong scenes (Kramer & Call, 2007).



- Notes on a potential character’s “physical appearance, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice” and material possessions (Hart, 2011, p. 159).
- Anecdotes to draw on for concrete examples to show a character’s personality.

These interviews were also supplemented with photographs or audio/video recordings of the event (if/when available) to help with the reconstruction. For each scene, I met with the interviewee twice to collaborate on reconstructing. Typically, after the first time discussing the event, interviewees would remember more and be able to share more details about the event in a second interview or meeting. This second interview/meeting took place after I had drafted their profile and asked them to read and verify and/or help me revise their stories for accuracy according to their memories. Some participants elected to meet over zoom. Other times, the participants preferred to add comments in Google docs to offer feedback on the scenes. In the fact checking section, I further explain how I fact checked the verifiable details gathered from scene recreation interviews before using them in the scenes in order to do my part to write honestly for the reader.

The scene recreation interview aligns with creative nonfiction methodology because it is a tool that is used to create narrative based on the participants’ experiences. Also, the scene creation interview aligns with speculative realism in that it works in service to knowledge production that is greater than human. The scenes that were reconstructed from these interviews show readers the pedagogical pivot places (Ellsworth, 2005) of the participants’ process of becoming.

## **Journalistic/Creative Nonfiction Material**

Gathering journalistic/creative nonfiction material means the seeking out of various research sources: primary sources, reports, photographs, artifacts, journal articles, records, videos and podcasts, books, archives, and special collections (Miller & Paola, 2019). In order to construct credible profiles that convey the depth of the participants' stories and process of becoming, I needed to gather journalistic/creative nonfiction material. Each of these sources worked to create the profile of the participant. Creative nonfiction is a balance of information and story (Gutkind, 2012). Many of these sources provided the information to balance the stories gathered through the other methods. The sources of journalistic/creative nonfiction materials gathered varied according to the participant. Some participants' stories, like Maya's, relied upon podcasts, photographs, historical websites and museums, while other participants, like Carla, relied upon books, conference recordings and videos. The participants' interviews on their process of becoming determined what sources I needed to search.

Gathering journalistic/creative nonfiction material was an iterative process. I started this method upon the participants' consent to participate in the study to learn more about their historical and social context. However, with each interview with the participant or key actors in their relational circle, I returned to this method, informed by new leads on where to search for journalistic/creative nonfiction material relevant to the study. Many of these materials supplied concrete details for crafting descriptions and historical context that was included in the creative nonfiction profiles. I also continued to return to this method during the writing and rewriting of the profiles.

Gathering journalistic/creative nonfiction material aligns with creative nonfiction methodology because it is a method that explains the context of the participants' lived experiences, as well as provide needed information and concrete details in the narratives. The sources functioned as a way to triangulate the participants' processes of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism. Gathering journalistic/creative nonfiction material aligns with speculative realism in that this method does not privilege the human above other entities. The sources are forms of material culture (Schlereth, 1985) necessary to craft a profile with a balance of information and story. The sources reveal the causal webs (Shaviro, 2014) and context of each participant's process of becoming.

Each of the methods selected in the study aligned with the theoretical framework, methodology and research questions. Table 1 displays how each material gathering method relates to the research questions.

**Table 1**

*Relationship Between Material Gathering Methods and Research Questions*

	What are three self-identified White teachers' perceptions their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism?	What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers' processes of coming to understand white privilege and structural racism?
Phenomenological interviews with teachers	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Semi-structured interviews with key actors		<b>X</b>
Scene recreation interviews		<b>X</b>
Journalistic/creative nonfiction material	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

After gathering all the material to write participants' stories, I created an inventory of all the material gathered. While I include this table before describing the material analysis methods, it is important to note that the analysis and gathering processes were iterative. As I analyzed and wrote, I continued to gather material and fact check until the time I completed the drafts of the teachers' profiles in Chapter 4. Table 2 details the quantity of each type of material gathered.

**Table 2**

*Material Inventory*

Material	Quantity
Interviews	15 (989 mins)
Photos	893
Videos	39
Documents	30
Podcasts	51
Websites	159
Books	12
Audio Recordings	2
<b>Total Material</b>	<b>1,201</b>

**Material Management**

I organized the gathered material systematically so that it was accessible, searchable, and known (Bazeley, 2013). I stored the material in google drive in ASU cloud storage, accessed by a computer with duo security and Cisco AnyConnect Secure Mobility Client. Audio recording and transcript files generated through interviews were saved according to date, participant selected pseudonym and interview number. I uploaded these files to a folder labeled with the participant's pseudonym. This organization strategy enabled me to access and view the material in chronological order according to participant (Erickson, 1986). I created a table of contents document for interview material and a separate table of contents for the journalistic material gathered.

These charts contained the file name (the title I had assigned each file), a link to the file, the quantity (i.e., length of an audio recording or page count in a transcript), the purpose for which the file was used (i.e., a specific scene, fact checking, character background, etc.). I also color-coded the journalistic material to note to which participant the material pertained. This allowed for all the material to be easily accessed and inventoried through the two tables of contents.

### **Material Analysis & Profile Creation**

The following section describes the material analysis and profile creation process for crafting creative nonfiction profiles from the material gathered above. As stated previously, creative nonfiction is a balance of information and story (Gutkind, 2012). First, I will describe how I analyzed the material to create scenes. Then I will describe the material analysis pertaining to information to be used in the creation of the profiles. I conclude by explaining how the material analysis aligns with the methodologies and theoretical framework.

#### **Scene Analysis**

I began material analysis in the Fall 2021 semester with the transcription of participant and key actor interviews. I used *Trint* transcription software to transcribe the audio recordings. Then, I listened to the audio as I cleaned each transcript. As I transcribed the interviews, I began to chronologically note the participants' process of transitioning from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy. After transcribing the phenomenological interviews, I printed copies of the transcripts, and I turned to pencil, paper, post-its, highlighter, scissors, and paper clips. Specifically, I created

timelines where I noted the pedagogical pivot places where participants identified they had experienced an ‘aha’ moment or realization of either white supremacy, their own white identity, and/or structural racism. I grouped (or cut, highlighted, and tabbed with post-its) the excerpts of transcripts according to each event on the teacher’s timeline (McPhee, 2017). Each participant’s timeline included the date/year and significant event. I included details or short quotes from the participant’s interviews with each corresponding event. Figure 1 is an example of an initial timeline created from Carla’s first two interviews.

**Figure 1**

*Example of timeline constructed from Carla’s first two interviews*

2010?	11-20-21 Carla - Timeline of pedagogy / pivot points Miss Dake - classroom - pool "This is an issue that is racial" - feelings- still positive, doesn't understand her whiteness	Consider linking it to Helms → maybe this date works Summer	TFA Jeff Duncan- Andrade go work w/ white communities
			internal work, looking at own story "how whiteness shows up in me" "how I perpetuate white supremacy" - PD conversation
2012/15	Troyon Martin case 2nd-5th gr teaching New Jim Crow 4yrs after dad's death- processing in context of Troyon + NJC → led to 8 years of reflection, learning + understanding white supremacy + whiteness	Feb 14, 2018	Parkland Shooting - cognitive dissonance - entitlement - lack of care for our black community - left
2014/15	during this time Halloween - Sancho Panza "identity and race is not child's play" humble myself - teaching PD on CR teaching	current	Don't shot off racial lens Vicious cycle / dance "I'm never going to be sufficient or enough, and that's okay." Confront + name racial dynamics vs. who am I to do that? Comfortability to talk about race + be vulnerable vs. am I too confident / too bold? What is my responsibility?
year?	Friend Naming whiteness, questioning, pushing Saviorism; deficit-based view How am I navigating this as a person who is part of this system? How does it manifest in my actions?		

**Additional Analysis**

In addition to analyzing the material to answer the research questions by noting the chronological order of each teacher’s process of transitioning from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy, I took notes in my research journal about patterns and

themes that I noticed in the participants' discourse or stories in their transcripts. After Dr. Evans-Winters recommended that I read *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life* (Helms, 2020), I also began to note patterns and themes across participants' stories related to Helms' (2020) Model of White Identity Development. While I proceeded to create the timelines and craft the teachers' stories, I kept returning to Helms' Model of White Identity Development and wondering IF it might be possible to synthesize the teachers' stories of transitioning through Helms' model while still answering the research questions and working in solidarity for racial equity. I expand on this analysis in Chapter 5.

After creating the initial timeline, I reread all the transcript excerpts related to each event and anticipated what type of details I would need to gather from the participants to turn each event into a scene. I kept the timeline and excerpts by my side during the scene recreation interviews in case I needed to refer to them when dissecting the events with the participants. At the start of the first scene recreation interview, I asked the teachers to review their timeline and verify if they thought that it accurately represented their story of transitioning. Teachers approved, clarified and/or revised the timelines to reflect the chronology and events important to their story of transitioning. In one instance, a participant later emailed to add another important event to her timeline that she had not previously mentioned in our interviews. Figure 2 is an example of Carla's revised timeline that includes additional events and corrected dates.



## Figure 2

*Example of revised timeline after Carla's feedback during third interview*

Carla -Transitioning Timeline	Spring 2016: TFA Conference - Jeff Duncan-Andrade
<b>2011: Mississippi Delta TFA training</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Social justice focused job - inspired by dad</li><li>- Classroom</li><li>- Pool incident</li><li>- First time talking about race</li></ul> "This is an issue that is racial." Feelings - still positive, doesn't understand whiteness	<b>Carla [00:31:47]</b> He was like, you know, white teachers, we don't need you, we people of color like, we don't need you coming into our schools and like teaching us that the world is unjust. Like we know. We know the world is unjust. We need you going into white communities and doing your work there and dismantling white supremacy in white communities. And that hit me so hard. I went back to Indianapolis, and I was like, I got to work with white people like I need to do like whiteness work
<b>Indianapolis:</b>	<b>-2016: Internal Work - Examining own story</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- "how whiteness shows up in me"</li><li>- "how I perpetuate white supremacy"</li><li>- Robin Di Angelo's work</li><li>- PD &amp; conversation w/ teacher</li></ul>
<b>February 26, 2012 - 2013: Trayvon Martin, <i>The New Jim Crow</i>, processing Dad's death</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 2nd-3rd year teaching</li><li>- 4 years after dad's death (processing in context of reading and Trayvon case)</li></ul>	<b>Feb. 14, 2018: Parkland Shooting, cognitive dissonance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Entitlement, lack of care for black community</li></ul>
<b>2014-2015: White teacher to heritage Spanish speakers, Sancho Panza</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- "Identity and race is not child's play"</li><li>- Humble myself</li><li>- Teaching PD on CR teaching</li></ul>	<b>2018: Apply to PhD program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Decides she is not ready</li></ul>
<b>2012-2017/18: Friend- whiteness, questioning, pushing, saviorism, deficit-based view</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- How am I navigating this as a person who is part of this system?</li><li>- How does it manifest in my actions?</li></ul>	<b>April - May 2020: Ready for PhD program</b>
<b>Summers 2015-16 Master's Program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- attended master's in ed leadership program at Columbia in NYC.</li><li>- "It was there that I started to do a lot of self-awareness and mindfulness work and first told my dad's story." (email 11/29/21)</li></ul>	<b>2018/19: Current: Dance - "I'm never going to be sufficient or enough, and that's okay."</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Confront and name racial dynamics vs. who am I to do that?</li><li>- What is my responsibility? Am I too confident/too bold?</li><li>- How to dismantle white supremacy without centering it?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Matias visit to PhD program<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Page. 36, but she is quoting Ignatiev and Garvey (1996) "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity."</li><li>- Pg. 94, "...White must first accept that they are, at best, "antiracist white racists." (presumably got this term from Helms, 1990).</li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>

After revising the timeline at the beginning of the first scene recreation interview, each teacher and I used the revised timeline to guide the remainder of the scene recreation interview, starting with the event that the teacher determined was the most significant event (pedagogical pivot place) in their transitioning. We systematically moved through each event as I asked pointed questions to get the participant to relive that memory and share as many concrete details as they could remember, along with their inner point of view and reflections on the experience (See Appendix C for Scene Recreation Protocol).

During the first scene recreation interviews, I also requested journalistic material that would help in recreating the scenes. The teachers shared various materials with me—photos, videos, personal statements, lesson plans, itineraries—to recreate the scenes in their stories of transitioning. Upon sharing these files, teachers signed a release form

consenting to their sharing of the files for writing purposes only. These files were organized in each teacher's folder and added/linked in the journalistic material table of contents.

After conducting the scene recreation interview and interviews with key actors, I also transcribed and printed these interviews. I inductively and deductively coded the transcripts (Saldaña, 2014). Deductive codes consisted of creative nonfiction features for writing scenes (i.e., setting, character details, dialogue, tension, action, inner point of view, reflection, etc.) and/or background information (i.e., family life, historical events, intimate details, etc.). Some examples of inductive codes related to contrasting manifestations or examples of participants' colorblindness with moments of reflection that led to new insights of structural racism and whiteness. Other inductive codes were unique to the unfolding of the events in the teachers' stories of transitioning. I also returned to the teachers' phenomenological interview transcripts to inductively and deductively code these. I reorganized the transcript excerpts according to events/scenes, as well as according to groups such as character details, family tension, colleague relationships.

Material analysis is used by creative nonfiction writers to systematically create a compelling narrative from the participant's gathered material. The information included also serves to support the reader's understanding of the narrative. The material analysis process aligns with speculative realism because it does not seek to look across data to report on knowledge produced from the material gathering methods. Instead, it guides the

researcher to locate and craft characters, settings, conflicts, and resolutions based on a theme, all of which are located in the material.

### **Writing and Revising and Writing and Revising**

*“You can’t divide or separate writing and revision”*

(Gutkind, 2012, p. 99).

In this section, I will explain my creative nonfiction writing and revising process. But I want to first address the connection between speculative realism and the writing process. According to western ontologies, we may consider the writer, the writing process and the writing that is produced as independent entities. However, in speculative realism, the writer, the writing process, and the writing are engaged in relational processes of becoming. As the writer embarks on a new experience of writing, their body brings to this experience of writing, all its past experiences, co-creating a new experience. The relationships between participant, story, writer, profile, and readers changed from moment to moment, contributing to a process of becoming through writing, revising, and reading creative nonfiction. This speaks to Shaviro’s (2012) claim that “Nothing comes into being once and for all; and nothing just sustains itself in being, as if by inertia or its own inner force. Rather, an object can only endure insofar as it renews itself, or creates itself afresh, over and over again” (p. 20).

While revisions are a continuous part of writing, in creative nonfiction, where the goal is to captivate and teach the reader through true stories, well told, revisions with the reader in mind are vital (Coates, 2013). After gathering material and starting to write the story, the creative nonfiction writer shifts her/his focus from the participants to the

readers. The writer must transform the material by crafting compelling nonfiction for readers. As the writer does this, s/he keeps in mind that readers seek out creative nonfiction to enter into the real-life worlds and experiences of the characters.

Allegiance to the readers brings its own ethical challenges. Creative nonfiction writers must walk a careful line in writing the truth. However, this line is often nebulous. Some writers are adamant about not (knowingly) fabricating a single detail in creative nonfiction. Other writers do not see an issue with fabricating small details or creating composite characters. Each writer must navigate what s/he deems is the correct boundary between fact and fiction (Miller & Paola, 2019). Navigating that boundary includes deciding when it is okay to include imagination and emotional truth, as well as what facts to omit in the writing.

Miller and Paola (2019) describe the creative nonfiction writer's "pact with the reader" as a mutual understanding and commitment that the writer has provided the reader with an engaging, not made-up story (p. 153). While I address some of the methods I implemented during the study to write honestly and in a way that best represented the participants' perceptions of their truths, I want to state that I attempted to be adamant about not (knowingly) fabricating details in the profiles.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I will first describe a bit about *My Writing Process*. Then, I will write about the following components of creative nonfiction writing and how they contributed to my writing

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<sup>4</sup> While I was intentional about not (knowingly) fabricating in the stories, I was not able to travel to many of these places and factcheck some of the concrete details. For example, in Carla's story where she traveled to work in Indianola, I described the area where Carla worked to the best of her memory and online journalistic research (checking historical sites, real estate sites, etc.). However, to ensure that my description of that area is accurate for readers, it would be best to visit to check the accuracy of the description through immersion and local historical records.

process: *Scene and Exposition*; *Scenes*; *Information*; *Fact Checking*; *Intimate Details*; *Inner Point of View*; and *Voice*.

### **My Writing Process**

Each morning as I wrote the profiles, I would listen to audiobooks. I listened to Michelle Obama's (2021) memoir *Becoming*, Trevor Noah's (2016) *Born a Crime*, and Isabel Wilkerson's (2020a, 2020b) *Caste* and *The Warmth of Other Suns*. While each of these creative nonfiction books were significant as mentor texts to study the authors' writing techniques, *The Warmth of Other Suns* was the most significant in guiding my writing and journalistic material collection. In *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Wilkerson teaches about the Great Migration of southern Blacks from the southern United States to northern and western cities. She teaches about this history through three compelling stories of people who participated in the Great Migration. As I listened to Wilkerson's profiles of these three people, I analyzed how she used their stories to weave in the history and teach in a compelling way. Then, as I sat at my computer and read through the transcripts and drafts of my writing, I thought about how I might be able to write with similar techniques as Wilkerson.

While I did use coding to organize the material according to pedagogical pivot place and creative nonfiction elements, I also thought, felt, sensed, and related with the material as I wrote. This can be attributed to an ontology of immanence and speculative realism's aesthetic judgement. In an ontology of immanence (St. Pierre, 2019), there is a flood of multiple, competing and colluding known and unknown factors (D. L. Carlson, personal communication, April 13, 2022). In an ontology of immanence, aesthetics plays

a role in influencing the writer when writing creative nonfiction.<sup>5</sup> Shaviro (2014) describes aesthetic feeling as “immanent and uncategorizable” (p. 155). Yet, he also considers aesthetic feeling to be the force of cognition and the foundation of all relations. This is because humans sense or feel something about an entity before they cognitively make a judgment about that entity. Perhaps, in terms of creative nonfiction, this is why writers set out to write stories with specificity that allow for readers to “comprehend the event in their guts” (Hart, 2012, p. 60). As I sat with the material and read through the drafts, certain interview excerpts, or photos, or portions of documentary interviews lured, allured, seduced, repulsed, incited, or dissuaded me to make aesthetic judgements as to what material I would include or exclude from the writing (Shaviro, 2012). Many of these inclusions and exclusions were influenced by the elements of crafting compelling stories within the creative nonfiction genre.

### **Scene and Exposition**

Creative nonfiction writers use both scene and exposition in their writing. Scenes incorporate dialogue, action, sensory details to recreate the experience for readers, immersing them in the location, time, action, and movement through the plot. Exposition, on the other hand, compresses time and summarizes the experience or facts for readers (Miller & Paola, 2019). Exposition can be used to speed up the pace of the story when the writer has a lot of cover and needs to include boring information that is necessary to understand the piece (French, as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007); it can also tell the reader what the narrator is thinking in relation to the scene or topic (S. Viren, personal communication, April 14, 2022). However, expert writers advise that for the most part,

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<sup>5</sup> Aesthetics also plays a role in influencing the reader.

when writing, starting off with a scene will capture the reader's attention and concern. Then, the author can pull back from the scene to explain background information through exposition (Kramer as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007).

### ***Scenes***

I started each scene focusing on the major thing that happened during the participant's event. I wrote and rewrote to show readers the characters, setting and action as vividly as possible (Gutkind, 2012). As I wrote, I would reread and ask myself what I could add to make it easier for the reader to see the setting, to feel like they are in the action and to have a multidimensional understanding of the characters? I reread and revised the structure of the scenes so that I would more quickly plunge the reader into the scenes to engage the reader and cause them to want to read more.

Often, I would write out the scene chronologically, piecing the details from transcripts, photos, videos, websites, and historical documents. Then, I would look for the most captivating part of the scene and move around the parts to hook the reader and then provide some background information. Once I had the structure that seemed to be the most engaging for the readers (Alison, 2019), I would go back and revise for character details and add more setting details. I used writing partners, committee feedback, and a writing group during this process to offer feedback on how to better structure the scenes and hold the reader's attention.

### ***Information***

How do I know what information/research goes into my story? is a common question creative nonfiction writers ask. Often, writers do not know what information

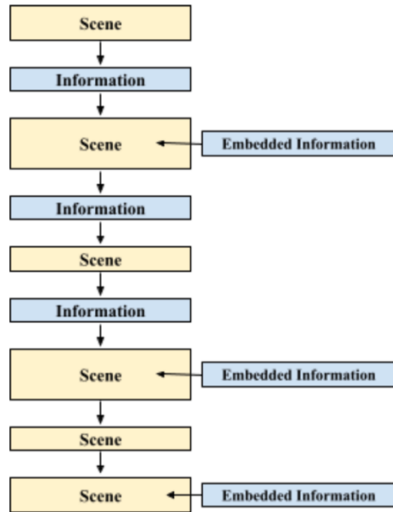
they will include in their writing until they've finished the narrative storyline and frame. As I sought out characters, setting, conflicts and resolutions in the material based on the teacher's story of transitioning, the story that emerged from the material directed me to what information should be included in the profile (Gutkind, 2012). Because of this, gathering the journalistic/creative nonfiction material was an iterative process.

I returned to this material gathering method after I completed the material analysis and participant's story because then I had a clearer understanding of what information the story directed me to include. I used critical writing partners during this process to receive feedback on what information was missing from the story to enhance understanding of the participants' lived experiences and process of becoming. Part of this included analyzing when and where I may have centered whiteness in the writing. When I found places where I realized (or when a critical friend pointed out that) I was centering whiteness, I rewrote these sections to make sure that I was centering the White teacher's experience of transitioning in the context of the harm that white supremacy causes to people of Color and that I included citations and theory from scholars of Color (C. Matias, personal communication, December 8, 2021). I also did the yellow test (see Figure 3; Gutkind, 2022) to inform revisions of the profiles so that there was a balance of information and story throughout the profile.



**Figure 3**

*The Yellow Test*<sup>6</sup>



### **Fact Checking**

Nonfiction writers do not take liberties with facts. Nonfiction writers do not intentionally deceive readers, and if they happen to learn (through a novel reader) that they unknowingly deceived, they revise so as not to deceive. I fact checked (Eisenberg, 2020; McPhee, 2017) to increase the accuracy of my reporting (However, to be significantly more confident in my fact checking, I would like to visit the actual locations that I wrote about to ensure that the setting details are accurate). Verifying that the accounts included from sources were factual was, at times, a time-consuming process. McPhee (2017) explains that fact checking can be a way to triangulate by seeking out additional sources who tell the same account. While I did not seek out additional sources for each event in the teachers' stories, I did seek out additional sources to share their

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<sup>6</sup> Used with permission from Lee Gutkind (personal communication, March 31, 2022).

perspectives and additional research and/or news reports to verify the accuracy of information.

Once a reader spots an error in the facts, it weakens their trust in the truthfulness of the piece and of the writer. It breaks the pact with the reader and will erode the writer's credibility. While there is not one, clear-cut ethical formula for trying to get as close as possible to portraying the world accurately in writing narratives (Miller & Paola, 2019), I tried to represent the participants' experiences accurately and ethically through an ongoing process of considering competing interests, asking key questions, and evaluating all the viable options (Hart, 2011).

### **Intimate Details**

Gutkind (2012) shares that “[t]hrough the use of intimate detail, we allow the reader to hear and see how the people we are writing about reveal what's on their minds; we note the inflections in their voices, their characteristic hand movements, and any other eccentricities” (p. 128). While I revised the profiles to include intimate details, this aspect of creative writing is my weakest. When I read Jhumpa Lahiri, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, and Sarah Viren, I see a difference in how they use intimate details much more powerfully than I currently do. This is an area where I will continue to write and rewrite as I work to become a better writer.

### **Inner Point of View**

Including the character's inner point of view allows readers to see the world through the character's eyes. It requires the writer to dig deeper during interviews, asking the participants to repeatedly go over their experiences and sharing their thoughts and

feelings about the events. Using inner point of view was a powerful technique to show readers the White teachers' internal processing and shifting to a new condition of knowing at each pedagogical pivot place. However, writing inner point of view requires a great deal of reflexivity on the writer's part. Two times in writing Maya's story in particular, readers in my writing group pointed out where Maya's inner point of view was either confusing to them or not supported by her actions. After I reflected on this and returned to her interview transcripts, I realized that I had assumed and inserted my own biases into her internal point of view. Having readers from my writing group to offer feedback on the writing helped to hold me accountable for writing the characters' inner point of view in alignment with the participants' lived experiences.

### **Voice**

In academic writing, writers compose long, complicated sentences that carry an institutional voice. Not so in creative nonfiction—the writer's voice is instrumental in engaging and keeping the readers' attention (Hart, 2011; Orlean, as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007). Voice can be defined as the writer's personality, identity, and self-understanding evident in their writing. Three elements of voice upon which writers readily draw are: diction, persona, and perspective (S. Viren, personal communication, January 27, 2020).

Diction encompasses the author's word choice and sentence structure. Writers carefully choose the verbs that they will use in their writing. They use transitive verbs to move the story along and show motive, cause, and effect (Hart, 2011). Writers tend to use linking verbs minimally because they do not contain action. Sentence structure influences

the story's pace and mood. Long sentences cause the reader to slow down. Short sentences speed up the reader's pace. Writers alter the sentence structure in order to control the reader's movement through the story (Orlean, as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007; Hart, 2011). In my writing,

Persona is how the writer crafts the "I" on the page. The writer needs to decide how to present themselves to the reader, show internal conflict, and do something useful to drive the story with the "I." Perspective relates to the "I" if the writer chooses to write from the first-person point of view. Other perspectives—second or third person—remove the I and may create more distance between the writer and participant/character. The writer can also regulate distance throughout the piece by writing objectively, with limited knowledge of the character's internal world, with transcriptions of the character's direct thoughts, or through a stream of consciousness as the character (S. Viren, personal communication, January 27, 2020).

In my writing of the profiles, voice is also one of my weaker areas. While writing and rewriting and revising I work to select words and vary sentence structure to provide a pleasant reading experience for the reader. However, I struggle with where to insert the "I." In Carla and Maya's stories, initially I was reluctant to insert myself into their stories because I wanted to honor their stories and because it is much easier to write about others than to write vulnerably about oneself. It was easier to insert the "I" into Jennifer's story to reflect on my own process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy.

## **Validity**

I recognize that in carrying out this study, my knowledge is partial, and what I learned through gathering material and analyzing and writing narrative from the material is also partial. I created one account based on everything I learned during the study; however, I acknowledge that in working with the gathered material, I have presented a partial view of that material. I validated the material gathered through the study and disseminated as creative nonfiction profiles through member checking, creating an audit trail, and comparing the material and profiles with committee members and theory to address any concerns about centering whiteness (Matias & Boucher, 2021), accuracy (McPhee, 2017), honesty, writing craft and honoring the participants throughout the research process.

Creative nonfiction writers seeking to ensure authentic, factual, and truthful understanding can ask their participants to verify or suggest revisions for quotes or other information that relates to their story/perspective (Harrington as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007). This member checking helps the writer to collaborate honestly and build trust with the participant. Member checking ensured that each participant had the final say in approving the written transcript or any published version of the interview. While member checking increases validity for analysis, interviewing of key actors and interviewing of participants was another way to increase validity. Interviewing of key actors gathered material from multiple perspectives about the same participant and experiences. The repeated interviewing of participants, along with the interviewing of key actors revealed

patterns in the participants' lived experiences, enactment of values, and revealed discrepancies in their accounts (Roulston, 2010; Seidman, 2019; Weiss, 1995).

Additionally, during the writing, if there was doubt of whether a participant or character said or thought something, I used taglines—phrases to cue the reader that what they are about to read may not be 100% factual. Using taglines such as, “he recalled thinking” or “his memory is that,” or “as he would later remember” (Hart, 2011, p. 134), “I imagine”, “I don’t remember exactly, but,” or “Perhaps”, were helpful with keeping my pact with the reader (Miller & Paola, 2019, p. 162).

Additionally, I documented the research process of the study using an audit trail to be transparent with the methods and process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The audit trail is a detailed, chronological record of my reflections, questions and decision-making process while gathering and analyzing the material. The audit trail allowed me to keep track of what I had completed so far in the study and what I had planned to do next in the study. The audit trail also kept track of any revisions that I made to the research plan and the reasons why I made those changes. This was especially useful for writing an accurate account of my dissertation methods. I discussed the themes and writing techniques with my colleagues and committee members who are more experienced with the research and writing process. They guided me as I navigated through the process. Also, comparing the material and profiles with existing theory helped me to frame and guide the study to increase validity.

## Reflexivity

Being reflexive is an engaging, ongoing process that is present at each stage of the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Davies (2008) broadly defines reflexivity as “a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference” (p. 4). Bourdieu (as cited in Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) outlined the reflexive process as taking two steps back from the research subject, asking: (1) “What do I know?” and, (2) “How do I know?” (p. 274). Reflexivity facilitates the researcher in documenting and studying any methodological and ethical issues, including those relating to subjectivity and bias during material gathering, analysis, and reporting of findings that occur during the research process. The researcher does this as s/he reflects back on her/his “thought process, assumptions, decision making, and actions taken” (Galletta, 2013, pp. 41-42).

In being reflexive during interviewing, I tried to proactively anticipate and prepare how to respond to “ethically important moments” when doing research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262). But when researching self-identified white teachers’ process of moving from ideologies of colorblindness, I found that there were quite a few difficult, unpredictable situations that I failed to anticipate and prepare for, but that I encountered in the practice of doing research. If I had read Helms (2020) and Matias (2016) before I had started interviewing, I would have found these situations predictable and would have been better prepared to respond to these ethically important moments. However, I encountered moments of tension and white emotionality both on my own part and on some of the participants’ parts. I did my best to make the most ethical decision in the moment, and later reflected on the situation and ways to respond in the future. As I

began to read Helms and Matias' work, I was able to sort through my own emotions of whiteness and better understand participants' white identity development. This helped me to make more informed ethical decisions when interviewing participants.

Additionally, in order to be transparent during the research process and to document my reflexivity with participants, I followed Spradley's (1976/2016) advice to keep a journal containing a record of my "experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise," as well as my reactions to participants, feelings that I sense from them and reflections on how I may have influenced their responses during interviews (p. 76). I added to this Finlay's (2002, as cited in Roulston, 2010) typology of pathways to reflexivity by critically self-reflecting on my "inner thoughts, actions, and interpersonal interactions" as researcher (p. 117). Understanding how, during the interview, I oriented myself to the participant to make sense of their prior talk and reflected on how different conversational styles impact the interactions between the participant and researcher helped me in the ongoing process of "critical scrutiny and interpretation" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275; Roulston, 2010).

I also practiced reflexivity during writing by reading my writing reflexively. Reflexive reading can support writers to revise their writing for assumptions, pushing them to report more factually when writing creatively. When reading a draft, I held onto the following questions, asking: "How do you know?" "How would you know?" and "How can you possibly know?" (McPhee, 2017, p. 78). Using these questions meticulously helped to hold me accountable for each detail when fact checking the writing.



## Honoring the Participant

The question of how to best report and write accurately while honoring and minimizing harm for the participant is a core ethical consideration in the fields of literary journalism and creative nonfiction. Honoring and minimizing harm should be at the forefront of the creative nonfiction writer's mind, humbly acknowledging that the participant is being vulnerable and allowing his/her story and perspective to represent something larger than themselves, often, without receiving much in return for sharing (Kramer & Call, 2007). However honoring participants in literary journalism and creative nonfiction differ because journalists see their work as a service/duty to the public, to keep them informed. Researching and writing for this purpose, journalists are loyal to the public over the participants. They make decisions prioritizing the possible harm in withholding information that could be important, over upsetting a participant.<sup>7</sup>

In order to report accurately and honor the participant, Wilkerson (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) points to the importance of engaging in long, authentic

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<sup>7</sup> I think that this is an area where it was very difficult for me to write without worrying if I might upset a participant. I wanted to honor their willingness to share their stories and their vulnerability. However, there were sometimes where I did not push teachers and key actors to reveal more. For example, during key actor interviews, a few times I had to specifically ask the key actors to not put the teacher on a pedestal. I asked them to share things that showed they were human, not perfect. Even when these key actors relented to share something that was not perfect, these details were often minor things like being a poor sport in board games or loading the dishwasher in an organized manner. I understand that we want to portray ourselves and others positively while minimizing our faults, and I cannot say that I would not do the same if I was not being interviewed. However, this made it difficult to write more complex profiles of the teachers. I had numerous readers ask me why does Maya seem like a perfect person? Reflecting on this, for future studies, I would revise my methods to not request permission from the focal participants to interview key actors. I would also make sure that I spent time in the field with the participants so that I might observe some "imperfections" or "human-like" qualities that can serve to balance the positive portrayal of the participants. I also think that I can revise the interview protocols so that when participants share about one of their pedagogical pivot places, that I ask them to talk to me about what they were like before (or how they would normally behave/talk/think before) they shifted. Learning about this might help me with contrasting the character's before and after. I also would add another question to the interview protocol about how the participant is still address their colorblindness/whiteness to better write scenes that show that this is an ongoing process. Luckily, after the interviews with Carla, she shared some of her writing with me that showed her working through her current blind spots.

conversations with participants about personal, and even upsetting aspects of their lives. Seeking clarification so that you have an accurate understanding of these aspects of their lives is essential to giving the reader insight into what it is like to be that person. I sought clarification with participants through scene recreation interviews, emails, and during member checking of their scenes or profiles. Particularly, when my reading and writing group members would ask questions about a scene (i.e., Well, what was Carla thinking when this happened? Or why was John Lewis so important to Maya?), and when I could not find the answers to these questions in the interview transcripts, I would email or text the participants to learn their perspective or find answers to develop a more complete scene.

### **The Final Say**

Harrington (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) states that skilled reporters should learn things about the participants that should not be revealed to the public. Then, the skilled reporter needs to “walk a delicate line” in order to ensure s/he is honest—ethically honest—in relation to both the participant and the reader (p. 172). There were times when participants would share something with me in an interview, and then say that they did not want that information included in the story. I made sure to honor their requests. At one time, Maya requested that I not share an event that she shared during an interview in her story because she did not want to damage a relationship with one of the key actors. However, when I interviewed that key actor, the key actor talked about the event and did not have a problem including it in the story. I included the event in a draft of the story. When I sent the profile to Maya for a member check, I wrote to her explaining that the

key actor gave permission to use the event. Yet, I gave Maya the final say. When she still did not feel comfortable with including the event, I removed it. In Jennifer's case, I shared her scenes with her for the final say.

When conducting interviews, I tried to honor the participant at the beginning of the interview, stating that participation is completely voluntary and that the participant is free to refuse to answer “any question, may end the interview at any time, and will have the final say in what form the transcript or any published version of the interview will take” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 38). Allowing participants the final say on the transcript granted participants the power to control what and how meanings were constructed from their answers to the interview questions (Mishler, 1991). When participants reviewed their transcripts, they advised me on the parts they wanted to exclude, revise, or add to in the final transcript and profile (Atkinson, 1998; Bhattacharya, 2007, 2021; Seidman, 2019).

### **The Final Final Say**

To honor and minimize harm for his participants, Walt Harrington (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007) technically broke the *Washington Post* rule against showing stories to participants before they are published. His story detailed a family dealing with the consequences of a son's suicide. Mental health professionals working on the story with him were concerned that the story might cause another family member to contemplate or attempt suicide. Harrington read the story to the family before publication, seeking their decision on whether they were okay with him publishing it or not. He also considered this to be fact checking. He put the honor and well-being of his subjects first.

Following Harrington's example, beyond the transcripts, I invited two of the teachers and key actors to have the final say in their stories. I asked them to read through their profile (or the sections of the profile pertaining to them for key actors) to make sure that the scenes accurately portrayed what happened according to their memories. Then, we discussed any parts (even very small ones) that did not seem accurate to the participants. If the participants felt that I exaggerated or misinterpreted something, they told me so that I was able to fix it. Because of the conflict between Jennifer's perception and some of the colorblind ideologies that surfaced during her interview, I was hesitant to share the whole longform with her. This is why I shared only the scenes with her for the final approval.

Writing qualitatively about participants, many times involves writing about the participants' "most personal kinds of experiences, perspectives, and feelings" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 36). As our participants tell us their life stories, they construct significant links with us in sharing their personal truths (Atkinson, 1998). Wilkerson points to the importance of having tremendous humility in gathering and writing participants' stories (as cited in Kramer & Call, 2007). As we set out to write qualitatively about participants, we should note that this writing is relational in that the research and writing are done *with* people as opposed *to* people (Bhattacharya, 2007).

While I did extract stories from my participants, I wanted to make sure that their voices were honored in the writing and presentation of their stories. One example of my efforts to do this was when writing a scene about an interaction between Carla and a family member. Carla wanted to share this part of her story without damaging her

relationship with her family members. We discussed how I might best write the scene. After I drafted the scene, I shared it with Carla to see if she felt okay with the portrayal of the event. With her feedback, I made some revisions to share with the readers an accurate description of the event while minimizing a negative reaction from her family.

### **Relational Power**

Relational power allows us to be open to the influence of our participants and affected by them (Mesle, 2008). We take these influences with us into each new experience of ethical decision making when we write their stories. Yet, even after the writing is finished, I have found relationships with Carla and Maya that will last beyond this project. Carla has become a mentor and critical friend in doing the work necessary to decenter whiteness. She has become someone with whom I discuss other research projects and with whom I write academic articles. Maya has ignited the need for me to learn more about the diverse perspectives not included in mainstream US history. We have discussed new ideas for her podcasts and plan to co-host some episodes together. Ali, Enrique, and I are collaborating with Jennifer for Ali and Enrique to share with her students about their work and experiences in STEM.

**Table 3.**

*Project Timeline from 2021- 2022 -Detailed*

Phase and Task	Year and Month												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
<b>Research/Writing Element</b>	<b>2021</b>												
Write dissertation research proposal													
Defend dissertation research proposal													
Submit IRB authorization													
Recruit participants													
Dissertation writing (theoretical framework, literature review, methods)													
<b>Data collection</b>													
Phenomenological interviews													
Interviews with key actors													
Documents and artifacts													
Scene recreation interviews													
<b>Data analysis</b>													
Transcription													
Creative nonfiction analysis													
Document and artifact analysis													

Phase and Task	Year and Month											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Research/Writing Element</b>	<b>2022</b>											
Recruit participants												
<b>Data collection</b>												
Phenomenological interviews												
Interviews with key actors												
Documents and artifacts												
Scene recreation interviews												
<b>Data analysis</b>												
Transcription												
Creative nonfiction analysis and writing												
Document and artifact analysis												
<b>Writing and dissemination</b>												
Dissertation writing (methods, findings)												
Dissertation writing (methods, findings, conclusion/creative nonfiction profiles)												
Dissertation defense												
Prepare manuscripts for publication (academic and public journals)												

## Wrapping Up & Looking Forward

In this chapter, I explained the research design—methodology, participants, recruitment, methods to gather the material, and material analysis—to address the following research questions:

- What are three self-identified White teachers' perceptions of their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism?
  - What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers' processes of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism?
  - How do these pedagogical pivot places contribute to new ways of knowing in teachers' shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism?

I also addressed the methodological coherence (Mayan, 2009) of the research design and described ways in which I increased validity and reflexivity throughout the study.

Additionally, there are three appendices consisting of interview protocols described in the methods to gather the material section.

In the following chapter, I share the findings of the study through three creative nonfiction profiles. Each teacher—Carla, Maya, and Jennifer—has their own profile telling their story of transitioning from colorblindness to white supremacy.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter includes three creative nonfiction profiles, one each for Carla, Maya, and Jennifer, that address the following research questions:

- What are three self-identified White teachers' perceptions of their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding their role in white supremacy and structural racism?
  - What are the pedagogical pivot places that occur in three self-identified White teachers' processes of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism?
  - How do these pedagogical pivot places contribute to new ways of knowing in teachers' shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism?

To help with the flow of the story, I have chosen to include footnotes instead of citations in the narratives. Sources that have the potential to compromise the participants' identity are not cited.

#### **Carla's Story**

Carla, along with about 100 other new Teach for America (TFA) corps members, woke at 6:00 am and boarded yellow school buses at Delta State University every weekday morning for a month during the summer of 2011. Her skin clung to the vinyl fabric seats, her long brown hair pulled back in the heat. Her hazel eyes gazed out the window as the buses passed farmland, weathered silos, and shotgun houses in the



Mississippi Delta. The buses bounced in and out of potholes on the cracked pavement until they arrived in Indianola, Mississippi. It was here, where The King of the Blues, B.B. King called home, that Carla, along with two other White teachers, co-taught fifth-grade math at the summer school in the impoverished community where all their students were Black.

Train tracks divided the city in two. On the north side of the tracks, two-story freshly painted white column colonials and red brick ranches sat neatly on green grass, trimmed with paved sidewalks for the White residents who made up less than 20% of Indianola's population. But Carla would have taught on the south side of the train tracks, where more than 80% of Indianola's Black residents were segregated to live in the small shotgun houses.<sup>8</sup> The weathered paint was coated with dirt that would find its way from the sparsely seeded lawns to the shotgun's wooden panels.

Carla knew that there were economic disparities in the Mississippi Delta, but she was not aware of the long history of violence and dehumanization to people of Color. The Mississippi Delta had once been "the richest cotton-farming land in the country" thanks to the enslaved African Americans forced by White farmers in the early 19th century to clear the dense forest and build levees to contain the Mississippi River, reported the Public Broadcasting Service.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Huffman, A. (2015, January 6). How white flight ruined the Mississippi Delta. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/01/how-white-flight-ruined-the-mississippi-delta/384227/>.

Johnson, M. (2016, September 6). Passport to prosperity: Indianola, Mississippi. *Urban Institute*. <https://apps.urban.org/features/promise-neighborhoods/indianola-ms.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.). Sharecropping in Mississippi. *American Experience*. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-sharecropping-mississippi/>.  
Sunflower County. (2018, April 15). *Mississippi Encyclopedia*. Center for Study of Southern Culture. <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/sunflower-county/>.

After emancipation, Mississippi kept Blacks in their dehumanized place through sharecropping. Blacks were not allowed to own land and White farmers charged them rent. Sharecroppers had to buy all the farming supplies from the White plantation owner's store and were charged high interest rates. At the end of each harvest season, Black sharecroppers met with their White employers to review the books. The White men would calculate the cost of the seed, farming equipment, and rent. If Blacks were lucky, working for a "good" farmer, they would break even.<sup>10</sup> They might not have made any profit, but at least they would not be indebted to their White employer as was the case for so many sharecroppers. Besides designing a farming system that kept Blacks as close to enslaved as possible, the Mississippi Delta was also known for its sanctioned violence against the Black community.

Between 1890 and 1910, at least 200 lynchings took place in the Mississippi Delta.<sup>11</sup> On September 7, 1904, in Doddsville, Mississippi, just a twenty-minute drive from where Carla taught in Indianola, about six-hundred white citizens gathered, some sipping lemonade, and others drinking whiskey, or snacking on deviled eggs as they watched the lynching of a Black sharecropper who had shot and killed his White employer, the Vicksburg Evening Post reported.<sup>12</sup> They watched Luther Holbert and an unidentified Black woman tied to trees while funeral pyres were constructed. They

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<sup>10</sup> Wilkerson, I. (2020b). *The warmth of other suns*. Penguin UK.

<sup>11</sup> Equal Justice Initiative. (2017). *Lynching in America: Confronting the legacy of racial terror*. Montgomery: Equal Justice Initiative.

<sup>12</sup>Equal Justice Initiative. (n.d.). On this day-Feb 07, 1904: Black man and woman brutally lynched in Mississippi Delta. <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/feb/07>.

Jenks, C. (1964). Mississippi: When Law Collides with Custom. *New Republic*, 25.

Makovi, K., Hagen, R., & Bearman, P. (2016). The course of law: State intervention in southern lynch mob violence 1882–1930. *Sociological Science*, 3, 860-888.

Richardson, J. A. (ed.) (1904, February 13). Most horrible: Details of the burning at the stake of the Holberts. *Vicksburg Evening Post*, p. 4.

watched White men chop off Holbert and the woman's fingers, one at a time. The crowd passed the fingers around, some pocketing them as souvenirs. They watched as White men cut off their ears, and then they watched as Holbert remained quiet as he was beaten until his skull fractured and one of his eyes fell out of its socket, dangling from the optic nerve. An eyewitness described how the mob used a large corkscrew to "bore into the flesh of the man and woman. It was applied to their arms, legs and body, then pulled out, the spirals tearing out big pieces of raw, quivering flesh every time it was withdrawn."<sup>13</sup> The festive crowd watched as the two Black mutilated people were finally thrown on the fire to burn to death.

Shortly after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as civil rights volunteers in the Mississippi Delta worked to help Blacks register to vote and establish Freedom Schools to integrate Black and White students, Whites threatened, beat, and arrested these volunteers. They bombed or burnt down the Freedom Schools and churches. Firemen stood outside the buildings ablaze, refusing to put out the fires or allow the civil rights members to intervene or examine the damage.<sup>14</sup> The Whites in the Mississippi Delta were determined to prevent "the potential flood of negro invasion into [their] schools, parks, swimming pools, restaurants, hotels, trains, buses, into [their] very neighborhoods and homes, and into public office" as reported Robert B. Patterson, secretary of The Citizen's Councils of America in 1963.<sup>15</sup> Forty-eight years later, even though Carla had not been aware of the history of violence, dehumanization, and oppression of Blacks in the

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<sup>13</sup> (Jenks, 1964, p. 15)

<sup>14</sup> Sources: Records of violence against Indianola voter registration efforts – link to records: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GbpUIKavggdOvc\\_cwjEtE21-W5x48-GM/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GbpUIKavggdOvc_cwjEtE21-W5x48-GM/view?usp=sharing)

<sup>15</sup> Patterson, R. B. (1963, October 26). The citizens' council: A History. Pamphlet distributed at *The Annual Leadership Conference of the Citizens' Councils of America*, Jackson, Mississippi.

Mississippi Delta, as she was bused into Indianola to teach at a school where all of her students were Black and living in poverty, it seemed that The Citizen's Councils of America had succeeded in maintaining segregation.

Carla has the kind of discipline, organization, and motivation that leave most in awe. Her Google calendar looks like a Tetris matrix, filled with responsibilities, meetings, and deadlines for work, her PhD program and equity organizations. It's hard to imagine that she would still find time to run sixty miles per week to train for an ultra-marathon with her husband Adam, maintain a healthy plant-based diet, or even make and deliver motivational message cards and gift bags filled with wine, chocolate, and candles to moms during the pandemic while still making sure that she sleeps between seven to eight hours each night.

Carla was passionate about helping others in poverty. As a child, Carla had adapted to her family moving at least once a year because of financial issues. She had adjusted to her father's transience between home, rehab, jail, and prison; and she had grown accustomed to taking care of her younger brother David: comforting him when he missed their mom, preparing his dinners, helping him with homework, and tucking him into bed while their parents were out.

Despite the ups and downs of Carla's home life, she had learned to value education as a way out of poverty. Her father had seen to that. Whether it was bringing home books and reading to Carla, teaching her Spanish phrases that he picked up from the T.V., music or friends, or calling from jail to tell her that she better get straight A's in

school, Carla's dad made sure that she understood the importance of learning and education.

Even though Carla's dad had felt he had been pushed out of school by teachers who did not believe in him, and even though he had dropped out of high school when he was seventeen, it was because of him that she devoured books like *Matilda* and *Charlotte's Web* by the time she was in first grade. It was because of him that she graduated with an undergraduate degree in Spanish, and it was because of him that she made sure she kept straight A's and took her education seriously.

As a teenager and in her early twenties, she had tried to save her father, picking him up at crack houses or jail, welcoming him home with a hug as he teased her in his usual silly way. She dealt with his relapses. She grappled with the love and pain, yearning for him to get better as she dropped him off at rehab in between softball, basketball, or cheerleading practice. When Carla could no longer save her father, she found herself applying to TFA to help students who were marginalized. She wrote in her TFA application essay, "If I can alter the destitute paths of many of my students and get them to see that through education change is possible, then I will consider my mission as a corps member a success." So, Carla eagerly traveled from East Moline to Cleveland. With her posture of determination and the soothing voice of a yoga teacher, she boarded a TFA bus in the Mississippi Delta, ready to make a difference in her students' lives.

One Sunday, towards the beginning of her time in Cleveland, Carla and another TFA teacher sat on lawn chairs at the perimeter of the community pool. As is typical for a summer weekend in Mississippi, the pool was crowded. Perhaps a handful of children

jumped, splashed, and laughed together in the pool; and occasionally, their splashes might have reached Carla's skin, cooling it from Cleveland's heat and humidity. Other adults might have sat around the pool: some on lawn chairs like Carla, while others might have sat at the edge of the pool, chatting, or watching their feet dangling in the water.

Perhaps Carla and her friend chatted about their TFA training: their disappointment in the drabness of the school building; where they might find markers, colored pencils, or paper for their lessons; or where they could find a functioning copy machine to make copies before the next school week. Maybe they smiled as they talked about one of Carla's favorite students who was a ball of energy and wanted to be just like B.B. King. They might have discussed new plant-based recipes, training for ultramarathons or complained about the muggy Cleveland weather as they spread sunscreen on their White skin. At one point, as Carla leaned back in her chair, and looked out past the fence surrounding the pool, she noticed two Black boys in swim shorts approaching the pool entrance. The boys seemed to be around the same age as her students. She raised her eyebrows and surveyed the pool with new eyes. Oh yeah, she thought. I'm not up north. I'm in Cleveland, Mississippi. All my students are Black. Why am I at a pool with all White people?

She was too far away from the front gate to hear what the thin White man said to the boys at the entrance. But she watched as the boys in their swim shorts looked up at the man who casually shook his head. She saw the boys as they quietly turned around, tilted their gaze toward the ground and walked away from the pool. Processing the whiteness at the pool and the two Black boys who had just been denied entrance, Carla,

in denial that it was blatant racism, tried to rationalize why the boys might have been turned away. Maybe they didn't have the money to pay to swim at the pool, she told herself.

When Carla returned to Delta State University, she asked her TFA leaders and fellow corps members about the incident. “Yeah, that’s common here,” they said as they explained the unwritten rules determining the days Black people are allowed to go to the pool versus the days White people go to the pool. Her Mississippian colleagues were not surprised. After all, high-school proms had been segregated until 2008<sup>16</sup> and just a few months before Carla arrived in the Delta, 46% of Mississippi Republicans had responded that interracial marriage should be illegal on a left leaning Public Policy Poll.<sup>17</sup>

Carla thought, hmm, concrete evidence that we still live in a racist society. She filed that experience alongside her beginning understanding of the intentional racial segregation of schools she had experienced in the Mississippi Delta. Troubled by this, Carla reflected on how she might help with addressing this injustice. At the time, Carla saw teaching as a way to contribute. She decided that she needed to become a better teacher for her students of Color.

While in Indianola, Carla worked to make connections with the students and their families to support her students’ math learning. She saved parents’ phone numbers in her phone and regularly shared with the parents about the students’ progress in math and

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<sup>16</sup> The Bryant Park Project. (2008, June 11). Mississippi school holds first interracial prom. *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2008/06/11/91371629/mississippi-school-holds-first-interracial-prom>.

<sup>17</sup> Hayden, E. (2011, April 7). Poll: 46 percent of Mississippi GOP want to ban interracial marriage. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/04/mississippi-republicans/349433/>.

behavior during the week. When she learned that many of the students loved B.B. King, she asked the students to tell her more about him and share their favorite B.B. King songs. I can connect with kids that don't look like me, she thought. Carla and the other two teachers in the class received praise from their TFA leaders for the gains their students made during that summer.

After her summer in the Mississippi Delta, Carla moved to Indianapolis to teach at a public middle school. For six years, she taught middle school Spanish classes to a more racially diverse student population. During her first few years of teaching, Carla received awards recognizing her as her school's teacher of the year, a top teacher in her district, and excellence in teaching from Teach for America Alumni. With all the recognition, Carla thought that by connecting with her students and teaching effectively, she had figured out how to be a successful White teacher for her students of Color.

### **Recognizing Structural Racism**

Carla leaned forward on the folding chair, feeling every muscle in her body clench. The aluminum of the Coors Light can crinkled in her hand as they sat in her mother's garage. Carla's pale cheeks flushed as she locked eyes with her mother Denise. "Think about all the Black mothers who have to worry every time their children leave." Behind her wire rimmed glasses, Denise sat wide-eyed. She blinked and set her cigarette in the ashtray. She said something along the lines of, "I also worry every time my children leave!" or "I have to worry if my husband is going to be safe every time he goes to work!"



One key period of Carla's coming to understand structural racism started in mid-March 2012 when national news broadcast the story of Trayvon Martin's killing by George Zimmerman.<sup>18</sup> Carla watched the news reports in horror as the anchor broke the story from February 26, 2012. Zimmerman, a White Latino/Hispanic man and neighborhood watch volunteer, had shot and killed Martin, an unarmed Black teen, carrying iced tea and a bag of Skittles, as he walked home from a nearby store. Zimmerman claimed self-defense and seventeen months later was acquitted of second-degree murder and manslaughter charges.<sup>19</sup> The news of Trayvon reminded Carla of one of her middle school students who, to her, resembled Trayvon. As Carla watched the story unfold, she pictured her student in his white hoodie, smiling, laughing, and misbehaving during Spanish class. Her stomach contracted and curled tightly as she imagined her student suffering the same fate.

Shortly after Trayvon Martin's killing made national headlines, Carla and her husband were visiting her mom and stepdad one weekend in Iowa. As happened during most visits to her parents' home, Carla and her mom, Denise eventually drifted out to the family's eight-car garage. By the wall collage of a pegboard filled with tools, faded American flag and Wells Fargo, Miller Light and Budweiser advertisement posters, they would gather in a circle of camping and metal folding chairs. There, they typically

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<sup>18</sup> Kovalski, S. F. & Robertson, C. (2012, May 18). New details are released in shooting of Trayvon Martin. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/18/us/new-details-are-released-in-shooting-of-teenager.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Alvarez, L. & Buckley, C. (2013, July 14). Zimmerman is acquitted in Trayvon Martin killing. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/us/george-zimmerman-verdict-trayvon-martin.html>.

discussed what was going on in their lives, the current headlines in the news, and after a few drinks, how much they missed Carla's dad and what it would be like if he were still alive today.

On that evening, Carla sat in a metal folding chair sipping her Coors Light. Beside her, Denise sat in her usual spot at the small walnut table against the wall. Amidst some old newspapers, a 1980's transistor radio, a few stereo speakers and Denise's plastic mug of Franzia white zinfandel, smoke floated up towards the ceiling from her menthol cigarette resting in the ashtray. At some point in their conversation, Carla brought up Trayvon Martin. She alternated her gaze between her mother and her stepdad's police car in the corner of the garage as she revealed her inner turmoil to Denise. She shared her recent realization that many of her own students and their families had to worry about being killed because they were perceived as a threat for being Black.

Denise listened to Carla, tucking her brown, shoulder-length hair behind her ear with one hand while holding her cigarette in the other. She agreed with Carla that Trayvon had died unjustly. However, Denise did not feel the same as Carla when it came to racial injustice. After all, she probably thought, as a police officer, Denise's husband was in danger most of the time that he was on patrol. She tapped her cigarette over the ashtray and tugged on the hem of her sweatshirt.

Carla was too upset to remember exactly what else transpired between her and her mother that night. Carla remembered Denise dismissing police brutality and saying that she supported law enforcement to protect the community. Carla remembered feeling her

heart begin to race as she urged the tears to stop gathering in her eyes. She doesn't get it, Carla thought. Was her mom so heartless that she didn't understand the racial factor?

Perhaps, Carla's anger swirled with grief at Denise's denial of police brutality, and perhaps she felt the disconnection between her and her mother grow. Perhaps Denise felt the disconnection grow as well, remorseful that she and her daughter had opposite views about law enforcement, racial bias, and its impact on people of Color. Maybe they stared at each other in silence, each one prayerfully urging the other to understand her point of view, or trying to calm the cognitive dissonance, processing the disappointment from their/her own kin.

What Carla did remember was that the conversation didn't end well. Carla stood up abruptly; the front two legs of her folding chair might have lifted momentarily. She remembered the words leaping from her mouth, "It's not the same. It's just- it's not the same!" Denise may have sat stunned at the table as her daughter shouted at her through tears or maybe she continued to defend her husband and law enforcement against accusations of police brutality. Either way, Carla left her mother in the garage and sought refuge in the guest bedroom as she struggled to accept her mother's dismissal of racial injustice.

Carla continued following the news coverage on George Zimmerman's trial. She had also started reading Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, a book recommended by her district's Racial Equity office. In between watching the nightly news, scrolling through online updates on Zimmerman's trial, and reading *The New Jim Crow* each night before bed, Carla worked through her

growing understandings of structural racism and the oppression of people of Color as she learned about the history of racial injustice and the creation of a new racial caste system through The War on Drugs and mass incarceration.

Lying in bed, staring into the gray glow of her Kindle, she read, “an illegal drug crisis suddenly appeared in the Black community after—not before—a drug war had been declared,” which then caused “arrests and convictions for drug offenses to skyrocket, especially among people of color.”<sup>20</sup> Carla sat with the statistics of the disproportionate number of minorities that are stopped, searched, and arrested for drug possession. She cringed at the harsh sentencing laws given to Blacks in comparison to Whites and the motivation of federal funding and prison privatization profit fueling mass incarceration.

Carla read about the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, signed by President Reagan in 1986, the year she was born: “Among other harsh penalties, the legislation included mandatory minimum sentences for the distribution of cocaine, including far more severe punishment for distribution of crack—associated with blacks—than powder cocaine, associated with whites.”<sup>21</sup> Carla’s eyes lingered on “far more severe punishment for distribution of crack—associated with blacks.” Carla swallowed and looked up at the ceiling. Her dad, although he was White, had struggled with crack addiction and had been in and out of rehab, jail, and prison since she had been a child.

In 2009, when Carla was twenty-two, her dad had been arrested for public intoxication and died while being arrested. The death report listed his cause of death as inconclusive: not enough drugs in his system to be lethal; he didn’t have a heart attack,

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<sup>20</sup> (Alexander, 2011, p. 24)

<sup>21</sup> (Alexander, 2011, p. 118)

but he wasn't killed by police officers. Dealing with her dad's sudden death at the time, Carla ignored the reporters and lawyers who reached out to her. But four years later, as she read Michelle Alexander's evidence for how the United States uses the criminal justice system to legalize discrimination against people of Color "in employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service,"<sup>22</sup> Carla was forced to fully process the probable criminal injustice of what happened to her dad alongside the racial injustice of what happened to Trayvon Martin and many other Black men. During that time, she came to understand that oppression and white supremacy harms everyone. Eight years later, as Carla sat in her living room under a painting of the Buddha, talking to me over Zoom about her experience of processing criminal and racial injustice, she remembered her anger when realizing that "we live in this society that is out to incarcerate and kill Black men, Black women, people of Color, anyone that doesn't fit into this dominant culture view; my dad also suffered, and my family suffered because of that shitty system."

After that realization, Carla embarked on eight years of reflection focused on learning and understanding white supremacy and whiteness. Some of that reflection happened with the help of her friend and colleague, Meghan, a reading teacher and counselor at Carla's school who usually accented her short brown hair with a purple or green streak. Carla, Meghan, and a few other White teachers would meet for a standing weekly happy hour at Aristocrats. Inside the pub, they perched on bar stools or sat in booths. Two-thousand pounds of recycled beer and wine bottles in the cement floor sparkled under the bronze pendant lights as they ordered burgers and salads and sipped

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<sup>22</sup> (Alexander, 2011, p. 15)

on their craft beers. The warmth from the teak walls surrounded them as they likely shared weekly highlights, vented about school bureaucracy, and discussed how to advance racial equity in their district.

During their six years of working at the same school, Meghan and Carla continually advocated for racial equity to be at the center of their school's staff meetings and professional development. They collaborated to participate in a PLC and led an after-school book study on racial equity and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, with Sharroky Hollie and Zaretta Hammond as mentors. While Meghan and Carla united as they urged other teachers to consider how racism and oppression damage their students of Color's health, emotional well-being and ability to learn, some elements of their relationship tended to be competitive and perhaps uncomfortable.

Meghan had started an Urban Education PhD program and was reading, discussing, and reflecting on books like *Colorblind Racism*<sup>23</sup> and *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking*.<sup>24</sup> Once, after reading Cheryl Matias' "Check Yo'Self Before You Wreck Yo'Self,"<sup>25</sup>—an article about what happens when cultural responsiveness is co-opted by a White liberal agenda—Meghan was compelled to share the article with the entire school staff to read.

Because of the work Meghan was doing in her urban education courses, she seemed to be a few steps ahead of Carla in doing the internal work of decentering

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<sup>23</sup> Carr, L. G. (1997). *"Colorblind" Racism*. Sage.

<sup>24</sup> Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge.

<sup>25</sup> Matias, C. E. (2013a). Check yo'self before you wreck yo'self and our kids: Counterstories from culturally responsive white teachers?... to culturally responsive white teachers!. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 3(2), 68-81.

whiteness. Meghan encouraged Carla to develop racial consciousness and intentionally interrogate herself, asking “How does whiteness show up in me?” and “How do I perpetuate white supremacy?” And while Carla appreciated Meghan pushing her to work through her own whiteness, Carla often felt insufficient and irritated when Meghan would point out one more way that Carla was centering whiteness. And while Meghan considered Carla to be “her people,” she also tended to feel that Carla, like many other teachers at the school, respected her but didn’t like her.

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During her third or fourth year of teaching, Carla was assigned to teach a heritage Spanish class, meaning that all her students either spoke Spanish as their first language or were bilingual.

Once, when correcting a student’s writing for accent marks, her heritage Spanish speaking student asked, “What are accent marks?”

Carla started to hesitate and ask herself, “Who am I to correct students on their grammar and writing?” Carla wrestled with her identity and position as a White teacher telling her heritage Spanish speaking students how to speak their language, the language that they had been speaking since birth, correctly. She also realized her white privilege when she stopped insisting that bilingualism was beneficial and tried to understand why some students were resistant to learning Spanish. She learned that some families preferred for their children to shed their linguistic heritage to assimilate into the White American culture.

One Halloween sometime between 2014 and 2015, Carla's students had been reading *Don Quixote*, and Sancho Panza had become a literary star whom the students' loved for his silliness. Pleased that she was going to use Halloween as a way to keep teaching, Carla planned to dress up as Sancho Panza and surprise her students. On Halloween morning, Carla looked in the mirror as she pressed a fake black mustache above her lips, set a sombrero on her head and stuffed a pillow under her shirt.

Perhaps Carla stood at the door of her classroom as students entered the building in the morning. She was preparing for the start of the school day when one of her students, Yareli, walked up to her. Yareli laughed and shifted her backpack on her shoulder. "Miss Jones, that's racist!"

Oh shit! Carla thought as her cheeks flushed. I didn't even think about it. She laughed and replied, "Hey, I'm Sancho Panza."

Yareli shook her head and smiled. "You look like my dad," she said as she freed her long curly hair stuck under her backpack strap before heading off to her locker.

Carla removed the pillow from her shirt. Over the next hour, Carla's uneasiness continued to increase. Yareli's words replayed in her head, "Miss Jones, that's racist!" "You look like my dad." She eventually peeled off the mustache and took off the sombrero. This doesn't feel right, Carla thought.

Later that day, Carla sat at her desk at the back of the classroom. Her eyes moved from the Tibetan singing bowl at the front of the room to the flags of the Spanish speaking countries hanging around the room. As she thought about her costume choice, Yareli's words, and her own White racial identity, the esteem she felt for her recognition



as a culturally responsive teacher leader, racial equity liaison and star teacher in her district, gave way to humility. Sitting at her desk, Carla told herself, “Identity and race is not child’s play. It’s time to get serious about this.”

Two years after Zimmerman’s trial, Carla started her educational leadership master’s program at Columbia University, and she first shared her dad’s story. Perhaps it was through her course readings, through Meghan’s critical friendship, or through encounters with her students that Carla came to realize that although the war on drugs had absolutely impacted her life, she still had her whiteness to protect her. Even though she grew up in a family oppressed by the War on Drugs and that her father had likely been unjustly killed by the police, Carla realized that she and her family still did not face the same discrimination of people of Color in finding jobs, housing, and receiving financial and public assistance.<sup>26</sup> Carla’s anger and frustration grew with her realization of the suffering people of Color endure because of white supremacy.

Carla decided to channel her anger and frustration into her work by advocating for racial equity with a social emotional focus for her students and in the district. She started a student voices class, focused on elevating the voices and leadership of students of Color in her school. Her students called for changes in inequitable practices at staff meetings and educational policy events. At one event, one of Carla’s students stood in front of a few hundred educators and said, “Look at all of these posters with ideas for how to make

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander, M. (2011). *The new jim crow*. Ohio St. J. Crim. L., 9, 7.

Coates, T. N. (2014). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*, 313(5), 54-71.

Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education*. Routledge.

Wilkerson, I. (2020a). *Caste (Oprah's Book Club): The origins of our discontents*. Random House.

schools better for kids that look like me! Fine, but what are ya'll gonna actually DO?  
Prove me wrong, DO SOMETHING.”

### **Working with White People**

In the spring of 2016, shortly after Carla had happily spent her honeymoon wearing about three pairs of winter gloves to keep her hands from freezing as she and Adam hiked the Rocky Mountains, Carla flew to Washington, D.C. where 15,000 people gathered to attend Teach for America's 25th Anniversary Summit. Flipping through the conference schedule, Carla noticed a session titled, “What is the Role of White Leaders on the Path to Equality?” Jeff Duncan-Andrade was one of the speakers.<sup>27</sup> She had already registered for a different event, but Carla decided to sneak into Duncan-Andrade’s session.

As she entered the room, Carla saw that the 1,000 seats were already filled. She stood at the back of the room, as four different speakers took turns sharing thoughts on White leaders’ responsibility in working for equitable education. After two speakers, Jeff Duncan-Andrade, wearing a light pink gingham button-down under his navy sports coat, approached the podium with confidence and a slight irritation that he had to take time away from his community to speak at the national conference. As he rested his hands on the podium, and tilted his bald head to the side, while occasionally touching his short black beard, he spoke of the need for White leaders and teachers to first recognize the reality of white supremacy in the United States, to ask permission from communities of

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<sup>27</sup> TFA Events. (2016). What is the role of white leaders on the path to equality? [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YRBiRq0DYo>.

Color to work with them, and to move from sympathy to empathy where White people realize that they are not leaders, but collaborators alongside people of Color to work to dismantle white supremacy.

Carla was hooked. She abandoned all her registered sessions for Jeff's. During one of his sessions, Carla remembered Jeff speaking directly to White teachers, saying, "You know, White teachers, we don't need you, we people of Color, we don't need you coming into our schools and teaching us that the world is unjust. We know. We know the world is unjust. We need you going into White communities and doing your work there and dismantling white supremacy in White communities."

Carla inhaled sharply as she absorbed the weight of Duncan-Andrade's words. I've got to work with White people, she thought. I need to do whiteness work with White people. As Carla traveled back to Indianapolis that February, she began to plan how she could transfer from her racially diverse middle school to work at a predominately White school in her city.

The following school year, Carla transferred to work at a public middle school in Indianapolis that disproportionately served White students. Her position included full teaching responsibilities, along with additional leadership roles to facilitate the school's racial equity work, leading professional development on white fragility and collaborating with families to create a parent racial equity team at the school.

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"This is oppression," and "You're not going to control my kid," were common phrases that Carla heard from some of the White parents at her school after the Parkland

school shooting. Perhaps a mother said it as she scowled at the middle school secretary at the front line of about ten other White parents waiting at the principal's office for their turn to sign their children out of school. She might have set the pen down on the counter while the secretary bit her lip and dialed the child's teacher to send him to the office. The other parents would likely have talked amongst themselves, shifting their protest posters in their hands. Occasionally, slightly more audible words might have stood out from the murmurs of the parents—words such as, “dictator-like school” and “suppressing our voice”—as they waited their turn to sign their children out of school. Carla was stunned at their entitlement and buried her anger as she encountered these parents.

In 2018, shortly after the Parkland school shooting, where fourteen students and three faculty were fatally shot by a former student armed with an AR-15 semi-automatic style weapon,<sup>28</sup> the majority White students and their families at Carla's school were incensed. They wanted to stage a school walkout to demand gun restrictions, but the administration would not allow it.

Many students who knew that Carla was a social justice minded educator came to her for support. Carla grappled with how to support her students in sharing their voices in the midst of her anger at the response. Carla spoke in her calm and assuring voice as she helped the student leadership group with their plan to honor the lives lost in the Parkland shooting inside the school, in a way that did not include a school walk out. Despite the school's attempt to honor the lives lost in the Parkland shooting inside the school, some of the entitled White parents, as Carla mentally called them, ignored the administration's

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<sup>28</sup> Chuck, E., Johnson, A. & Siemaszko, C. (2018, February 14). 17 killed in mass shooting at high school in Parkland, Florida. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/police-respond-shooting-parkland-florida-high-school-n848101>.

decision against the school walk out. After signing out their children, the parents and children marched outside of the school holding their “Protect kids, not guns” signs. What about all the other lives that have been lost since we’ve known each other? Carla thought. We didn’t do anything when people in our own community were gunned down by police officers.

Between New Year’s 2018 and the Parkland shooting, there had been thirteen Black victims of gun violence in Indianapolis.<sup>29</sup> And as 2017 had come to an end, the year’s “homicide rate of non-Hispanic blacks was approximately six times higher than that of non-Hispanic whites,” reported Indy Indicators of the Marion County public health department.<sup>30</sup> Out of the 158 firearm homicides investigated up until December 28, 2017, 73% (115) were Black victims, while 27% (43) were non-Black victims.<sup>31</sup>

Yet there had been no outrage from Indianapolis’ White community when fifteen-year-old Sema J. Jordan, who had been a student at Arsenal Technical High School, was found shot dead in an Indianapolis alley on April 10, 2017.<sup>32</sup> On his Gun Violence Memorial webpage,<sup>33</sup> there are some photos of “Jay” as his family and friends lovingly called him. In one photo, Jay stands, looking at the camera as his locs softly frame his

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<sup>29</sup> Martin, R. (n.d.). Indianapolis crime: List of all criminal homicides in 2018. *IndyStar analysis of IMPD homicide records*. <https://databases.indystar.com/indianapolis-crime-homicide-list-2018/page/2/>.

<sup>30</sup> Harte, T. (2017, December 28). 2017 Crime wrap: Tracking Indianapolis homicides. *Fox 59*. Retrieved from <https://fox59.com/morning-news/2017-crime-wrap-tracking-indianapolis-homicides/>.  
Indy Indicators. (n.d.). Homicide rate by race (Marion County 2012-2017). *Marion County Public Health Department*. [http://indyindicators.iupui.edu/content.aspx?content\\_id=63](http://indyindicators.iupui.edu/content.aspx?content_id=63).

<sup>31</sup> Calculations made from data in report from 2017 Indianapolis homicides.  
[http://indymotorspeedway.com/stopcrime/2017\\_index.html](http://indymotorspeedway.com/stopcrime/2017_index.html)

<sup>32</sup> CBS4. (2017, April 14). Family seeks justice after 15-year-old found shot to death in alley. <https://cbs4indy.com/news/family-seeks-justice-after-15-year-old-found-shot-to-death-in-alley/>.

<sup>33</sup> GunMemorial.org (2017, April 10). Sema J. Jordan. <https://gunmemorial.org/2017/04/10/sema-j-jordan>.

young face. He smiles, showing off his bright blue sneakers and matching Air Jordan t-shirt. “Very loving, outgoing normal teenager. funny and always respectful,” someone wrote about Jay on the memorial page.

In early September 2017, school counselors met with thirteen-year-old students at Belzer Middle School to help them understand that they would never see their classmate, Matthew McGee again. Matthew, a Black boy with braces and the lanky awkward build common to most young adolescents, had been fatally shot at a Long John Silvers, near Castleton Square Mall (a popular hangout place for middle schoolers) over the weekend. Matthew’s fellow eighth graders—all mostly Black—met at the basketball court where they used to shoot hoops with Matthew.<sup>34</sup> At the basketball court, they released blue star and red heart foil balloons to the sky in his memory. With tear-stained faces and grieving hearts, they watched the balloons float across the Indiana sky until they disappeared. Meanwhile, the White students at Carla’s school just across the city likely sharpened their pencils and discussed their weekend fun with their friends unaware and unconcerned about Matthew McGee or any of the eleven juveniles murdered in the city that year as reported by 13WTHR Indianapolis’ local news network.

Just five months after Matthew McGee’s murder, as Carla’s White students planned a ceremony to honor the middle class mostly White student victims of gun violence over one thousand miles away, Carla asked herself, How is it that we care so little about issues that pertain to our Black community? Internally Carla was disgusted as

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<sup>34</sup> Cox, K. (2017, September 9). 13-year-old shot, killed outside Long John Silvers near Castleton Square Mall. *WRTV ABC Indianapolis*. <https://www.wrtv.com/news/local-news/indianapolis/person-critical-after-shooting-near-long-john-silvers-near-castleton-square-mall>.

she realized the whiteness of the community's response, as she came to believe that White people don't care about gun violence that's happening in Black communities, or in communities of Color, or poor communities until it hits home.

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"Arms down, head back and hold on!" The Top Thrill Dragster roller coaster attendant announced into the microphone. Carla and her brother David gripped onto the lap bars of the second fastest and highest rollercoaster in the world. The train surged 120 mph up the 90-degree incline. Carla's head bounced from side to side, her braided ponytail hanging over the top of the headrest. David's arm collided with Carla's shoulder as the Dragster twisted them 90 degrees clockwise. All they could see was a blur of the red and yellow tracks and the blue Ohio sky. As the train crested the top of the 420-foot-high top hat, Carla thought, I cannot believe we are finally at the front.

For years, their dad had taken Carla and David to Cedar Point Amusement Park to ride roller coasters together. The Top Thrill Dragster, one of only two strata coasters in the world, had always been their favorite adrenaline ride. When their dad was still alive, they had ridden the seventeen-second adrenaline ride together at least twenty times. But they had never gotten to ride in the front car. In 2016, seven years after their dad had passed, Carla drove from Indiana and David drove from Iowa to continue the family tradition in Cedar Point.

They had spent the entire day riding all their favorite adrenaline rides and reminiscing on the special times they had shared there with their dad. As they walked past the food stands, David checked his phone, 5:45 pm. The park would be closing soon.

David looked at Carla. His eyes sparkling as he pressed his lips together to hide his smile. Carla didn't need him to ask. She nodded her head. They turned around and jogged towards the Top Thrill Dragster entrance. As they snuck into line to ride the Top Thrill Dragster just one more time, they had never expected to get to sit in the front seat.

Their stomachs floated as the train reached the peak. With no other people in front of them, they could see past the edge of the park to Lake Erie and the Sandusky skyline. The tops of trees, roofs and outdoor umbrellas were far below. As the train tipped over the crest, Carla felt her chest tighten and her legs lift off the seat. The lap bar pressing against her thighs was her only reminder that she wasn't flying. Wind surged through her ears as the weight from the back of the train hurtled them down 90-degree drop with a 270- degree twist. Seventeen seconds later, they were back on the ground.

David rubbed his eyes and Carla smoothed the flyaways back to join the rest of her hair as the lap bars lifted. Standing up to exit the ride, they held onto the headrests while the blood made its way back to their heads.

"Man, I wish Dad was here to see it," David said. For a moment, Carla imagined her dad standing in line with them, laughing and teasing them as they would wait to ride the Top Thrill Dragster together. She took a deep breath and smiled, "He would have loved it."

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"Please, just make sure that you at least try to hire somebody else, somebody outside of your comfort zone," Carla urged David one day as they were talking about what was new with his business. It might have been over the phone during a sibling catch up call, or it might have been at their mother's home in Iowa after their traditional



Thanksgiving Day turkey trot. David couldn't remember exactly when Carla said it. But it stuck with him.

As Carla learned more about racial injustice and became more vocal about racial equity over the years, she had tried to discuss it with her family. Over time, David stopped venting about difficult tenants who had trashed the rental property or who were behind in rent. David, concerned about his livelihood and the cost to the business, would look for empathy from Carla. But instead of extending empathy, Carla would launch into an analysis about underlying social injustice. David would listen to Carla and think to himself, "It's not that I don't care about these issues. I'm just frustrated. I just wanted to vent." He would shake his head in confusion, "She is committed to this almost to the point where I can't comprehend it." Carla's mother also grew more hesitant, not wanting to unknowingly trigger a social injustice issue that might lead to an argument between the two.

While David eventually stopped discussing any tenant issues in the rental business with Carla, he had never thought about or really cared about analyzing who he hired for his business before. As he reviewed applications for potential employees to hire for his property rental business, he pictured Carla's eyes intensely focused on him while her advice replayed in his head, "Somebody who's not just another white country dude like you."

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Eventually, Carla transferred to a new school when an administrator reached out to her to serve as a social emotional learning coach. While the student racial

demographics at the new school were more diverse than the previous school, the school's teachers reflected the national demographics of around 80% White. Carla continued to lead equity-centered workshops and anti-racism professional development focused on whiteness studies. She coached teachers to do their own internal work of decentering whiteness and becoming racially literate and anti-racist teachers, and she taught a social justice class for seventh grade students.

She also wanted to find a way to be more impactful, so she applied to the Urban Education PhD program at Indiana University. The same program where Meghan was enrolled. Carla was accepted. But when it came time to respond to the acceptance offer, Carla didn't think she was ready. She declined the offer and became more invested in the racial equity work in her district and her community.

Sitting on her couch two years later, under a painting of the Buddha, Carla's fingers perched on the laptop keys as she reapplied to the Urban Education program. Carla had spent the previous two years leading racial equity professional development at the district level. George Floyd had recently been murdered. COVID-19 had ravished the globe. Once again, the racial inequities that Carla had come to understand seven years prior and had been working to address in her district and community were hypervisible. She decided that it was time to take the next step. Like most weekends or evenings, Adam might have sat nearby watching episodes of *Shameless* or *Game of Thrones*, Carla "watching" with him as she worked on her computer.

As Carla filled out her application, she thought about areas where she had grown, like how she had shifted her focus on social emotional learning and mindfulness from

breathing and brain breaks to addressing the systemic injustices and inequities that threaten the social emotional well-being of their district’s students of Color. But Carla also thought about the blind spots she was still uncovering. Like when her Latinx friends called Carla out for her public post praising *American Dirt*.<sup>35</sup> Carla had not realized that the book included problematic and stereotypical portrayals of Latinx people. When her friends confronted her, she had been mortified at her lapse in judgment, repented and educated herself to address her implicit biases.

As she thought about this humbling experience, perhaps Carla was reminded of one of her favorite Ricky Lee Allen quotes—one that leaned on whenever she became aware of another area of whiteness that she needed to address—“Whites must first accept that they are, at best, ‘antiracist white racists.’”<sup>36</sup> I am never going to be sufficient or enough, she reminded herself as she continued typing, “I am humble, and I have a lot of work still to do. But I feel okay because I find ways to align moments like these with my core values and choose courage, humility, and vulnerability.”

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<sup>35</sup> Cummins, J. (2020). *American dirt*. Philippe Rey.

<sup>36</sup> (Allen, as cited in Matias, 2016, p. 94).

## Maya's Story

### Road Trips to Realization

Maya stood posing under the steel and concrete arches of a bridge named in honor of United States senator, Confederate general, and “Grand Dragon” Ku Klux Klan leader, Edmund Pettus. On the crossbeam above Maya, rust peeked through the gray paint and from under the edges of the large black letters spelling the name of the man who, after the Mexican American War, volunteered his services to support the genocide of the Yukis and other Native American tribes in California and who used his power as a lawyer and politician to disenfranchise Blacks and create a slave-like society.<sup>37</sup> Beneath her feet, Maya could hear the water rushing ferociously around the concrete pillars and fluidly curved arches supporting the 1,248 feet of bridge spanning the Alabama River.

Standing on the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Dallas County, Alabama, Maya, a mother of three from Mankato, Minnesota, was in her mid-thirties at the time. Her sunglasses perched in front of her blue eyes, and sunscreen shielded her pale Norwegian skin from the midday July sun. Sweat soaked through her gray tank top, one of the many neutral-colored shirts that she typically wore and that tended to reflect her calm and measured personality. While Maya posed on the bridge, Jackie, a spunky middle-aged White woman, positioned her camera to frame Maya, the overhead arch ribs and portals and Edmund Pettus' name in her viewfinder. Jackie used her sunglasses to push back her damp blonde bangs and tilted her hip to shift her fuchsia crossbody bag to her side as she found the best angle for the shot.

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<sup>37</sup> Whack, E. (2015). Who was Edmund Pettus? *Smithsonian Magazine*.

They tried to be quick. Jackie checked the time and counted the minutes until they needed to drive to the next stop on their civil rights' itinerary. As Jackie deliberated if they had enough time to walk across the bridge before they headed to the lynching memorial, Maya clasped her hands and worried to herself, "What if a person of Color drives by and see two White ladies taking selfies? Will they think we are being disrespectful?" Maya thought about her photo albums of all the historical places she and Jackie had visited. She treasured being able to share the photos with her students and hoped that taking photos at the bridge would not appear insensitive to people of Color. "I want to honor the civil rights history of the bridge, not the KKK leader," Maya reasoned.

Then, Maya shifted to worrying about white supremacists who might drive by and see them acknowledging this place. Even though the bridge still bore the name of the "Grand Dragon" KKK leader, the Edmund Pettus bridge had made news throughout the world and brought urgency to passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>38</sup> It was later designated as a national historic landmark to honor the civil rights movement.<sup>39</sup> Maya wondered, "Would white supremacists become angry that two Minnesotans came to see this historic civil rights site?"

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<sup>38</sup> Lyman, B. (2020, July 18). Rename Edmund Pettus Bridge for John Lewis? Some civil rights veterans Say no. *Montgomery Advertiser*. <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2020/07/18/rename-edmund-pettus-bridge-john-lewis-some-activists-say-no-selma-alabama-decision/5465094002/>.

<sup>39</sup> Auburn University. (2021, March 6). The Selma project. <https://cadc.auburn.edu/the-selma-project/>. Civil Rights Trail. (n.d.). Edmund Pettus Bridge. <https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/edmund-pettus-bridge/>.

Klein, C. (2015, March 6). How Selma's 'Bloody Sunday' became a turning point in the civil rights movement. *The History Channel*. <https://www.history.com/news/selma-bloody-sunday-attack-civil-rights-movement>.

In July of 2018, while most of their fellow teachers were either working a summer job, heading to the lake, or spending time with their children, Maya and Jackie loaded up Maya's Honda CRV with enough comfortable clothes, mini bags of chips, and diet Cokes to last them eleven days. The two had spent Mankato's winter months creating an itinerary for their fourth annual history road trip. They combed the internet for civil rights museums and national landmarks across the United States. They mapped and arranged the sites on google maps like a jigsaw puzzle, trying to cover as many sites as possible during their time on the road. They calculated the driving distances, compared the hours of each site's operation, and estimated the amount of time they could spend at each historical site. They each read at least twenty books about the history of the sites they planned to visit.

On this trip, Jackie and Maya would end up driving about 4,800 miles, stopping in 12 states across the southeast and Midwest to visit the places where seminal events in the civil rights movement took place. After eleven days on the road, they would be eager to head back to family and home cooked food in Minnesota.

At the bridge, as older model cars and pickup trucks with peeled and faded paint drove across, some slowed down. White elbows and faces leaned out of open windows. Cold eyed and straight lipped, locals stared at the two blonde haired White women snapping photos on the bridge. Maya's eyes ping-ponged from the cars to the camera, to the river. When one of the cars slowed down Maya thought, What if they yell at us? What if they call me a bitch or curse at us? What if I swear back at them? Her muscles tightened with awareness that some of the White people might see the two tourists with

their Minnesota license plates and be upset that they were honoring the historical civil rights site of Bloody Sunday.

In Dallas County in 1965, Whites continued to oppress Blacks and deny them the right to vote despite the passing of The Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>40</sup> Selma, where the Edmund Pettus bridge is located, was known for being one of the most severe places for barring Blacks from the voting polls. In 1965, only 2.1% of Blacks eligible to vote were registered in Selma,<sup>41</sup> and as Martin Luther King Jr. noted in the *New York Times*, there were more Blacks in jail than were registered to vote.<sup>42</sup> Blacks protesting peacefully were met with violence from White police. On Sunday, March 7, 1965, about six hundred civil rights activists from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) organized at the Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma.<sup>43</sup>

Twenty-five-year-old John Lewis, the leader of SNCC at the time who had been organizing efforts to register Black voters in Alabama, stood at the front of the marchers.<sup>44</sup> With his lips drawn and back straight, the son of Alabama sharecroppers who

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<sup>40</sup> Burns, J. (n.d.). Bridging history documentary: Selma and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. *History, Art & Archives/House of Representatives* <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/Civil-Rights/VRA-Documentary/>.

<sup>41</sup> Porter, D. (Director). (2020). *John Lewis: Good trouble*. [Film]. Magnolia Pictures.

<sup>42</sup> Equal Justice Initiative. (n.d.). On this day-Feb 01, 1965, Dr. King and hundreds of voting rights activists arrested. <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/feb/1>.

King, Jr., M. L. (1965, February 1). Excerpt from "A Letter from a Selma, Alabama, jail." *2012 The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*. Retrieved from [www.gilderlehrman.org](http://www.gilderlehrman.org).

<sup>43</sup> National Park Service. (n.d.). Alabama Brown Chapel AME Church Selma. <https://www.nps.gov/places/alabama-brown-chapel-ame-church-selma.htm>.

<sup>44</sup>Details included from this history were gathered from photographs and the following interviews/videos: Channel 4 News. (2021). *The life of US civil rights hero John Lewis*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/W1ZP-hDQ8m0>.

Horne, R. [Atlanta Journal-Constitution]. (2021). *Bloody Sunday: Rep. John Lewis remembers the fateful day in Selma*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBCTUmTf4GE>.

had rallied 200,000 people alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington two years earlier, and who would one day become a United States congressman, placed his hands in the pockets of his beige trench coat. John's backpack rested on his petite frame. He had already been arrested at least three times before for peacefully protesting segregation in Nashville, Tennessee. In his backpack, he had an apple, orange, book, and toothbrush just in case he was arrested again.

Alongside Lewis, stood Hosea Williams, who was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s chief field lieutenant and known for his ability to organize and lead masses of people in nonviolent protests. Williams stood in for King as the leader for the SCLC for the march. Williams, in his black wool coat and wider build, seemed to tower over Lewis.<sup>45</sup> The two walked side-by-side as they exited the church, leading the group of six hundred in what they planned to be a 54-mile march to the state capital. The procession of mostly Black men and women in wool and plaid overcoats made its way through the six blocks of Selma neighborhoods to the Edmund Pettus bridge. Like Lewis, some marchers carried sleeping mats, suitcases or overnight bags in preparation should they be arrested and sent to jail.

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Los Angeles Times. (2015). Selma 50 years later: Remembering Bloody Sunday. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn6uQBDAr\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn6uQBDAr_U).

Porter, D. (Director). (2020). *John Lewis: Good trouble*. [Film]. Magnolia Pictures.

TED. (2019, November 19) *John Lewis and Bryan Stevenson: The fight for civil rights and freedom*. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCqR9LbT1\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCqR9LbT1_w).

Time Magazine. (2017). *John Lewis: The Selma to Montgomery marches*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRwnXUbJdfg>.

<sup>45</sup> Hosea Williams. (2022, April 5). In *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosea\\_Williams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosea_Williams).

Porter, D. (Director). (2020). *John Lewis: Good trouble*. [Film]. Magnolia Pictures.



As Maya stood on the bridge fifty-three years after Bloody Sunday, taking photos, she imagined what it must have been like for John Lewis, carrying his backpack filled with books, fruit, and his toothbrush at the front of the march. She envisioned his reaction as he would have approached the highest point on the bridge and seen a sea of helmets blocking the road on the other side. Under those helmets, White men grimaced and stood or sat on horses waiting. The sun would have reflected off the State trooper and police badges on their uniforms. Grasping their night sticks, with gas masks and tear gas canisters stashed in their belts, the men waited.

Governor Wallace, who in his first inaugural address as Alabama governor in 1963, had declared “segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever,”<sup>46</sup> and who, six months after his inaugural address, had publicly stood in the way of two Black students attempting to enroll at the University of Alabama, had ordered the state officers to use whatever means necessary to stop the march. Behind the officers, a posse of White men had gathered on horses, perhaps as reinforcements should the officers need extra help with stopping the nonviolent protestors. White onlookers stood beside their cars parked in the lots of the White owned Haisten’s Mattress and Awning Company store, Henderson’s tractor store, and the 15¢ Hamburger shop. Their confederate flags of all sizes either sprawled out of the car windows or were fastened on the antennae. The

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<sup>46</sup>George Wallace. (2022, April 16). In *Wikipedia*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Wallace#cite\\_note-segsymbol-7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Wallace#cite_note-segsymbol-7).

Raines, H. (1998, Sep 14). George Wallace, segregation symbol, dies at 79: Former Alabama gov. George Wallace, 79, a symbol of segregation, dies. *New York Times*.(p. B13).  
[http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/george-wallace-segregation-symbol-dies-at-79/docview/109867194/se-2?accountid=4485\\_](http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/george-wallace-segregation-symbol-dies-at-79/docview/109867194/se-2?accountid=4485_)

onlookers gathered at the sidelines, as if they were attending a high school football game. Newspaper and television reporters stood with the White onlookers, their camera lenses focused on capturing the anticipated confrontation between the White mob and Black marchers.

Lewis and Williams continued to lead the six hundred marchers across the bridge until they were less than ten yards from the officers.

“This is an unlawful assembly,” an officer’s voice crackled over the megaphone. “This march will not continue.” The officers fastened their gas masks to their faces while the megaphone crackled, warning the protestors that they had two minutes to end the march and return to the church.

May we pray? Williams asked as they stood on the street in front of the 15¢ Hamburger shop billboard. The voice on the megaphone crackled no. At the front of the line, Lewis stood with his hands in his pockets, staring at the sea of officers grasping their nightsticks. Williams held his nose, as he watched some officers reach to their belts for the tear gas. The men and women behind Lewis and Williams stood with their backs straight and hands clasped or down at their sides.

Perhaps Lewis’ chest became tight and his breathing shallow as he prepared for what would come next. Perhaps he reminded himself quietly of the words he had spoken at the March on Washington, “We want our freedom, and we want it now. We do not want to go to jail. But we will go to jail if this is the price we must pay for love, brotherhood, and true peace.”<sup>47</sup> Or perhaps Lewis watched the mob as they marched

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<sup>47</sup> Now This News. (2021). *John Lewis' historic speech at the march on Washington*. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCqR9LbT1\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCqR9LbT1_w).

toward him, the officers' boots and horses' hooves growing louder with each step they took on the pavement. Either way, Lewis and the others remained standing for their right to vote.

Whistles began to shrill. A group of Alabama state troopers, in their blue uniforms, formed a wall and pushed Lewis, Williams, and the others at the front of the line. Before Lewis knew what happened, an officer raised his nightstick and hit him on the head. Lewis' knees went out from under him. He lay on the ground, his skull fractured. The White officers continued to plow into the unarmed men and women in their church coats with their hands clasped or at their sides. The White onlookers shouted and jeered as the White officers raised their nightsticks and hit Black men and women's heads.

Reporters captured footage of horses stampeding the unarmed through clouds of tear gas. They caught glimpses of nightsticks through the clouds as officers on horseback raised up their arms, aiming to strike the heads of victims choking on the tear gas. "Typical southern justice! You nothing but a bunch of bullies," one man could be heard yelling at the mob while a reporter filmed the assault of what one newspaper later described as a "forest of threshing arms and legs and clubs."<sup>48</sup>

After the tear gas clouds dissipated and the White mob was satisfied with stopping the march, some of the peaceful protestors made their way between the state trooper cars and around the dropped suitcases, sleeping mats and bags littering the street. They helped carry the injured back across the bridge to Brown Chapel. Seventeen people,

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<sup>48</sup> Newspaper footage retrieved from Los Angeles Times. (2015). Selma 50 years later: Remembering Bloody Sunday. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn6uQBDAr\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn6uQBDAr_U).

including John Lewis, were hospitalized and about one hundred people were injured from the White mob on Bloody Sunday.

A week after Bloody Sunday, as John Lewis recovered from his head injury and news outlets across the country and the world televised the violent injustice inflicted on peaceful citizens requesting their right to vote, President Johnson announced to Congress that he planned to submit a Voting Rights Bill to Congress. SNCC and the SCLC also gained President Johnson's approval and support from the National Guard to continue their march for the right to vote.

Fifty-five years after Bloody Sunday, an eighty-year-old Congressman John Lewis reflected on his life's work of advocating for civil rights in an interview with CBS.<sup>49</sup> Appearing as calm as he did on the day of the march, Congressman Lewis, dressed in a white collared shirt and black sweater, with his brown skin as smooth as his bald head, said, "I was beaten, left bloody and unconscious, but I never became bitter or hostile, never gave up. I believe that somehow and someday, it will become necessary to use our bodies to help redeem the soul of a nation, and then we must do it."

It only took a few minutes for Maya and Jackie to take each other's photos, about as much time as the state troopers had given Lewis and the civil rights marchers to stop their march and return to the church. And after the stares, the White drivers who had slowed down and stared at them from their windows, would find their accelerators. The drivers would look back at the road leading them over the bridge, and Maya exhaled as she saw their Alabama license plates fade away. Jackie, who couldn't care less about who

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<sup>49</sup> CBS Mornings. (2021). *Rep. John Lewis' message to protesters fighting for racial equality*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxJGuHKZc0g>.

was stopping and staring, was eager to start their one-hour drive to The National Memorial for Peace and Justice. She headed towards the car as Maya spent a few more minutes at the bridge.

Maya looked over the railing, watching the ripples of the water move quickly down the river. She thought of John Lewis walking straight into the army of white supremacists where he, along with the other protestors, were beaten mercilessly with nightsticks, barbed wire, and bullwhips. She cringed as she remembered the news photographs and footage showing the protestors choking on tear gas as they were trampled by men on horses and crowds of White people cheered.

Maya leaned over the railing on the bridge, careful not to touch the steel baking in the sun, her gaze following the green trees lining the Alabama river as far as she could see. Perhaps she stood and listened to the swift moving water under the bridge or to the weathered vehicles crossing over the bridge. Maya thought back to when she had read Lewis' account of Bloody Sunday. John Lewis had looked over the bridge at the water and told the other marchers that he couldn't swim, so the only way to go was towards the White mob. As Maya reflected on the activists' sacrifice on Bloody Sunday and contrasted her own anxiety about the White people staring at her from their car windows, the reality of the hate, anger, and hostility that Whites directed at Southern Blacks sank in.

Wow, she thought. I was worried I was going to encounter a white supremacist, and I was prepared to give the finger to someone who cursed at me. But the protestors all knew they were going to encounter white supremacists. Lewis and the other protesters

knew white supremacists were going to do some awful things to them, and they knew they had to react in a nonviolent way in order to make a change. John Lewis did it even if it meant that he was going to go to jail, even if it meant he was going to get hit over the head, even if it meant he was going to have to go to the hospital. Maya shook her head, overcome with the extreme violence and hatred that people of Color had experienced during the civil rights movement.

While the theme of this road trip was to see as many civil rights sites as possible, summer road trips were not new to Maya and Jackie. As middle school US history teachers, Jackie and Maya had been eager to help their students understand our country's history in an engaging and meaningful way. Four years prior, Jackie and Maya had worked on rewriting their curriculum. One of the required units was the Civil War. Jackie, who did not care for battles, felt that she needed to visit the battle sites to connect with the history. Maya also felt that she needed to have a better understanding of the Civil War to teach it well. So, they decided to plan a road trip.

They made a route mapping all the Civil War sites that they taught to their seventh graders. During one week in the summer of 2015, they drove, as if on a marathon, stopping a half a day at each site. Prepared with their essential learning objectives, they knew what they wanted to photograph; they knew what videos they wanted to take, and they knew what questions they wanted to ask park rangers to answer to prepare their lessons. Maya had been nervous about leaving her three children for a week, her youngest only four at the time. But her husband Steve had assured her that they would survive for a week.

Pleased with the feedback from their students at the new artifacts and videos of park rangers teaching about the historical sites, the next year, Maya and Jackie decided to do the same thing with their Industrial Revolution and Immigration unit.

One of the stops on their itinerary was Franklin Delanor Roosevelt's presidential library. That morning, Maya and Jackie sat sipping their morning coffee in Maya's Honda Civic in the parking lot as they waited for the library to open and the first tour of the day. Usually, they toured the sites in under two hours and would hop in the Civic ready to drive to the next stop. But on this day, as they exited the parking lot, they spotted a sign "Val-Kill Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site." Eleanor Roosevelt has a site? We have to check this out, Maya thought.

Maya and Jackie took the detour from their tightly packed itinerary. They toured the small stone, stucco, and ivy-covered cottage that Eleanor had used as her personal retreat. As they walked through wood paneled and floored rooms with overstuffed floral armchairs, they learned that Val-Kill was where Eleanor and her two close friends, Nancy Cook and Marion Dickerman, would eat, sleep, and write. Eleanor had built the house to have her own space, away from her mother-in-law and husband.<sup>50</sup>

Jackie and Maya walked into the sun porch. Sunlight streamed through the windows and onto a twin sized bed, crossbuck table, windsor writing chair, and rich wood floor. Jackie, a connoisseur of interior design, pictured Eleanor sleeping on the sun porch with the windows open and fresh air. I would definitely want to live here, she

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<sup>50</sup> National Park Service. (n.d.). Eleanor Roosevelt national historic site: Val-Kill Cottage, New York. [https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/eleanor\\_roosevelt\\_valkill.html](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/eleanor_roosevelt_valkill.html)

thought. Maya felt connected to Eleanor as she imagined Eleanor having her own space to sit and write on the porch. As Maya stood on the porch, she started to think about all the other historical sites and presidential homes they had visited. There had been a woman who lived in those homes too, she thought. She was troubled as she realized that most of the sites only preserved the legacy of the male who lived there.

Maya had always loved history, but as a child she had wondered why history seemed to be only about men. In fact, the only woman she could remember mentioned in her history textbook was Susan B. Anthony, a photo with a caption saying that she helped with the 19th Amendment. Seeing Eleanor Roosevelt's cottage provoked Maya to start questioning what contributions the other half of the population made to history that most people aren't aware of because women are not generally mentioned in history. As Maya continued to seek out books and historical sites that were not just focused on what she called "white dude history," she also began to ask about the contributions of people of Color. As she grappled with the absence of representation of women and people of Color in US history, as Maya visited future historical sites, she would ask, "What about the ladies? What were the women's roles in this?" and "What about African Americans? Were there African American soldiers here? Were there enslaved people here?" The next two road trips that Maya and Jackie planned were focused on sites about women and African Americans who had contributed to US history.

Jackie thought the two made a perfect traveling team. They were both intent on learning as much about the historical sites as possible. Why waste time stopping at sit-down restaurants and relaxing by the hotel pool when they could be on their way to



another historical site? Jackie liked driving; Maya did not. Maya had a great sense of direction and knew how to use technology to navigate the route; Jackie did not. Jackie was a tremendous snorer, but when Maya took out her hearing aids, she could sleep just fine.

The summer after Donald Trump was elected, Jackie and Maya, incensed that a pussy grabbing man was in the White House, had driven over one thousand miles to New York. There they visited the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, and the homes/graves of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Harriet Tubman.

In Fort Hill Cemetery, they sat beside Harriet Tubman's grave, the early morning dew dampening their shorts. They had compared her seemingly ordinary headstone—lined with tiny pebbles, pennies, and seashells from admirers—in a nondescript northeastern cemetery with the grandeur of Martin Luther King Jr.'s.<sup>51</sup> As they sat in the solitude of the cemetery, Maya and Jackie reflected on all they had learned about Tubman's accomplishments despite her oppression. Female and a person of Color, born enslaved, Tubman devoted her life to helping other slaves escape; she was a spy in the Civil War, and eventually turned her own home into an African American nursing home.

Maya didn't know if it was real or not, but as she sat next to the grave, she swore that she could feel Harriet Tubman's energy. In the stillness of the cemetery, Maya checked herself, "Here I am, a White lady, complaining because forty-five got elected. I wasn't born a slave," she thought. "I didn't have to endure a massive head injury and run across Maryland at night to get my freedom."

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<sup>51</sup> Fort Hill Cemetery Association. (2021, September 17). Fort Hill Cemetery. <http://www.forthillcemetery.net/>.

After their civil rights road trip in 2018, where Maya and Jackie had stood on the Edmund Pettus bridge and reflected on John Lewis' leadership and resolve in the face of racial violence and oppression, Maya and Jackie took a break from traveling together. The following summer in 2019, Maya applied and was accepted to spend a week in the Teacher Dig Archaeology Expedition Program excavating Pine Alley—the enslaved community's quarters—on President James Madison's plantation. The program was designed by archaeologist and anthropologist, Dr. Alexandra Jones through her nonprofit Archaeology in the Community.<sup>52</sup>

Dr. Jones, an African American woman with a radiant smile and golden-brown skin, had once been a sixth-grade teacher herself. As an advocate for exposing children to the possibilities of archaeology, as well as for preserving African American cemeteries,<sup>53</sup> Dr. Jones had been disappointed that most states don't include archaeology in their standards or curriculum. Sidestepping the bureaucratic trenches, the archaeological visionary who has been known to wear a construction helmet and high-visibility safety vest while excavating throughout the United States and Caribbean,<sup>54</sup> or at other times a satin blouse and chandelier earrings while being filmed for archaeology educational

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<sup>52</sup> Archaeology in the Community. (n.d.). <https://www.archaeologyincommunity.com/>.

<sup>53</sup> Archaeology Now. (2021). *Archaeology of an African American Benevolent Society | Dr. Alexandra Jones & Delande Justinvil*. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZMHNxIJcwg&feature=emb\\_imp\\_woyt](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZMHNxIJcwg&feature=emb_imp_woyt).

Jones, A. (2021, February 23). Stop destroying African American cemeteries. *Anthropology Magazine*. <https://www.sapiens.org/archaeology/african-american-cemeteries-destruction/>.

<sup>54</sup> Cover Communications. (2020, August 31). Howard University graduate, Black cemetery expert, Dr. Alexandra Jones attacked for her research, telling the Truth. *Medium*. <https://covercomm.medium.com/howard-university-graduate-black-cemetery-expert-dr-2f7fdbbf11b0>.

Flewellen, A. (2014, January 10). Oral history project feature: Alexandra Jones. *Society of Black Archaeologists*. [Audio]. <https://www.societyofblackarchaeologists.com/archaeology-stories/dr-alexandra-jones/>.

videos with Vanity Fair,<sup>55</sup> decided to offer scholarships to twelve teachers for the weeklong training that provides continuing education credit with time for teachers to design lessons on archaeology and a holistic view of United States' history.

### **Mere Distinction of Colour**

Maya sat alongside another teacher on the light hardwood floor in the South Yard's reconstructed slave quarters at James and Dolley Madison's Montpelier plantation, Virginia. They sat in silence, looking up at the tiny fragments of dried red, brown, tan, and black piedmont clay bricks assembled to create the mosaic of a young, enslaved boy in *The Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibit. The pieces were intricately arranged to create his portrait. Although the mosaic was angled to display more of the right side of the boy's face, from his petite profile with his neutral facial expression, the boy's black eyes looked out from the collage. His eyes seemingly made eye contact with his viewers.

Maya had seen the brick mosaic earlier that week during a tour with about twelve other teachers, led by Dr. Mary Furlong Minkoff, a cheery archaeologist and curator of archaeological collections with fair freckled skin and thick brown bangs that seemed to anchor her sparkling eyes as she passionately shared about the artifacts in the exhibit. But now, Maya had returned to sit in front of the portrait as if it were a shrine and process what she had learned during her week-long teacher archeology expedition. She adjusted her glasses on her face and tucked her blonde hair behind her ears. As Maya stared at the boy, Dr. Minkoff's questions returned to her, "Well, yes, but how traumatizing is it for

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<sup>55</sup> Vanity Fair. (2020, August 27). Archaeologist reviews archaeology in movies, from 'Indiana Jones' to 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider'. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7wSTmhrZr0>.

your students if you don't teach them about the history of slavery? And how traumatizing would it have been to experience slavery?"

During that summer of 2019, under large white canvas tents, the teachers stood, squatted, or kneeled in the Virginia piedmont red clay as they worked alongside archaeologists in the units. The units were circular or rectangular holes—about three-feet deep and seven-feet wide—that punctuated Montpelier's pristine green lawn. Looking up from her unit where she sifted for nails, hairpins, pottery, and other remnant possessions of the enslaved, Maya, in her national park or Jason Mraz t-shirts spotted with sweat and red clay, would take in the landscape. Pine Alley lay in between Madison's restored four column, two-story colonial mansion and a restored garden folly.

Madison, known as the "Father of the Constitution," had been the fourth president of the United States, from 1809 to 1817.<sup>56</sup> He had joined the founding fathers in declaring independence from Britain while at the same time, denying independence to his enslaved African Americans. Madison's home, Montpelier represented "a historic site that is simultaneously a place where ideas of Liberty were conceived and, depending on 'a mere distinction of colour,' a place where the same ideas were systematically denied," reported the Montpelier Foundation.<sup>57</sup> As the week progressed, thanks to Dr. Jones' professional development sessions, Maya began to analyze the historical landscape from multiple

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<sup>56</sup> History.com Editors. (2022, March 22). James Madison. <https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/james-madison>.

<sup>57</sup> The Mere Distinction of Colour. (n.d.). 6 ways understanding slavery will change how you understand American freedom. *James Madison Montpelier*. <https://www.montpelier.org/learn/6-ways-that-understanding-slavery-will-change-how-you-understand-american-freedom>.

positions and perspectives, the dichotomy of freedom and slavery becoming more apparent.

In the evenings, Maya would sit in between the white columns on the front porch steps of the Madison mansion to watch the sunset. A small fox scampered across the yard as she looked beyond the wood picket fence, beyond the vast green field and forest to the Blue Ridge Mountains. As the sun slowly snuck behind the peaks, the sky above the mountains filled with streaks of pink and orange. At first, Maya was filled with awe at the beauty of the mountains. But then, she imagined how an enslaved person might see the same sunset. Instead of seeing the beauty of the mountains, they might consider them to be further imprisoning. It might be harder to escape with the mountains there, she thought. With that thought, the beauty of the sunset on the Blue Ridge dimmed.

In between digging and sweating in Virginia's humid summer, sorting bone, brick, iron, and slag in the air-conditioned lab, and professional development with Dr. Jones, the teachers went on tours located on the historical grounds. One of these tours included *The Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibit. Dr. Minkoff, along with some of Montpelier's living descendants, had curated the exhibit to evoke the experiences and humanity of the enslaved while also linking to the national story and legacy of slavery.<sup>58</sup>

Before *The Mere Distinction of Colour* exhibit was created or had a name, Dr. Minkoff and other Montpelier staff met with the descendant community to plan for how to share about the lives of the enslaved at Montpelier. The descendant community shared

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<sup>58</sup> James Madison's Montpelier (2020). Fate in the balance. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsvQEdsSZ\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsvQEdsSZ_8). Legacies. (2017). [Film]. A Northern Light Production.

two goals for the exhibit. First, they wanted to make sure that their ancestors were presented as fully dimensional human beings, not just as laborers or slaves. They wanted to make sure that visitors saw their more than three hundred ancestors' curiosity, creativity, intellectual gifts, knowledge and skills, their religious faith, and family relationships.<sup>59</sup> One descendant community member, Leontyne Peck, shared in a Montpelier video, "It won't be fully restored, we know that, but this is a step in the right direction to tell their story. Their story needs to be told. They weren't invisible. They were someone's great-great-grandmother, great-great-grandfather."<sup>60</sup> Second, the descendent community was adamant that the exhibit did not leave the story of slavery in the past, but that it connected the enslavement of people at Montpelier to current issues of mass incarceration and police brutality.

Dr. Minkoff and the staff searched through the three million artifacts, considering which "material things" would address common misconceptions about slavery, connecting the past and present, and which objects would speak to the personhood of the enslaved. They gathered artifacts as small as five millimeters such as buttons and beads, and larger items like bricks and ceramic shards glued together to reconstruct a plate.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Montpelier Descendants Community. (n.d.). <https://montpelierdescendants.org/>

<sup>60</sup> Davenport, A. A. (2017, August 9). How this slave descendent is helping reframe history at Madison's home. *PBS News Hour*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/slave-descendent-helping-reframe-history-madisons-home>.

PBS News Hour. (2018). How this slave descendent is helping reframe history at Madison's home. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDVMryFZqPk>.

<sup>61</sup> Dig at Montpelier [@Montpelier\_Arch]. (n.d.). *Tweets* [Twitter Profile]. Retrieved March 10, 2022, from [https://twitter.com/Montpelier\\_Arch](https://twitter.com/Montpelier_Arch).

History@Work. (2019, February 1). The making of James Madison's Montpelier's "The Mere Distinction of Colour" Q&A: Part 2. *National Council on Public History*. <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/mere-distinction-qa-part-2/>.

Kamphuis, P. (2021, February 5). Unearthing history at Montpelier. *The Piedmont Virginian Celebrating the Good Life*. <https://piedmontvirginian.com/unearthing-history-at-montpelier/>.

They displayed these excavated objects, along with videos, oral histories, and documentary and architectural research throughout the cellar and the reconstructed quarters. Maya was a participant in one of Dr. Minkoff's first teacher tours at *The Mere Distinction of Colour*.

As the teachers made their way through the exhibit, Dr. Minkoff invited the group to share how they had learned about slavery in school and how they thought they might go back and share what they had learned at Montpelier with their students.

Maya shuddered as she remembered how she learned about slavery in her eighth-grade history class. Every day for a week, Mr. Davis quietly rolled the T.V. cart in front of the room, inserted the VHS of the mini-series *Roots* into the VHS player, and pressed play. Perhaps a student turned off the lights while Mr. Davis adjusted the volume and checked the T.V. cart to make sure it was positioned just right at the front and center of the classroom. But there was no introduction before nor discussion after the class watched Black men and women being whipped, mutilated, and raped by White slave owners, and Black children separated from their parents. As this "lesson on slavery" continued for the hour-long history class each day that week, Maya remembered watching in horror and thinking, What is this? Why are we watching this? This is horrible.

Now, as Maya sat on the floor in her neon blue rain jacket, khaki bermuda shorts and sneakers, she inspected the brick fragments for the small fingerprint marks left behind from the enslaved children as they made the bricks. Dr. Minkoff's explanation of

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Montpelier Arch Lab. (n.d.). *Small finds*. [Digital Photo Album].  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/139532405@N03/albums/72157664803063166/page2>

the mosaic's historical context replayed in her head, "Brickmaking was considered a relatively easy task for children to do, and so, that's what they did all day. They spent their time making these bricks and letting them dry in the sun. The bricks made up the foundations of all the buildings on the plantation."

Gazing up at the portrait, Maya was filled with conflicting emotions. She was in awe of how the artist had managed to powerfully portray the childhood of an enslaved person at Madison's Montpelier; yet gravity seemed to increase as she thought about the injustice of enslaved children. A little boy made these bricks instead of going to school, instead of staying with his mother, his father, instead of playing with other kids. He was making these pieces of brick, Maya thought.

Maya may have thought about the porcelain doll feet that Dr. Minkoff commonly invited teachers to think about during the tour. One of the tiny doll feet was about a half an inch long, attached to a one-inch calf. Around the toes and upper calf, the alabaster porcelain was slightly tinged with Piedmont red clay from the South Yard. The other foot, presumably from a different doll, measured about two inches long, the jagged porcelain broken above the ankle. Wanting the teachers to connect the significance of the doll feet to childhood for enslaved girls, Dr. Minkoff would ask teachers to consider who might have given this doll to an enslaved girl and why? A teacher would typically respond, saying something like, "Oh, the Madisons gave this to the enslaved child because it's an expensive gift."

Dr. Minkoff would agree and then invite the teachers to consider why the Madisons might do that. Are they being nice, or are they building an allegiance from the



enslaved children to the plantation owners and not to their enslaved parents? Dr. Minkoff would note that the porcelain doll feet came from a doll that was an expensive and breakable adult White woman. Elementary teachers' eyes would widen as they began to understand how deep the social conditioning of slavery spread, into the very "toys" that taught enslaved girls how to take care of the expensive, White, fragile adult woman.

Perhaps Maya returned her gaze to the boy's black eyes, or maybe she adjusted her position at the foot of the mosaic from sitting with her legs crossed and hands in her lap to extend her legs and lean back with her palms on the floor as she closed her eyes. Either way, she confronted her white privilege and started to consider how to have meaningful conversations and engage students in critical thinking about America's complex history. Maya told herself, "If I'm going to teach children about slavery, yes, I could upset them. I might make them feel uncomfortable. They might be somewhat traumatized, but they're in a school. They're able to be kids. They're not enslaved like this little boy was."

### **Inclusive History**

Maya returned to Mankato, Minnesota the next school year prepared to teach inclusive history. She threw away her Junior Scholastic articles on The Underground Railroad that she had used as security blanket lessons. Instead, she drew on primary sources and artifacts and videos from the Southern Poverty Law Center to support her students in understanding and analyzing the history of enslavement in the United States.

As Maya presented her students with a photo of an enslaved man with scars on his back from being whipped, or a document from a slave auction, or a written account of

parent and child separation, she helped her students process the history of slavery. She responded to their questions: Why did they do that to people? Why did they separate the moms and the kids? Why didn't they let them get married? Why did they make the husbands go to different plantations? They talked about control. They talked about how White enslavers did not see the enslaved as people with feelings but instead saw them as property to be owned and controlled. She wanted her students to understand the evil of slavery while taking the time and space to process it together.

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On May 25, 2020, about eighty miles or an hour and a half drive from Maya's home, George Floyd, a Black man arrested for trying to use a counterfeit \$20 bill, was murdered by Derek Chauvin, a White police officer. Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds.<sup>62</sup> Floyd called for help, pleading with the officers "more than 20 times he could not breathe as he was restrained," and then finally gasping, "You're going to kill me, man," reported the BBC.<sup>63</sup> A video recording from a bystander flooded the news and internet. As Maya watched George Floyd's murder, the brutality and extreme injustice of his death hit her. As riots protesting police brutality and racial injustice spread throughout Minneapolis, some of Maya's friends and colleagues were more upset about property destruction than the murder of a man.

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<sup>62</sup> Bogel-Burroughs, N. (2021, March 30). Prosecutors say Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd for 9 minutes 29 seconds, longer than initially reported. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/us/derek-chauvin-george-floyd-kneel-9-minutes-29-seconds.html>

<sup>63</sup> BBC News: US & Canada. (2020, July 16). George Floyd: What happened in the final moments of his life. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726>

Maya remembered having some difficult conversations with her friends and colleagues, “What’s more important to you, a man’s life or your white picket fence?” she would ask them. “Fences can be rebuilt,” she would urge. “People are more valuable.”

At the time of George Floyd’s murder, Congressman John Lewis, at eighty years old, was less than two months away from losing his battle with pancreatic cancer. Despite his rigorous treatments and rapid weight loss, he spoke out against the injustice. “How many more? How many more young Black men will be murdered?” he asked as he watched the footage of George Floyd’s murder.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, as Congressman Lewis saw the global protests, he shared on CBS news that he was encouraged at the world’s response to the injustice. Sitting in front of his computer, his fragile, elderly body shifted and rocked to emphasize his words while his voice remained steady and calm, saying that “it was another step down a very, very long road toward freedom, justice for all humankind.”

As Maya attended some of the protests that Congressman Lewis may have seen on the news, and as she attended some Black Lives Matter events, she was struck by racism that she had never experienced as a White woman. She thought to herself, “If I take off my equality shirt and put down my sign, these white supremacists don’t bother me. But people of Color can’t escape it. They always have to deal with this.”

Between the injustice of George Floyd’s murder, her frustration at some of her friends’ and colleagues’ reactions, and the white supremacist displays that tried to silence people of Color at the Black Lives Matter events that she attended, Maya thought, “I need

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<sup>64</sup> CBS Mornings. (2021). *Rep. John Lewis' message to protesters fighting for racial equality*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxJGuHKZc0g>.

to do more.” She wondered how she could get more people to listen to perspectives outside of the mainstream White historical and social context. She considered how she could help amplify people whose voices needed to be heard, people whose stories needed to be told. She decided to create a podcast to educate people on an inclusive history of the United States.

While Maya’s husband Steve and her youngest son watch *The Office* or *Big Bang Theory* in the living room, Maya, wrapped in a fleece throw on her brown leather couch, began reading books and articles about groups of people often left out of the US historical narrative. She sought out perspectives from LGBTQ+ history to slave narratives, and women’s rights suffragists to civil rights advocates, and women and African American inventors to the history of Native American Boarding Schools. As she read, she took notes in her college ruled spiral notebooks of what she learned. These notes later turned into information that Maya currently shares on her podcast to teach her audience a more inclusive American history.

While some of her thirty-minute episodes feature her and other guest co-hosts sharing the historical information that Maya has researched, Maya also interviews people to share about their work and experiences, inviting guests such as refugees from Afghanistan and South Vietnam, a park ranger from a Civil War site, and a Black scholar to share about the history and significance of Juneteenth. Her reason for creating these interview episodes is because Maya, inspired by Michelle Obama, believes that “it’s harder to hate up close.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Obama, M. (2021). *Becoming*. Crown. (p. 389).

Using her scripts from reading and research or the interview questions for her guests, Maya records the podcasts in a home office that used to be her daughter's bedroom before she left for college. After six to twelve hours of researching, recording, and editing each episode, she uploads the episode. Steve promotes it on his LinkedIn for his colleagues and clients.

In one of Maya's most recent episodes, she quotes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who wrote "Whites, it must frankly be said, are not putting in a similar mass effort to reeducate themselves out of their racial ignorance. It is an aspect of their sense of superiority that the white people of America believe they have so little to learn."<sup>66</sup> While Maya has committed to continue her ongoing work to reeducate herself and others, she also calls for other White people to take action to address their racial ignorance, support honest historical education in public schools, read books written by people of Color, and stand up to racism and injustice.

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<sup>66</sup> King Jr, M. L. (2010). *Where do we go from here: Chaos or community?* (Vol. 2). Beacon Press. (p. 10).

## **Jennifer's Story**

Jennifer looked out the window as she and John drove through a neighborhood in Maricopa County, Arizona to deliver the bags of sheep brain dissection supplies to Jennifer's students. Air conditioner units hummed and dripped as they sagged out of the small windows, framed by the chipped paint on the trim of the single story attached apartments built in the 1970s. With the oils stains and cracks adorning the asphalt parking lots, it seemed that perhaps the asphalt had been around almost as long as the homes. While Jennifer had taught at the Title I middle school for over a decade, and was aware of some of the financial challenges that her predominately students of Color faced, she was not familiar with the neighborhood. Hmm, these homes are not in the best part of town, the White twenty-eight-year veteran teacher thought.

In Fall 2020, some students put on their masks and came back to school in person while other students, cautious of COVID-19, chose to attend school remotely. Out of the twenty-five students enrolled in Jennifer's Medical Detectives' class, eight of those students had signed up for remote learning. Jennifer's principal had been against hybrid learning at the time, advocating for teachers to teach classes where students were either all in person or all remote.

Jennifer had pushed back. Her students would have had to take a prerequisite class to enroll in the Medical Detectives class. "No, they earned their spot in here," Jennifer responded, offering to teach the class as a hybrid. While Jennifer did not mind teaching the class as a hybrid so that all her students could participate in the class, this created a challenge when the time came for dissecting sheep brains. "This will be so

boring for the remote students to just watch through Zoom,” Jennifer thought. She wanted to make sure all students could participate in the dissection. Jennifer approached John, the school’s security specialist and Jennifer’s kayaking friend, about the possibility of delivering the brain dissection kits to the students’ homes.

John, who lived in the area and knew the neighborhood well, agreed. So, Jennifer gathered the materials for the dissection. She placed a sheep brain, scalpel, pick, tweezers, magnifying glass, latex gloves, labels, and a takeout food container in each of the eight grocery bags. Jennifer and John loaded the bags, along with Jennifer’s therapy dogs, into the district vehicle. John drove to each of the student’s addresses. As they pulled up to a student’s home, Jennifer would grab a bag, set it by the front door, ring the doorbell, and walk about six feet away from the door.

At one of the homes, Jennifer watched as the front door, lumpy from many coats of brown paint over the years, opened and some children ran out to inspect the mysterious grocery bag. Her student Sergio spotted Jennifer at the curb, smiled, and waved. He untied the bag as the siblings nudged each other, trying to peek inside. “Keep the scalpel away from the little kids,” she cautioned.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Sergio said, retying the bag as his siblings jumped around him on the sidewalk. Jennifer counted four children. She took another look at the apartment. That can’t be any more than two bedrooms, she thought. She was surprised when she imagined the four children and two parents living in that two-bedroom apartment. As Jennifer and John finished delivering the sheep brain dissection kits to the students, Jennifer thought about the downtrodden apartments in the rougher areas of town

that they had visited. Thinking about her students, he realized, “my kids really are pretty brave for the things that they go through and endure and still have a smile on their face.”

Recently, Jennifer received significant state recognition and an award for her teaching and work designing a STEM program at her Title I middle school serving predominantly students of Color. With the help of a donor, Jennifer offers five scholarships and transportation to the Aerospace Academy summer program for students of Color who cannot afford the tuition. To make sure that her students of Color can envision themselves in the STEM field, Jennifer invites people of Color who work in engineering, aerospace, aviation, and air force to talk with her students about their experiences in STEM. She plans to continue using her platform from the state recognition to advocate for people of Color and girls to have a place in STEM. She is also working to build a STEM pipeline from the district’s elementary schools to middle and high schools.

Jennifer and I met shortly after she received her award. I was seeking self-identified White teachers who perceived that they had shifted from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and were engaged in both individual efforts and structural reform to address structural racism in education. I was impressed with Jennifer’s STEM program that seemed to mirror the STEM programs in school districts serving communities with a higher socioeconomic status. As we met for our first interview, I asked Jennifer to tell me her story of how she shifted from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism. “I would say it was probably kind of gradual,” Jennifer said. “[T]here's like little blips in my teaching career that stick out to me.”



## **Women Not Welcome**

As a wildlife biology major at Arizona State University (ASU) sometime between 1989 and 1990, Jennifer's dream had been to study the animals in the South American rainforests. Perhaps she would lie awake at night, imagining that one day her boots would sink into the mud as she hiked under a canopy of kapok trees. The rain would soak through her khaki pants as she studied the ecology of poisonous frogs or the mating habits of scarlet macaw. In preparation for the Amazon, Jennifer had eagerly taken as many Spanish courses as she could to be able to speak with the other scientists in the South American rainforest.

When she learned that an ASU professor had just returned from the Amazon rainforest, she made an appointment to meet with him. It seemed like her feet barely touched the floor as she walked down the hallway of Life Science Building A. I can't believe I am going to talk to someone who has actually worked in the Amazon, she thought as she passed the snakes housed in the walls of Reptile Row.

Jennifer reached Dr. Avery's office and sat down in the chair across from his desk. She could not exactly recall all that she and Dr. Avery discussed during the meeting, but at one point she began to tell Dr. Avery about her dream of working in the Amazon just like him. Dr. Avery listened quietly. Perhaps he crossed his arms and pursed his lips as Jennifer told him how much she admired his work and wanted to follow in his footsteps someday.

After Jennifer shared her dream with Dr. Avery, he may have paused for a moment, trying to form a response. In a calm voice he told Jennifer something along the

lines of, “I really appreciate you wanting to work in the Amazon, but down in South America, it’s a very machismo culture. They don’t take kindly to female scientists out there working with them in the rainforest.”

Jennifer stared at Dr. Avery. Perhaps her hands trembled slightly, and her legs felt as though they had turned to stone. Perhaps red splotches burst to the surface of her pale skin as she tried to understand what Dr. Avery said about her dream.

Jennifer didn’t remember how the conversation ended, but as she walked down the hall, past the snakes in their transparent cages, she thought about her dream. If I go down there, I’m going to be disliked and unwelcome. Jennifer thought about all the Spanish she had learned. She thought about her internship with Arizona’s Game and Fish. She thought about what it would have been like to breathe the humid heavy air of the Amazon. What am I going to do now? she wondered.

Gender discrimination in wildlife biology and other science fields is still a problem today.<sup>67</sup> But in 1989/1990, when Jennifer was discriminated against because of her gender, she shifted her career goals according to the hegemonic structures, from male dominated wildlife biology to the more acceptable female career of teaching. And while Jennifer did not consider this life event to be a blip in her journey of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism, she did see it as a major factor in her pursuit to encourage her students of Color and girls that they can choose STEM related careers if they so choose.

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<sup>67</sup> Anderson, W. S. (2020). The changing face of the wildlife profession: tools for creating women leaders. *Human–Wildlife Interactions*, 14(1),104–110.

Kobilinsky, D. (2016, January 20). USFS researchers provide insight into gender gap. *The Wildlife Society*. <https://wildlife.org/usfs-researchers-provide-insight-into-gender-gap/>

## **We Don't Talk Like That**

One of Jennifer's blips came early in her career, in 1996, when Jennifer was a fourth-grade bilingual teacher at a racially and linguistically diverse Title I school in Maricopa County, Arizona. She taught an English as a Second Language (ESL) class where half of her students were English language learners (ELLs), and the other half were native English language speakers. It was a typical fourth-grade classroom with perhaps a bookshelf, a globe and an American flag surrounding the classroom job bulletin board. In a corner, Neo, the class pet gerbil named after the Matrix, chewed on wood and cardboard in his cage.

Throughout the room, ELLs and monolingual English speakers talked with each other in English at their tables created by grouping sets of four desks together. Jennifer, with her blonde hair pulled back and wearing a denim dress over her blouse in typical 90's fashion, walked throughout the student tables, listening to the conversations during the daily English grammar lesson. Then, she would walk to the chalkboard at the front of the classroom to continue teaching another component of the grammar lesson. At some point during the lesson, she made a grammatical error. Twenty-five years later, she didn't remember exactly what grammatical error she made during the lesson but thought it might have been that she accidentally left out the present tense verb "is" or "are" from a sentence as she taught; something like "He funny" instead of "He is funny."

As soon as Jennifer heard her mistake, she corrected herself. "That's not how we talk," she said apologetically to the students.

“That’s how we talk at home,” Isaac, one of her students, said. Jennifer looked over to where Isaac sat with his group. Perhaps he kneeled on the chair and leaned his elbows on the desk as he shared with Jennifer and the class. A few of his black curls reached down to his light-colored eyes. Isaac was African American. Jennifer remembered the first day of school when Isaac’s father had dropped him off at the classroom door and introduced himself to Jennifer. Jennifer remembered him telling her, “If you need anything, you call me.” With Isaac’s kindness as he interacted with his peers and his eagerness to connect his home life and knowledge with school lessons, Jennifer never saw a need to call Isaac’s father.

As soon as she heard Isaac’s comment, Jennifer’s heart sank. Oh crap! she thought. I just insulted Isaac’s whole family.

“It’s okay,” Jennifer said, trying to backpedal her previous statement. “Well, sometimes at home and school we talk differently.”

She looked at Isaac and then the other students. Perhaps Isaac settled back into his chair or nodded his head. Jennifer did not notice a reaction from the other students as they continued with the lesson.

After that interaction, Jennifer thought more about what Isaac said. She thought, if Isaac said that he speaks differently, then maybe other students speak differently too. She considered how she might help students with understanding the differences in grammar at school and at home. She thought about BICS and CALP when learning a new language. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is the social, everyday language. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) focuses on academic language used

in the classroom.<sup>68</sup> Jennifer thought about how she could explain home and school grammar differences to students as similar to BICS and CALP. She also thought about informal and formal differences in the Spanish language. She thought about how if she were speaking to her husband at the time, who was Mexican, and their children, she would use the informal “vosotros” as in “y’all;” but if she were speaking to people she did not know, she would use the formal “usted” to communicate respect and less intimacy.

After that experience with Isaac, Jennifer was determined to make sure that her students would understand that at school she had to teach certain things about English grammar, but that if students spoke differently outside of school, it was perfectly fine. Twenty-six years later, Jennifer reflected on that moment of realization. She said, it “humbled me and made me realize that, you know, it's almost like when we had the Native American boarding schools, where we would send the kids and cut their hair off and refused their language, and their dress, and it's almost like, I need to stop thinking about making them like me and start making them like themselves and just giving them the tools to be able to function in the real world.”

### **Different Values**

Two years later, in 1998, Jennifer was still teaching fourth grade at the same school. A few days a week, Jennifer would receive a call from the office. As she was told that Valeria’s mother, Mrs. Hernandez had come to pick her up from school early again, she may have sighed, furrowed her brow behind her glasses, or stuffed her hand into a

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<sup>68</sup> Cummins, J. (2008). BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of the distinction. *Encyclopedia of language and education*, 2(2), 71-83.

jean pocket on her denim jumper. This is the third time this week, Jennifer thought. She watched as Valeria would gather her homework, sling her backpack over her shoulder, and leave the classroom 1 ½ to 2 hours early. While Jennifer and the rest of the students continued with the reading lesson, Jennifer worried that Valeria was missing valuable learning time. Over the past few months, Valeria, a quiet and pleasant fourth grader who spoke Spanish as her home language, had grown more comfortable with speaking English in the classroom. However, Valeria was still a bit low in some of her skills, and because she was an English language learner, Jennifer wanted to make sure that Valeria was not missing out on the literacy instruction.

One day, after a few weeks of Valeria's early pickups, when Jennifer received the call again that Mrs. Hernandez was picking Valeria up early, she approached Valeria. Maybe the other students were independently reading or discussing some aspect of the reading lesson, but as Valeria packed up her things and zippered her backpack, Jennifer leaned over Valeria's desk and asked her why she was leaving school early a few times a week. Valeria looked up at Jennifer, strands of her long dark hair framed her brown round face, "Oh, well, my mom picks me up early because I have to babysit my little brothers and sisters so she can go to work."

Oh dear, Jennifer thought. This is not okay. Jennifer didn't remember if it was on the same day that Valeria told her that she needed to leave school to babysit her younger siblings, or if it was the next time Mrs. Hernandez came to pick her up early, but Jennifer determined that she needed to talk to Mrs. Hernandez. Perhaps she asked another teacher

or the office secretary to come watch her students while she walked alongside Valeria to meet her mother.

Valeria may have run ahead of Jennifer to the car pick up area in front of the school where Valeria's mother's car sat idling. The light blue metallic paint of the older model sedan reflected the rays of the afternoon Phoenix sun. As Valeria grabbed the handle to the rear door, Jennifer bent her knees and leaned over to look in the opened passenger side window. Mrs. Hernandez sat at the wheel in her work clothes. Perhaps Valeria's siblings were in the back seat of the car, but Jennifer didn't remember. She was focused on talking to Mrs. Hernandez.

As Jennifer looked into the open window, she said, "I know you have to work, but Valeria has to be here to learn so that she can be successful. I know it's hard, but you need to find maybe another way to have someone watch your kids." Mrs. Hernandez's eyes grew wide, and her face became serious. Perhaps Mrs. Hernandez concentrated on understanding Jennifer's English, or perhaps she was worried about what this White American teacher said to her, or maybe she panicked as she tried to imagine how else she would find childcare while she worked to pay her family's bills.

"Yes, yes, okay," Mrs. Hernandez responded with her Spanish accent as she nodded her head humbly from the driver's seat. Jennifer removed her head from the passenger window and stood. Mrs. Hernandez shifted the car into drive and pulled out of the school parking lot.

Jennifer didn't think much of it at the time until perhaps later that week when during morning duty. Jennifer and another teacher, Mrs. Mohammedi monitored the

children, cautioning them to walk as they ran from the school buses and across the pavement to the playground in the morning. As they greeted and reminded the children to walk safely to the playground, Jennifer brought up the problem of high absenteeism, parents not doing what they should at school, and what happened with Valeria and her mother.

Mrs. Mohammadi, a middle-class Iranian immigrant, listened to Jennifer's complaint, then she reasoned, "But you know, that's kind of like our middle-class values we are trying to impose onto these students." She continued to explain to Jennifer that what they felt was important as middle-class teachers did not exactly always match what their students and their families who were economically disadvantaged felt was important.

The foundation of the tower of righteousness began to crack in Jennifer's mind. She continued to watch the children, talking to each other in Spanish, carrying their backpacks and soccer balls as they scurried to meet their friends at the playground. She stared at the playground and began to think about what she had said to Mrs. Hernandez. I just told her to find someone else to watch her children. I just assumed that there must be someone else that she could use to watch her kids other than her fourth-grade daughter. Jennifer's mind swirled as she continued to process her interaction with Valeria's mother through a lens of middle-class values. She thought, I just assumed that she could change her work schedule or find another job where she wouldn't have to make Valeria miss six hours of school each week.



At the time, Jennifer was unaware of the division of labor based on one's place in the racial hierarchy; the historical and structural conditions that relegated Spanish-speaking immigrants like Mrs. Hernandez to the "caste-like occupations at the bottom of the hierarchy—grocery clerks, bus drivers, package deliverers, sanitation workers, low-paying jobs with high levels of public contact.... the jobs less likely to guarantee health coverage or sick days but that sustain the rest of society."<sup>69</sup> After all, America had a four-hundred-year history of ensuring that African Americans, after they could no longer be legally enslaved, were restricted to barely paid or low paying service jobs such as sharecropping, cleaning, and cooking in service of Whites.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, many Mexican and Central American immigrants are relegated to manual labor jobs with no benefits, compensation below the minimum wage, and no prospects of mobility.<sup>71</sup>

At the time, Jennifer seemed to have gotten a glimpse of how she, as a White teacher who was operating out of colorblindness, perpetuated racism through White, middle-class values that marginalize students of Color and students not considered to be middle-class.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Wilkerson, I. (2020a). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. Random House. (p. 463).

<sup>70</sup> Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege'. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 36(2), 137-152.

Wilkerson, I. (2020a). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. Random House.

Wilkerson, I. (2020b). *The warmth of other suns: The epic story of America's great migration*. Penguin UK.

<sup>71</sup> Jefferies, J. (2009). Do undocumented students play by the rules?: Meritocracy in the media. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 6(1-2), 15-38.

<sup>72</sup> Baggett, H. C., & Simmons, C. G. (2017). A case study of white teacher candidates' conceptions of racial profiling in educational contexts. *Journal of Education*, 197(1), 41-51.

Matias, C. E. (2016). *Feeling white: Whiteness, emotionality, and education*. SensePublishers.

Nash, K. T. (2013). Everyone sees color: Toward a transformative critical race framework of early literacy teacher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 11(3), 151-169.

Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race ethnicity and education*, 12(2), 197-215.

Watson, D. (2011). "Urban, but not too urban": Unpacking teachers' desires to teach urban students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(1), 23-34.

Seeing Valeria's absence from this new perspective, Jennifer turned from the playground to look at Mrs. Mohammedi. "Wow, yeah, you are right," Jennifer said. She regretted what she had said to Valeria's mother. She analyzed how Mrs. Hernandez, an immigrant from Central America with limited English, might have viewed Jennifer as a White type of authority figure telling her that she could not take her daughter out of school to babysit her siblings. Jennifer wondered if she had said the same thing to parents at a higher income level, would they humbly agree with her like Mrs. Hernandez, or would they snap back at her for telling them how to raise their daughter?

Considering the difference in class and values, Jennifer continued to reflect on her own middle-class values and how she might restrain herself from forcing them on her students and their families who were more so in a survival mode and perhaps wondering where their next meal might come from. Shortly after her conversation with Mrs. Mohammedi, Jennifer stopped getting calls from the office requesting Valeria for early pickup. One day at dismissal, Jennifer made her way out to the car pickup area. She found Mrs. Hernandez sitting behind the wheel of her light blue metallic sedan. Jennifer leaned over to the open passenger side window and said, "You know, I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with your situation, and I didn't understand." Mrs. Hernandez looked at Jennifer as she continued, "Valeria still needs to be here, but I apologize if I came across rough." Mrs. Hernandez may have raised her eyebrows or dropped her jaw a bit. Mrs. Hernandez quickly responded, "Oh, no, no, it's OK." Jennifer felt as if Mrs. Hernandez was trying to say that she understood her point.

During the next five years, Jennifer would continue to notice and process class value differences. She would travel to Juarez, Mexico numerous times with her husband at the time and their biracial children to visit with his family and the schools there. It was in Mexico that Jennifer noticed cultural differences in the length of the school day and in the family-teacher relationships. She brought this learning back to the US and considered how she might revise her teaching practices and help her new students from Mexico transition more easily into their new school.

Jennifer eventually moved from teaching fourth grade to teaching at one of the middle schools in her district. She spent twelve years developing a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program as part of the school, after school, and summer curriculum. The school curriculum includes four core classes: Robotics, Engineering and Design, Flight and Space, and Medical Detectives. The after school and summer programs include FIRST LEGO League, Robotics Club, and Aerospace Academy.

Reflecting on her drive to provide her students with a robust STEM education, Jennifer said, “So, my goal is to get more STEM programs... so that they have exposure to those things. That's my goal, because my students are amazing kids, and it doesn't matter the color of their skin or their primary language. It's the fact that these kids are smart and deserve every opportunity that any other kid does, and the thing about our country is we can do that. There are other countries where they have castes, and you have no chance of having those better careers, where our students, I tell them, have every opportunity that everyone else has.”

As I listened to Jennifer, I wondered how she made sense of her own experience being shut out of the STEM field. I wondered about the experiences of my international friends of Color, pursuing STEM related degrees at US universities. Is it caste? Or is it merit? And if it is merit for those who do make it, merit at what mental, emotional, and physical cost?

### **Caste or Merit**

Dr. Scott raised his voice, “I am paying you 10 hours [research assistantship] RA and you did only this much work!” As the group of four international Indian students and one White American student met with Dr. Scott for their weekly research group meeting over Zoom, they each shared the work they had accomplished that week. One of the students, Raj, had just reported his progress of working on the tasks Dr. Scott had assigned him that week. Never mind that he was being paid for ten hours, Raj, like most other international Indian students, had been expected to work forty hours a week. Like the other Indian students in his group, he made sure to work the thirty extra hours without pay while trying to keep up with his three electrical engineering courses and lab work.

In the Spring of 2019, Raj, a thin and reserved twenty-something year old member of the elite Kshatriya (warrior) caste, ran his hand through the top of his thick black hair as he stepped off the plane from Delhi to start his master’s program in electrical engineering at ASU. Raj had previously spent two years working as a software developer at a multinational Indian company. While he was a bit skeptical about the fair treatment in western countries due to the Indian media broadcasting any hate related incidents in the US, he took the risk to pursue his graduate education at ASU. To finance

his education, he had taken a loan with an Indian financial institution and was eager to find a job to help stave off the 12-15% interest rate that was steadily accruing.

As an international with a student visa, Raj could only work at ASU. During his first semester, Raj applied for every possible part time job at ASU that he could find. He was never offered an interview. Most position recruiters responded that he was not a good fit for the job. “I don’t understand. What special skills are needed to serve food in the cafeteria, work in the library, or sit at a reception desk?” he said to himself. After one semester, he finally found a ten-hour research assistant position with Dr. Scott on a \$1.25 million-dollar National Science Foundation (NSF) funded project to design a step-based computer-aided tutoring system for teaching elementary linear circuit analysis. When Raj mentioned the job interview to his other Indian friends in the program, they warned him not to take it. “That guy is a jerk,” they said. They told him that Dr. Scott intentionally hired Indian students because it was easier to exploit the Indian students to work more, and Dr. Scott knew that Indian culture does not generally go against the establishment. But Raj, who was already living with three roommates and only eating fast food twice a day, needed the extra \$200 per week to survive. So, while Dr. Scott brought in his approximately \$145,000 yearly salary off the backs of international Indian students in a financial bind, Raj took the job.

Yet, even with his working thirty hours per week extra with no pay, Dr. Scott was not satisfied. His eyes menacing and eyebrows furrowed, the electrical engineering professor shouted, “If you continue like this, I will remove you from the job.” The Indian students sat quietly in their Zoom windows of their own personal computers; in whatever

quiet space they could find to work. Dr. Scott, despite demanding forty hours of work per week from his research assistants, expected them to supply their own work equipment and office space as they designed the tutoring system funded by that \$1.25 million dollar grant.

“Chris, why don’t you tell us what you did this week?” Dr. Scott’s tone softened as he asked the only undergraduate student and White research assistant in the group. Chris, who lacked the programming background that all the other members of the group had, updated the group on his work that week. Like most other weeks, Chris had completed the small task of adding a print button on a webpage that allows the user to print the webpage into a pdf file. The work would have taken him much less than the ten hours they were being paid.

“Excellent Chris!” Dr. Scott smiled and his face muscles relaxed. He directed his attention to the Indian students in the group, “Look at how fast Chris is learning and working. He’s so talented” Raj would stare with a blank expression. At first, he had thought how ludicrous it was that while he generated electrical circuit related questions and worked on the software algorithm and database to support the programs’ ability to formulate questions and answers on its own, Dr. Scott was praising Chris for such a simple task. But after a few months of the same behavior from Dr. Scott, Raj just counted the minutes until the meeting would be over.

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What is the bond-angle distribution at infinite temperature? Dr. Parker barked at Ali over Zoom. Ali sighed as he sat at his computer in the Mechanical Engineering Lab at

Arizona State University (ASU). This was probably the fourth “test” question that his White PhD advisor threw at him in typical interrogation fashion during their weekly meeting. Ali, with his Iranian accent, started to explain the bond-angle distribution as similar to a straight line.

“Well, let me ask you this,” Dr. Parker interrupted Ali when he realized Ali knew that answer. “What is the entropy of torsion potential?”

Ali furrowed his brow and bit his lip until his mustache and beard touched. Ali’s mind raced across the different variables and many different answers that would require him to make a chart in order to describe the entropy of torsion potential. As Ali thought about how to answer the question for a few seconds, Dr. Parker, satisfied that he had finally asked Ali a question he could not immediately answer, launched into his weekly insult ritual. He may have said something along the lines of, “Why are you doing this? You’re not fit for a PhD. Why are you wasting my time?” He may have veiled his arrogance as he encouraged Ali to drop out, or find a new advisor, or threatened that he was not going to fund him. Accustomed to the berating after two years, Ali sat in his cubicle quietly while he listened to Dr. Parker’s degradation. Ali thought, At least this time he didn’t tell me that I have the memory of a goldfish.

What other options did he have? Ali was already trying to survive as an international student with a one-way visa, while he worked for his advisor for free because his advisor did not have funding. He did not have permission to work outside of ASU and because of the sanctions on Iran, he could not take a loan or transfer money from his home country. Eating once a day, stretching his money to pay for his courses

and rent, Ali sought help from ASU's president, another White man. The president of the university passed Ali's concern along to another White man in his office. Platitudes were extended, asses were covered, and the unfortunate obstacles that non-White and non-American students endure continued outside of the limelight.

If he stood up for himself, Dr. Parker might treat him even worse or get him kicked out of the program. Ali thought about Dylan, the Alabaman engineering student with blonde hair and blue eyes. Dylan had been fully funded by his advisor and the department. He didn't have to go beg another department for a teaching assistant position to help cover his rent. He graduated easily without any publications and walked into a job at a highly esteemed National Lab. After Dylan graduated, Enrique, another PhD student—the son of Mexican migrant workers, who joined the military at seventeen and after touring in Afghanistan, decided to pursue engineering—had discovered that Dylan's coding results were littered with errors. As Enrique proceeded in the thankless work of correcting Dylan's errors, Enrique and Ali commiserated over Dylan's white privilege, knowing that they would never be allowed to slide through their PhDs with errors in their work as he did.

In higher education, White men are overrepresented in engineering as well as many other STEM degree programs.<sup>73</sup> In 2019, The National Science Foundation studying the diversity of engineering graduates from four-year colleges found that from

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<sup>73</sup> Lee, M. J., Collins, J. D., Harwood, S. A., Mendenhall, R., & Hunt, M. B. (2020). "If you aren't White, Asian or Indian, you aren't an engineer": racial microaggressions in STEM education. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 7(1), 1-16.

Yoder, B. L. (2015). *Engineering by the numbers*. Washington, DC: American Society for Engineering Education <https://www.asee.org/papers-and-publications/publications/college-profiles/15EngineeringbytheNumbersPart1.pdf>.



1996 and 2016, the number of Latinx graduates increased from 5.9% to 10.4% of graduates in the field. However, the number of Black graduates decreased from 4.7% to 3.86%.<sup>74</sup> The lack of diversity in STEM can be linked to limited access to quality education, lack of encouragement for young children of Color and girls to pursue STEM jobs, racism and sexism that students of Color and women experience at the university, and discrimination in recruitment and promotions.<sup>75</sup>

In Jennifer's belief of America as a meritocracy, I see a reflection of myself. I had once championed the same beliefs until I began to read the work of Michelle Alexander (2011), Deborah Hicks (2013), Zeus Leonardo (2004), and Monique Morris (2016). As I read about the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration, I began to understand America's racial caste system where the color of skin determines one's place and options for opportunity in the hierarchy (Alexander, 2011; Wilkerson, 2020a).

Pulitzer Prize author and journalist Isabel Wilkerson (2020a) describes America's four-hundred-year-old caste system in terms of hierarchy. In the hierarchy, white skin is at the top of the hierarchy, black skin at the bottom, and all other skin colors somewhere in the middle. From the beginning, those at the top of the hierarchy, Whites, believed in white supremacy and protected their solidarity to secure their place at the top. In fact, our caste system is so well formed that in 1934, when Nazis in Germany gathered to begin drafting the Nuremburg Laws, they poured over the American purity laws governing

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<sup>74</sup> Hamrick, K. (2019). *Women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in science and engineering. Special report NSF 19-304*. Alexandria: National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/wmpd>.

<sup>75</sup> (Funk & Parker, 2018; Lee et al., 2020).

racial hygiene, segregation, intermarriage, and immigration as their guide to institutionalize racism in the Third Reich (Wilkerson, 2020a, p. 110). From slavery, where Blacks were denied personhood and were tortured in forced labor camps to make a profit for their White dominators (Wilkerson, 2020a), to Jim Crow, where Blacks were trapped into enslaved working conditions as sharecroppers without rights (Alexander, 2011; Wilkerson 2020b), to mass incarceration, where our criminal justice system systematically targets and oppresses people of Color (Alexander, 2011; Evans-Winters, 2019; Morris, 2016), our racial caste system has evolved to uphold white supremacy.

One of the fathers of sociology, Max Weber (1993), argued that our American ideology of the meritocracy is influenced by Protestantism, perpetuating the following myths: (1) We should not be benevolent towards beggars; (2) God has a good reason for not creating everyone equally and/or giving everyone equal gifts; (3) Humans prove their worth/level of blessing from God through their work; (4) If a person is capable of work, but is unemployed, it is their own fault (p. 221). These myths remain central to the justification of racism in America today and are helpful tools for us Whites who want to explain away our privileges and excuse our domination at the expense of the races relegated to the lower ranks of the hierarchy (Crowley, 2019; Leonard, 2004).

When I think about Jennifer's championing of the United States' meritocracy, I wonder what would happen if our school districts had teachers read books like Wilkerson's *Caste* (2020a) and *The Big Test* (Lemann, 2000) instead of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Payne, 2005)? I wonder what would happen if White teachers were supported with learning about their white selves?

Critical Whiteness Studies scholar, Cheryl Matias calls for White teachers to “first learn about their white selves” before focusing on only students of Color (Matias, 2013a, p. 78). When White teachers “dismiss this notion of self-examination, they recycle the structure of race and white supremacy in education and society” (Matias, 2013a, p. 68).

At the close of one of our interviews, Jennifer shared, “I know I still have a ways to go in my colorblindness. And I don’t know if I will ever be completely cognizant of every single thing, but the effort is there, that I really care about my students, and I’m not trying to make them all in my image or anything like that.” But I wonder, if we as White teachers do not know what our image is, how can we make sure that we are not enforcing our values on our students of Color?

Jennifer has voiced her openness about continuing to learn and undo her colorblindness, and she is engaged in structural reform for her students of Color to receive STEM programs, funding, and exposure to people of Color working in STEM. However, without this examination of meritocratic ideologies and of the white self, it seems that Jennifer may continue in a cycle of “innocence, ignorance, or neutrality about race and racial issues” (Helms, 2020, p. 31).

## CHAPTER 5

### ASSERTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

“Therefore, just as White racial identity scholar Janet Helms (1990) asserts that in order to do work on racial identity development, that person ‘will first have to take the journey herself’ (p. 219) so too should White teacher candidates learn about their White identity beyond a mere recognition of being White” (Matias, 2013b, p. 70).

In this chapter, I discuss how Carla, Maya, and Jennifer’s pedagogical processes of transitioning from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy contribute to and in some ways contest the existing literature on White teachers’ awareness of racism and white supremacy. I also examine the teachers’ stories through Helms’ (2020) model of White identity development. First, I will analyze Carla and Maya’s process. Then, I will analyze Jennifer’s process. I conclude with implications for teacher education, the challenges and possibilities for conducting creative nonfiction research on topics of white supremacy and racism, and next steps in research looking forward.

#### **Carla and Maya**

When analyzing this study’s findings alongside the scholarly literature on White teachers becoming aware of race and racism, Carla and Maya’s stories align with Johnson’s (2002) findings in that both Carla and Maya grew in their awareness of race and racism through relationships with people of Color, participating in social justice organizations with racially diverse members, and from experiencing marginalization in childhood. Maya’s conversations and dinners with Dr. Jones during her archaeology trip helped her to understand the discrimination, oppression, and marginalization that African

Americans face living in the United States. Carla's friendships and working relationships with people of Color helped with shifting her to understand her white privilege and the oppression and marginalization that her friends and students of Color face. Maya's hearing impairment that led to her being labeled the r- word in elementary school and Carla's home life with parents who struggled with addiction and poverty placed them on the margins of White middle-class values centered in schools. Both Maya and Carla became involved with racial equity organizations in their communities to advocate for people of Color. They both perceived this work as important in working to dismantle the harmful structures of white supremacy in solidarity with people of Color.

Carla and Maya's stories also align with Matias' (2013b) call for White teachers to learn the history of people of Color that is silenced by the dominant Eurocentric curriculum. By studying a more inclusive history, teachers learn that "they must share in the burden to continually understand their students of Color in order to be effective teachers" (Matias, 2013b, p. 69). Carla spent time studying the history of segregation in education, as well as in the structures that led to mass incarceration. Maya spent time studying the history of the United States through African American, Native American, women, and LGBTQ+ perspectives. A common theme throughout their learning of history was the marginalization of social identities outside of the highest caste, White males, and each group's fight (1) to claim personhood, and (2) to celebrate their own identities.

**Table 4***Carla's Pedagogical pivot place and new condition of knowing*

<b>Pedagogical Pivot Place</b>	<b>New Condition of Knowing</b>
Teach for America, Mississippi Delta	"This (poverty, access to education) is a racial issue."
Processing Trayvon Martin, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> by Michelle Alexander, and father's addiction and death	Understanding of racial injustice; white supremacy harms POC Begins to understand white privilege
Teaching Spanish to heritage language speakers	White identity & racial consciousness
Critical Friend & master's program	Internal work - "How am I manifesting whiteness?"
Jeff Duncan-Andrade speech: "You need to work with White people"	Needs to do racial equity work with White people
Parkland shooting and White families' reactions	Interest convergence
PhD program	At best, I am an "antiracist white racist." (Allen, as cited in Matias, 2016, p. 94)

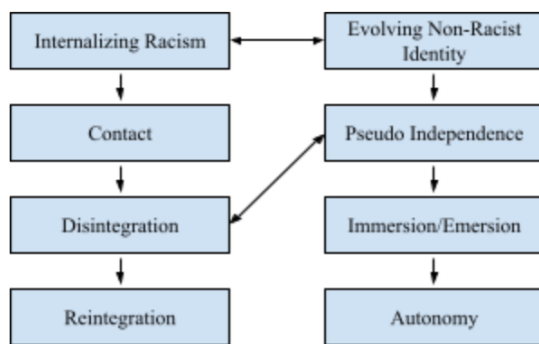
**Table 5***Maya's pedagogical pivot place and new condition of knowing*

<b>Pedagogical Pivot Place</b>	<b>New Condition of Knowing</b>
Hearing impairment	Outsider at school
Visited historic sites => Where are the women and people of Color (POC)?	I've been teaching "white dude history." What have women and POC contributed to history? Begins to understand her white privilege
Reading about women and POC in history	Women and POC have contributed a great deal to U.S. history
Archaeological expedition at Montpelier's enslaved quarters	Women and POC have contributed a great deal to U.S. history
George Floyd's murder	"I need to do more." Starts internal work
Teaching inclusive history to general population	Other voices need to be heard; other perspectives need to be understood

Analyzing Carla and Maya’s processes of transitioning alongside Helms’ (2020) Model of White Identity Development, their stories suggest that they are in the process of constructing a non-racist identity in the immersion-emersion schema. The moral re-education of other White people is a central theme in the immersion-emersion schema. Carla is working with other White teachers to understand white supremacy and the systemic inequities their students of Color face. Maya is creating podcasts to decenter whiteness in United States’ history and facilitating book studies with White community members on African American and Native American history. They have some awareness of the assets and deficits of being White. However, on a path of this awareness, Carla seems to be further along with this.

**Figure 4**

*Helms’ Model of White Identity Development* (Source: *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White People in Your Life* [Helms, 2020, p. 30])<sup>76</sup>



<sup>76</sup> Used with permission (J. E. Helms, personal communication, March 28, 2022; A. Lucido at Cognella Publishing, personal communication, April 4, 2022).

## **Jennifer**

While Maya and Carla's stories align with Johnson's (2002) findings, Jennifer's story does not. Even though Jennifer had developed close relationships with people of Color, specifically her husband and his family, and she personally experienced discrimination as a woman in a male dominated science field, her awareness of racism and white supremacy tended to vacillate between referentially acknowledging the harm of white supremacy to people of Color and perceiving the United States through colorblind and meritocratic ideologies. For example, while Jennifer related some of her pedagogical pivot places (i.e., teaching English grammar and her interactions regarding Valeria's absenteeism) to the White dominant middle class' historical marginalization of people of Color, she did not acknowledge structural barriers for people of Color in STEM. She also tended to assume a general connection between non-English speaking immigrants and poverty.

Analyzing Jennifer's process of transitioning alongside Helms' (2020) Model of White Identity Development, her story seems to not fit into a schema. Helms has stated that individuals may overlap between schemas as they evolve. While Jennifer exhibits some elements of denial or colorblindness in America as a casteless meritocracy, she had significant involvement with members of other racial groups. In some ways she might be in the contact schema, possessing "innocence, ignorance, or neutrality about race and racial issues" (Helms, 2020, p. 31). Through some of Jennifer's pedagogical pivot places and new ways of knowing, she seems to align with aspects of the reintegration schema as



she seeks to help her students of Color gain the exposure and skills of STEM while encouraging them that they can achieve anything they set their minds to in this county.

**Table 6**

*Jennifer’s Pedagogical pivot place and new condition of knowing*

<b>Pedagogical Pivot Place</b>	<b>New Condition of Knowing</b>
Discouraged from pursuing male dominated job	Women are not welcome in STEM
Bilingual teacher teaching English grammar to multilingual 4th graders	“I am not a savior.” Begins to examine how to be more culturally responsive
Student absenteeism interactions with parent and colleague	Begins to understand white middle class values
Visiting husband’s family in Mexico	Notices cultural differences and US discrimination against Mexican immigrants
STEM for women and POC	Recognizes the importance of STEM access for students of Color and students in poverty
Professional development on <i>A Framework for Understanding Poverty</i> by Ruby Payne	Begins to realize her middle class privilege Students are resilient despite their circumstances
Transitioning to remote learning during COVID	Continues to realize middle class privilege

Howard’s (2016) Framework of White Identity Orientations would describe Jennifer as an integrationist. Meaning that while the White individual acknowledges diverse perspectives and demonstrates a beginning awareness and some self-interrogation of the construction of whiteness, the individual continues to defend Western superiority. The White individual’s level of self-esteem is rooted in “helping others” and learning about other cultures while tacitly supporting White dominance (p. 105). Reflecting on Jennifer’s pedagogical pivot places and conditions of knowing, it seems that Jennifer vacillates between antiracism and whiteness (C. Matias, personal communication, April

14, 2022). Further exploration into the experiences of teachers like Jennifer would help us to better understand this vacillation.

### **Implications**

All three teachers shared that they were continually learning and in process in terms of understanding white supremacy and structural racism. Their acknowledgement of this speaks to speculative realism's process of becoming (Shaviro, 2014) and the continual process of becoming a nonracist White person (Helms, 2020) or antiracist white racist (Allen, as cited in Matias, 2016). While we as White people are in a continual process of becoming antiracist white racists, we must acknowledge that because of an ontology of immanence (St. Pierre, 2019), we will always carry residue of whiteness and racism with us. The history of white supremacy moves through us.

Carla, Maya, and Jennifer's stories may suggest that the work of critical whiteness studies—which “focuses on problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness, arguing that in doing so whites deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics” (Matias et al., 2014, p. 292)—is relevant in the work that White teachers need to do in the continual process of understanding their racialized identities, relearning their emotions, and their role in centering whiteness that oppresses and marginalizes people of Color (Matias, 2016). It's important to note that this work is never complete. Howard (2016) notes that there is no endpoint in cultural and racial awareness; it is “an ongoing process of change and growth and we are always subject to sliding back into the cocoon of privilege” (p. 116).

Jennifer's story indicates the need for teacher preparation programs and in-service teacher preparation programs to shift their focus on culturally relevant teaching from a focus on White teachers learning how to meet the needs of others who are "different racially, ethnically, religiously, linguistically, physically, or mentally" (Evans-Winters, 2009, p. 142) to training on the United States' historical caste system and structural racism, along with racial consciousness and White identity development.

Contrasting Jennifer's story with Carla and Maya's, the findings seem to suggest that understanding the myths of meritocracy, white washing of history, and analysis of one's own white identity are instrumental in the pedagogical process of coming to understand white supremacy and structural racism. Maya's conversations with Dr. Jones about how different social identities experience the history of the United States, along with her reading and visiting sites helped her in understanding her white self and the myth of meritocracy. Carla's work with people of Color in advocacy groups, along with her readings about whiteness and white emotionality have helped her with understanding her white self and structural racism. It's difficult to say, being that Jennifer has had close relationships with people of Color, but perhaps more counter stories would help teachers like Jennifer to reconsider how they make meaning from experiences through a lens of meritocracy and ignorance of white identity. In our work for racial equity, further research is needed to understand how to support White teachers like Jennifer with shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism.

## Reflections

In this section, I aim to do three things: (1) to reflect on ways in which I shifted from colorblindness and confronted my whiteness during the dissertation research; (2) to touch on how other researchers might anticipate challenges and possibilities of doing this work; and (3) discuss my future plan for helping other White teachers, like myself, in their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and engaging in racial equity work.

### My Process

I conducted this research during a time of increasing political polarization (Klein, 2020), a time of increasingly bold displays from white nationalists (Herndon, 2021, January 8), and a time of glaring racial oppression and disparities due to COVID-19 (Chowkwanyun & Reed, 2020; He et al., 2020), immigration policies (Anderson, 2020, August 26; Narea, 2021, Dec 4; Rodgers & Bailey, 2020, October 31), criminalization and killing of Black bodies (Alexander, 2011; Bogel-Burroughs, 2021, March 30; Clifford, 2022, April 14; Kennedy & Diaz, 2021, November 24; Laymon, 2014; November 29), and legislation—against voting access, trans rights, inclusivity, and critical education—enacted to uphold our caste system (Benner, 2020, October 9; Lardieri, 2021, July 9; Oxford, 2021, July 1; Rojas & Mzezewa, 2022, April 7).

Before I committed to this topic for my dissertation, I watched the news and heard the stories of the suffering of groups who were not at the top of the United States' racial hierarchy. At the time I felt comfortable with my white privileges (Carlson, in press) and took comfort that I was largely unaffected by the oppression and suffering that people of

Color face daily. However, social justice activist and writer Beth Kwiatek describes the original sin of whiteness as “the inherent world of ease, benefits, claim, comfort, and mirrored images that come with being white” (David & Forbes, 2016). She explains that as whites, we can decide to walk away from working against whiteness. We can knowingly do nothing. However, when we fail to act when we can and should, our inactions are a violation of moral law.

From comparing the relative ease of my life with my friends and colleagues of Color, and from Drs. Evans-Winters’ (2019) and Carlson’s influence, I set aside my comfortability for moral responsibility. As I read more of the literature, specifically Helms (2020), Matias (2016), and Wilkerson (2020a), I came understand the importance of this work not just to help people of Color, but to help myself and other Whites in the work of developing positive White identities. In her book *Caste*, Wilkerson (2020a, p. 89) describes the negative impact of our racial hierarchy on Whites as well as people of Color:

“These disfigured relationships were handed down through the generations. The people whose ancestors had put them atop the hierarchy grew accustomed to the unearned deference from the subjugated group and came to expect it. They told themselves that the people beneath them did not feel pain or heartache, were debased machines that only looked human and upon whom one could inflict any atrocity. The people who told themselves these things were telling lies to themselves. Their lives were to some degree a lie and in dehumanizing these people whom they regarded as beasts of the field, they dehumanized themselves.”

I began to understand that my own humanization and liberation is bound with people of Color in doing this work (Matias & Boucher, 2021), and that my own responsibility in this work is helping White teachers with understand their racial identities and the violence of structural racism that must be addressed in education. However, even in doing this work, I have found that I continue to manifest whiteness and have to continually commit to relearning so that I improve at doing the work in solidarity instead of in a way that harms. In the next section, I share some of the challenges and possibilities of doing this work as a White teacher researcher.

### **Challenges and Possibilities**

In this section, I reflect on my positionality during the research and writing process. This section may also help researchers who are considering writing creative nonfiction related to issues of white supremacy and racism. Here, I share some of the challenges and possibilities of my experience doing this work for the first time should they help you in your work.

### ***Participant Vulnerability***

When starting off with interviewing participants about their colorblindness, I found that for some teachers, it was difficult for them to share vulnerably about instances when they engaged in racist or colorblind actions. At times, when I asked a question, some teachers would shut down, seemingly dealing with guilt or shame. Worried that I was going to lose their participation in the study, I sometimes catered to the emotionality of whiteness. I would accept the silence or denial and move onto the next question without further prodding. I struggled to determine how to balance honoring the

participant and gathering the material to answer the research question in a way that would allow me to write compelling nonfiction stories.

In one of these instances, I explained to the teacher that I was still working through my own colorblindness and racist actions and that there was no judgement. While the teacher initially remained distant and unwilling to discuss examples of colorblindness, about halfway through the second interview, she began to share, on her own initiative, about two situations where she was confronted with her white privilege. While I still sensed that she was protecting herself from being too vulnerable by exposing too much about her past colorblind or racist actions, she did start to open up.

In another instance, when I asked a teacher about her relationships with Whites and people of Color when she was colorblind, she responded awkwardly and did not seem to wish to continue the interview. Another time, I pushed a bit to ask a participant about pedagogical pivot places involving family members of Color. The participant responded that she was an assertive person who would shut down racism pertaining to family members.

In some of these instances, I agonized over how to best proceed in these interviews and then interrogated my decisions afterwards. In the instance where the teacher was distant, I later reflected in my research journal,

*I feel like I am going to shatter into a million pieces because there is some tension between [participant name] and I about realizing whiteness and colorblindness. She wanted to redo her response to colorblindness, which was good. I explained that it is her final say and that she can change whatever she would like to.... I*

*hope I am not projecting myself on her and causing harm in this research process.... I just know that [different participant] is much more open about reflecting on her white privilege and her mistakes based in racial bias.*

(D. Rylak, Research Journal, November 5, 2021).

I understand that for White liberals it is terrifying and horrible to be called out for being a racist. I think that for some participants, this fear prevented them from being more vulnerable to share more of their pedagogical pivot places.<sup>77</sup>

One possibility to address this is to be persistent in recruitment, honestly discussing the importance of being vulnerable and comfortable with talking about whiteness in relation to the self can help with recruiting participants who will be willing to talk about aspects of their lives that many people find scary because they fear being labeled a racist. Perhaps it would help to start off by sharing times when we, even as researchers attempting to work in solidarity with people of Color, have fallen short and been humbled as we realize that we continue to perform whiteness and must reexamine and correct our behaviors. This might help our participants to see that we are not judging them but are just as complicit in our behaviors of colorblindness and upholding whiteness even as we work to become antiracist. It might help to encourage our participants, telling them that by sharing their experiences, and through our writing creative nonfiction accounts of their experiences, they can help other people with shifting from colorblindness.

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<sup>77</sup> I interviewed Carla first, and she was much more vulnerable about moments in her life when she exhibited colorblindness. This could be because she has spent much more time reading and talking about whiteness and race than myself and the other participants. She freely volunteered pedagogical pivot places where she had committed microaggressions and had reflected on where she fell short.



Another possibility for researchers is to be flexible with interview protocols. Remembering that research is relational, and we research *with* our participants is key. When participants shut down or start to manifest emotionalities of whiteness, we can revise our interview protocols. We can sense when we've built better rapport with our participants to possibly return to the tough questions and see whether they are willing to share. When we find that participants are resistant to discussing colorblindness or whiteness on a personal level, we can still use this material to guide our analysis and inform our future work in dismantling white supremacy.

I think that one method of gathering material that I did not implement in this study due to funding, time, and geographical restrictions was immersion reporting/observation. This consists of following people around while they go about living their normal days, especially days when they are too busy to entertain a creative nonfiction writer (Kramer & Call, 2007). Spending long periods of time just "hanging around, watching and thinking" seeks to get at people's lived experiences, their social context, cultural values, and individual identity (Hart, 2011, p. 147). Time spent observing participants in the field would allow the researcher to experience the events alongside the participant and to document concrete details and anecdotes that are essential in writing about the participant's world and experiences (Kramer & Call, 2007). This method might also build rapport with the participant that would lead to a greater willingness to be vulnerable.

### *White Emotionality*

In addition to the problem of participant vulnerability, I also had to work through my own white emotionality. As I read Dr. Matias' book throughout the material gathering process, I found myself confronted with the ways in which I was centering whiteness in my dissertation. I think that this quote from Helms (2020) sums up my feelings at the time:

“One's level of embarrassment generally rises as the person becomes aware of her or his own previous social ineptness with respect to race as well as that of other White people. When this affective condition occurs, the person may become socially inhibited because of continuous self-doubt and questioning and reluctance to be perceived as inept” (Helms, 2020, p. 73).

Some days during the material gathering process, I would feel paralyzed from embarrassment and shame leading to self-doubt as I realized more of how I had unknowingly been colorblind and manifesting whiteness. I realized that I was focused solely on the White teachers' stories, resulting in a possible narcissistic study and representation of critical whiteness studies (Matias, 2016). I began a cycle of psychoanalyzing myself and my behaviors with my friends and professors of Color, realizing times when I had silenced them by enacting whiteness. As I processed the guilt and shame that I experienced at my failure in working in solidarity with people of Color in dismantling white supremacy, I questioned whether I should be doing this study, or whether I should only focus on the internal work of educating and interrogating whiteness in myself before I started to do this research.

For other White researchers who plan to engage in this work, one possibility that may help to guide and support you during your research is the importance of reflexivity and returning to the theory and literature to interrogate whiteness. I found Helms (2020) and Matias (2016) to help with understanding White identity and emotionality. I also found it helpful to analyze my writing alongside a lens of black whiteness studies (Matias & Boucher, 2021). In order to prevent us from further centering whiteness, consistently reflecting on the experiences and stories of people of Color and drawing on the contributions of scholars of Color can support us in doing this work in solidarity.

### **Looking Forward**

As a (hopeful) future teacher educator, I will be responsible for preparing my preservice teachers with the strategies to advocate for structural reforms that create a more democratic and just society. In considering how I might be able to help other White teachers, like myself, in their process of shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy, I plan to continue to write creative nonfiction about teachers who have shifted from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy. Composing compelling nonfiction stories of White teachers doing this work will provide White preservice teachers with engaging examples to encourage them to develop a positive White identity and to advocate for racial justice as they enter the teaching profession. I think that making a book that follows a similar pattern of Matias' (2020) *Surviving Becky(s): Pedagogies for Deconstructing Whiteness and Gender* may help if used for teachers to read the creative nonfiction and then reflect on discussion questions that guide teachers to examine their own whiteness. From discussions with other teacher educators dedicated to

helping their pre-service teachers shift in racial consciousness and confronting internalized racism, I also think it will be important to include profiles of teachers of other races, and their shifting from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and the manifestation of whiteness in this type of pedagogical text.

As stated previously, we know that schools are amplifiers of the ideologies of the greater society (Anyon, 1980; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), and the necessary significant shifts needed to dismantle structural racism are not isolated to educational institutions and policies. Therefore, creative nonfiction writing, accessible to a wider audience outside of academia, will continue to be my vehicle of choice in writing for racial equity.<sup>78</sup>

At the university level, we hear a great deal of talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Perhaps the most important aspect in the university's pursuit of diversity, equity and inclusivity is in our work for racial justice. Education scholar Angelina Castagno (2013) notes "because whiteness is systemic, institutional, and ideological, its dismantling would require change at those levels—not simply change in individual discourse and practice" (p. 120). As a self-identified white woman who benefits from

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<sup>78</sup> In continuing to do revise the current profiles, I plan to visit the historical places from Carla and Maya's stories. I plan to read more of the history and review primary source documents that will allow me to add greater and more accurate details to teach the historical context of the places like Isabel Wilkerson does in her creative nonfiction books (2020a, 2020b). I would like to interview more people involved in the creation of the memorials and museums to add more detail, history, and perspective to these sites. This will help me to write much more accurately so that the readers will trust the information taught, and it will help to share more specific details related to the proliferation of white supremacy that is connected to the present-day oppression of people of Color in these locations. I also would like to interview other key actors who may have tension with the teachers so that I can write to convey a more complex character. I also know that I need to revise to add more of myself into the profiles that shows my point of view and analysis. I will continue to revise the profiles and trim them down to the general acceptance size of 5,000 words to submit them to creative nonfiction magazines.

structural racism, part of my responsibility as a future assistant professor will be to work to end white dominance and white power in academia and education. My work for racial justice as a teacher educator will include recruiting, mentoring, and supporting students—who are not white—in the successful completion of their teacher education and advanced degree programs.

My work to end white dominance and white power also includes learning from scholars who are Black, Indigenous, and people of Color in order to decenter the whiteness of our current educational philosophy and pedagogies, while centering previously marginalized ways of knowing, being, teaching and learning. I will do this by selecting course readings and inviting guest scholars to encourage critical reflection on the dominant epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies in academic research.

My work to end white dominance and white power will also include collaborating with my colleagues and administration at the university to reflect and revise our pre-service teacher education pedagogy and practices to better support our White pre-service teachers' in acknowledging their role in the systemic manifestation of whiteness in order to prepare them to be antiracist teachers (Matias, 2016). In order to prepare our white pre-service teachers to be antiracist educators, we must include teaching on whiteness in our cultural diversity courses and courses across the program. In our research and revising of pedagogy and practices, we also need to consider why we tend to assign our scholars of Color as the sole instructors of diversity courses where they face the hostility, anger and white guilt of White pre-service teachers (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020). This trauma negatively impacts scholars of Color while privileging White students' course evaluations

which have the potential to harm tenure opportunities (Evans-Winters & Twyman Hoff, 2011; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005).

On a personal level, I commit to continuing to do my own internal work of relearning my emotions, educating myself about racial inequities, and developing a positive White identity so that I can more effectively help with the moral education of my fellow Whites. In my process of becoming, this dissertation, reading from my committee and conversations with participants have helped me to enter the immersion-emersion schema. I know that I still have much more work to do to dismantle how oppressive and dominant culture centered beliefs and ways of being live in me.

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APPENDIX A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## **Phenomenological Interview Protocol**

**The first interview** will focus on the participant's background, values and lived experiences relating to their colorblindness.

**The second interview** will focus on the participant's process of changing values related to their understanding of white privilege and their role in white supremacy and structural racism. It will also focus on the participant's current values and lived experiences with these values.

**The third interview** will ask participants to revisit topics that came up during one of the first two interviews for purposes of clarification and/or elaboration.

(Session protocols on following pages.)

### **Interview Protocol Session #1:**

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and talk about your process as a white teacher coming to understand white privilege, white supremacy, and structural racism. This interview will be about 75-90 minutes, with two follow-up interviews that could last 75-90 minutes each. In the first interview, I will ask you some questions about your background and your past experiences with colorblindness.

If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. The recording will allow me to listen to your responses during the interview and later to capture your responses with accuracy.

I will use a pseudonym (fake name) while transcribing the interviews to keep your identity private. You can select what pseudonym you would like me to use for you. If I use any excerpts from the transcription in a research presentation or publication, the use of pseudonyms will keep your identity confidential. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time. Also, you will have the final say in approving the written transcript of the interview.

1. First, I'd like to hear a bit about your background. Could you tell me a bit where you've lived and where you've taught?
2. I would love to know why you chose to become a teacher.
  - i. What grades have you taught?
  - ii. Can you tell me about the schools where you've taught? [size, location, demographics, time spent there, why you left]
3. Tell me about your family. [siblings, parents, family of your own, location]
4. Can you talk about what it means to be "colorblind"? What does that look like?
  - a. Would you say you were once "colorblind"? How did you view or talk about other people/groups who were not white?
  - b. When you were "colorblind," did you notice racial inequities?



- c. When you were colorblind, who did you spend time with outside of school? Can you tell me about that? What did you do together? How often? What did you enjoy most about it?
5. How would you describe your interactions with your students of color when you were colorblind? [Can you think of an example?]
  - a. What about your students' families? How did you view them/relate with them?
6. Were you involved in any after school or community activities with the school during this time? [Can you tell me about that? Why did/didn't you participate?]
7. How did you view your role as a teacher when you were colorblind?
8. Thanks so much for taking time to meet with me today. I've really learned a lot. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your past experiences with colorblindness?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

I hope that we can meet again in a few days to a week so that I can learn more about your life experiences. Also, after I transcribe the interview, I would like if you can go over the typed transcript with me for your final approval and to make any changes or corrections, if necessary.

**Interview Protocol Session #2:** Thanks for meeting with me again. This interview will be about 75-90 minutes, with one more follow-up interview that could last 75-90 minutes. Last time we met, we shared about your personal experiences with colorblindness. Today, I'd like to hear more about the process of moving from a colorblind perspective to an awareness of racism or an anti-racist perspective. I'd also like to hear your views on structural racism, white privilege, and white supremacy. Most of all, I am interested in learning how your values/ways of living have changed over time.

If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. The recording will allow me to listen to your responses during the interview and later to capture your responses with accuracy. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time. Also, you will have the final say in approving the written transcript of the interview.

1. Last time we met, we talked about your understandings of and experiences with colorblindness, and I heard about \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_. First, is there anything you'd you like to add?
2. I'd like to learn more about how you came to understand structural racism and/or white supremacy. Do you remember a specific event or interaction that changed your thinking about race? Or was it something that happened slowly over time? Can you tell me about those times? [What were you thinking/feeling? What did you do in that/those situation/s?]
3. Do you think that the changes in your views on race and racism have influenced the way that you live? [How? Can you think of a time that shows this?]
4. In the last interview, you shared that previously you [activities/people associated with]. How would you respond differently now if you were in the same situation again?
5. How do you think your awareness of structural racism and/or white supremacy have influenced your teaching? Your relationships with students and families?
6. Can you think of a time that you were teaching, and you changed your plans and/or your interactions with students because of this awareness?
7. How do you view your role as a teacher now?

8. Are you involved in any after school or community activities with your school currently? [Can you tell me about that?]
9. I've really enjoyed hearing about your process of change from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism. Is there anything you'd like to tell me that I haven't asked?
10. Do you have any questions for me?

After listening to the interview, I will have some follow-up questions for you, and hope that we can meet again in a few days to a week so that I can learn more about your life experiences. Also, after I transcribe the interview, I would like if you can go over the typed transcript with me for your final approval and to make any changes or corrections, if necessary.

### **Interview Protocol Session #3**

Thanks for meeting with me again. This interview will be about 75-90 minutes. In this third and final interview, I will ask you some follow-up questions about what you shared in the first and second interviews.

If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time. Also, you will have the final say in approving the written transcript of the interview.

I'd like to follow up on issues that came up earlier. E.g., [insert a few key topics from interviews 1 & 2.]

1. Last time we met, we talked about [fill in the blank]. I'd like to hear a bit more about... Can you help me understand...?
2. During our earlier conversation, you said that... Could you say a bit more about that?
3. I'm wondering what you meant when you said "quote"... Can you explain?
4. Is there anything else you would like me to know about you or your experiences in your process of coming to understand white privilege, white supremacy, and structural racism?
5. Do you have any questions for me?

Thanks so much again for sharing your perspective with me. I really appreciate it! Once more, after I transcribe the interview, I would like if you can go over the typed transcript with me for your final approval and to make any changes or corrections, if necessary.

### 11.23.21 Revised Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and talk about your process as a white teacher coming to understand white privilege, white supremacy, and structural racism. Your story will help me and others to understand more about how white teachers come to understand white supremacy and work to dismantle it. This interview will be about 1 ½ - 2 hours.

If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. The recording will allow me to listen to your responses during the interview and later to capture your responses with accuracy.

I will use pseudonyms (a fake name) while transcribing the interview to keep your identity private. You can select what pseudonym you would like me to use for you. If I use any excerpts from the transcription in a research presentation or publication, the use of pseudonyms will keep your identity confidential. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time. Also, you will have the final say in approving the written transcript of the interview.

First, I'd like to hear a bit about your background. Could you tell me a bit where you've lived and where you've taught?

1. I would love to know why you chose to become a teacher.
  1. What grades have you taught?
  2. Can you tell me about the schools where you've taught? [size, location, demographics, time spent there, why you left]
2. I'd like to hear your story of how you came to understand structural racism and/or white supremacy. Do you remember a specific event or interaction that changed your thinking about race? Or was it something that happened slowly over time? Can you tell me about those times? [What were you thinking/feeling? What did you do in that/those situation/s?]
3. Do you think that the changes in your views on race and racism have influenced the way that you live? [How? Can you think of a time that shows this?]
4. How do you think your awareness of structural racism and/or white supremacy have influenced your teaching? Your relationships with students and families?

5. Can you think of a time that you were teaching, and you changed your plans and/or your interactions with students because of this awareness?
6. How do you view your role as a teacher now?
7. I've really enjoyed hearing about your process of change from colorblindness to understanding white supremacy and structural racism. Is there anything you'd like to tell me that I haven't asked?
8. Do you have any questions for me?

After listening to the interview, I will have some follow-up questions for you, and hope that we can meet again in a few days to a week so that we can further discuss some of the important events in your story of coming to understand white supremacy, white privilege, and structural racism. Also, after I transcribe the interview, I would like it if you can go over the typed transcript with me for your final approval and to make any changes or corrections, if necessary.

APPENDIX B  
KEY ACTORS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Key Actors Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (example)

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and share with me about Carla. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. The recording will allow me to listen to your responses during the interview and later to capture your responses with accuracy. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time.

I'm hoping that you can share some about how you've helped Carla along in her process of developing her racial identity, understanding white supremacy, and in her work for racial justice.

1. How did you and Carla meet?
2. How long have you known Carla?
3. How would you describe your friendship with Carla?
4. Carla has shared that you have been a critical friend who has helped her to be reflective about her own racial identity and consciousness, to work through her whiteness.
  - a. Dinners together: Do you remember any conversations that you had over dinner together? Do you remember any favorite places where you would go to eat/have drinks?
  - b. Conversations at school: Do you remember any times where you might have had a conversation with Carla at school about naming or working through whiteness?
5. She also shared that you have challenged and helped her to identify whiteness in your school and talk about it in order to work for racial justice in education. Can you remember a time when you talked about this with her?

**Carla:** “But she would just push me to think about what does it mean that this school is run primarily by white women and then one white man? And when we're talking about all the things, we need to do to serve our students, are we talking about that through like a savior mentality, through a deficit-based mentality? Like how are we centering our students' voices, and experiences, and tapping into our students' brilliance, and knowledge? And like helped me kind of reframe what culturally responsive teaching meant in that it wasn't just a list of strategies.”



6. Can you remember a time when Carla said something that stuck with you? When was that? What happened? What did Carla say?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share that you have not already shared?
8. Do you have any questions for me?

Thanks so much again for helping me to get a better understanding of Carla and her story. I really appreciate you sharing your perspective and memories! After I transcribe the interview, I would like it if you can go over the typed transcript with me for your final approval and to make any changes or corrections, if necessary. Also, if it's okay with you, when I'm working on writing the profile, I may reach out to you to verify that what I write is accurate. Would that be okay with you?

### **Key Actors Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (example)**

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and share with me about (participant's name). This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. The recording will allow me to listen to your responses during the interview and later to capture your responses with accuracy. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time.

I will use pseudonyms (fake names) while transcribing the interviews to keep your identity private. You can select what pseudonym you would like me to use for you. If I use any excerpts from a transcription in a research presentation or publication, the use of pseudonyms will keep your identity confidential. Your name and place of employment will not be identified in reports, presentations or publications resulting from this study. You also will have the final say in approving the written transcript to ensure that it reflects your perspective accurately.

I'm hoping that you can help me to get a better understanding of who (participant) is as a person and how she's changed.

1. How did you and (participant) meet?
2. How would you describe (participant)? And then "What's a moment that comes to mind that illustrates what their personality/who they are?"
3. Can you remember a time (participant) was funny? Tell me about that.
4. Are there any special memories that you've shared with (participant)? [Can you tell me more about that time?]
5. Can you remember a time when (participant) said something that stuck with you? When was that? What happened? What did (participant) say?
6. What does (participant) worry about the most? Can you think of a story/time when (participant) worried about that?
7. Is there anything particularly unique or quirky about (participant)? [Can you tell me about a time when (participant) did that/said that?]
8. Does (participant) have any normal routines that you know of? Can you tell me about them?

9. How would you describe (participant's) personality? [+ follow up about moments/anecdotes that show their personality]

Thanks so much again for helping me to get a better understanding of who (participant) is as a person. I really appreciate you sharing your perspective and memories! If it's okay with you, when I'm working on writing the profile, I may reach out to you to verify that what I write is accurate. Would that be okay with you?

Also, if you remember anything else memorable about (participant) that you think I should know, please reach out and let me know.

APPENDIX C  
SCENE RECREATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Scene Recreation Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Last time we met, you mentioned (*event that I want to make into a scene*). I would like to recreate this event as a scene, but since I wasn't there when it happened, I am going to need your help. "I'm going to do something weird. I'm going to ask you [about] fifty questions" about this seemingly small moment in the past. If you can answer them, you can help me build this scene for the reader.<sup>79</sup>

If it is okay with you, I would like to audio record the interview [if in person]/ [or if virtually,] I would like to video record the interview using Zoom. Zoom records an audio and video track of the interview. However, I will only use the audio track recording. If, during the interview, you would like to participate in an audio only interview, you may turn off your camera. During the interview, at any point, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can refuse to answer at any time. Or you can request to stop the interview at any time.

1. So, can we go back to (describe the event). Can you remember what was happening that day? Before [the event]?
2. Can you help me to understand the [setting]? [Depending on the setting, questions like, what would I see when I first step in the room? + follow up on each part of the setting and atmosphere, senses]
3. Walk me through what happened. [And then what happened?]
4. What were you thinking when that happened?
5. What did you feel when that happened? [What are you feeling now talking about it?]
6. Do you remember anything that [participants, or other people] said? What did they say?
7. Follow up on sensory details as appropriate [sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes].
8. Follow up on character details [physical appearance, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice during the event].
9. What happened after [the event]?
10. Is there anything else you can remember about [the event]?

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<sup>79</sup> Kramer & Call, 2007, p. 27

Thanks so much again for helping me to recreate this event as a scene. I really appreciate it! If it's okay with you, when I'm working on the scene, I may reach out to you to verify that what I write is accurate to what you remember happening. Would that be okay with you?

Also, if you remember anything else about what happened, please let me know so I can include it.

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APPENDIX D  
IRB APPROVAL



EXEMPTION GRANTED

[David Carlson](#)  
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe](#)

-  
David.L.Carlson@asu.edu

Dear [David Carlson](#):

On 11/4/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	White Teachers Doing the Work: The pedagogy of shifting from colorblindness to addressing one's role in structural racism
Investigator:	<a href="#">David Carlson</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00014410
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dissertation Photo &amp; Video Release Form 10.17.21.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• IRB Modification Letter.pdf, Category: Other;</li><li>• Revised IRB, Category: IRB Protocol;</li><li>• Video Recording Guidelines.pdf, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them);</li></ul>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 11/3/2021.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).



If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

REMINDER - All in-person interactions with human subjects require the completion of the ASU Daily Health Check by the ASU members prior to the interaction and the use of face coverings by researchers, research teams and research participants during the interaction. These requirements will minimize risk, protect health and support a safe research environment. These requirements apply both on- and off-campus.

The above change is effective as of July 29<sup>th</sup> 2021 until further notice and replaces all previously published guidance. Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring a healthy and productive ASU community.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:

Danielle Rylak



EXEMPTION GRANTED

[David Carlson](#)  
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe](#)

-  
David.L.Carlson@asu.edu

Dear [David Carlson](#):

On 9/8/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	White Teachers Doing the Work: The pedagogy of shifting from colorblindness to addressing one's role in structural racism
Investigator:	<a href="#">David Carlson</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00014410
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dissertation EMAIL Key Actors RECRUITMENT SCRIPT.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Dissertation EMAIL Teachers RECRUITMENT SCRIPT.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Dissertation Key Actors LETTER OF PERMISSION.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Dissertation Photo Release Form (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Dissertation Social Media Recruitment Post.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Dissertation Teacher LETTER OF PERMISSION (2).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Rylak Dissertation IRB 8.13.21.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li><li>• RYLAK DISSERTATION IRB REFERENCES.pdf, Category: Other;</li><li>• Supporting Documents 08-28-2021.pdf, Category:</li></ul>

	Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);
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The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 9/1/2021.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

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*The above change is effective as of July 29th 2021 until further notice and replaces all previously published guidance. Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring a healthy and productive ASU community.*

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:

Danielle Rylak