

## Critical Race Theory and Method: Rendering Race in Urban Ethnographic Research

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*North American critical race theorists maintain race is a central feature in the social and economic organization of the United States. Rather than describing an objective reality or a psychological operation, according to these theorists, race is best understood as power relationships that define dominant and subjugated positions in society. In this article, the author situates a discussion of the theoretical and practical applications of critical race theory in ethnographic methodology within an analysis of its usefulness in rendering visible racialized relationships that researchers take for granted. Specifically, he analyzes data, generated during a 3-year period, to explicate how these relationships play out in a qualitative methods course at a large Midwest research university with an urban elementary educational facility field site. This analysis renders the mechanisms of race explicit in ways to subject them to critique and to lay foundations for alternative ways to imagine and do qualitative research.*

The fall of 1996 marked the beginning of my joint appointment in African American studies (AAS) and education at a large research university in the midwestern United States. A former middle and high school teacher, I had recently earned a Ph.D. in education with an emphasis in critical educational theory and adolescent development. In addition to the opportunity to focus solely on issues related to the schooling of Black children and youth, the appointment provided me with the chance to work with scholars in the field of sociocultural studies. Prior to my arrival to the university that fall, the chairperson of the education department asked me to assume the responsibilities for teaching a course called "Literacy in the Schools." This course had as its field site an after school computer club located in one of the city's public elementary schools. The chairperson had created the club to serve as part of a distributed literacy consortium that was established by a group of sociocultural researchers throughout the United States. *La Clase Magica* and the Fifth Dimension, which are associated with the University of California, San

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Diego, and which I had the opportunity to observe firsthand prior to arriving at my new job, are two of sites served by the consortium. I agreed to teach the course, in part to be "a good university citizen" but more so to take advantage of the opportunity to work immediately with Black students within their neighborhood school.

In an article theorizing race, gender, and violence in urban educational research (Duncan, 2000), I described some of my experiences in this course. In particular, I explored the emphasis that students in that initial class, all of whom were White, placed on their research on the putative pathologies of the child participants in the computer club and the notion of care that mediated the ways students spoke and wrote about these pathologies. Here, care was evoked in ways that reinforced racist stereotypes of city-dwelling children and that maintained the assumed link between Whiteness and innocence upon which racism and its normal status are reproduced in society (Morrisón, 1993; Schick, 2000; A. Thompson, 1998). In what follows, I follow up on the roles of care and empathy in qualitative research and use critical race theory (CRT) to examine the limits of both in White supremacist societies. Specifically, CRT explicates the liberal ideological underpinnings of certain forms of caring that position caregivers in a positive light and, at the same time, that either harm or fail to do good for the intended receivers of care. I follow this section with an overview of the strategies I used in subsequent courses to render race visible, that is, to make visible the concrete and relational character of race in U.S. society. This discussion illustrates how a focus on reflexivity disrupts the processes that underlie false empathy and lays the foundation for alternative ways to imagine and do qualitative research, especially in urban educational settings.

### THE CONTEXT: "EDUCATION 250: LITERACY IN THE SCHOOLS"

The Cardinal Elementary Community Education Center (CECEC),<sup>1</sup> located in a city close to the university, was established in 1994. The physical plant that houses the center has been in existence since 1905, when it was constructed as an elementary school. The CECEC is home to a computer club and a number of other after school educational programs that the center provides for Cardinal elementary students. Nested in an urban residential area where it is bordered by three streets, the CECEC and its neighborhood reflect the economic and cultural dynamics of the public school district in which it is located. The district, once nationally acclaimed for its responsiveness to a mostly White student population of more than 110,000, recently ended a 20-year-old desegregation battle with surrounding suburban and county schools and currently, with a predominately Black student population of less than 45,000, is at risk of losing its statewide accreditation.

As I indicated in the introduction, the CECEC's computer club was the field site for Literacy in the Schools during the 1997 spring semester. The course was designed to provide students with an intense experience in combining theory and practice in the study of human development. In particular, course participants would learn to use ethnographic, participant observation techniques as a foundation for evaluating theories of learning and development. The social science materials I prepared for the initial course, however, were inadequate to sustain a critique of the complex relationships that inform human development in a White supremacist society. Such a critique was necessary not only to reveal the way these relationships shaped the character of the CECEC but, most importantly, to uncover the ways our research reinforced conditions that sustained systemic violence (America, 1973/1998; Billingsley, 1973/1998; Blauner & Wellman, 1973/1998; Stanfield, 1999; R. Williams, 1974).

In an attempt to make these issues clearer, midway through the course, I introduced the students to authors whom the sociologist Billingsley (1973/1998) called "the more 'creative' Black writers—including novelists, poets, essayists, biographers, and lyricists" whose perceptive insights "move beyond art toward science" (p. 448). Billingsley argued that literature and art could do what White and Black social scientists often failed to do: provide a rich and varied depiction of Black culture and life in the United States. The perceptive insights of Hughes (1967/1994) and Giovanni (1968/1979) facilitated the processes by which students began testimonial interrogations of the various readings (Boler, 1999), critical reflections on their value orientations, and thinking through their experiences in the computer club. The words of Hughes and Giovanni, in particular, were useful for encouraging a narrative ethics that prompted the kind of multiple consciousness that goes beyond simply entertaining a number of random viewpoints to one that seriously considers specific viewpoints. It is the kind of multiple consciousness that Matsuda (1996) proposes as a method of inquiry into social reality. It is one that includes a deliberate choice to see the world from the point of view of socially subjugated groups, to implicate our social and economic positions within society, and to search for avenues to a more just world.

To be clear, multiple consciousness is not merely an abstract notion, and this is especially true in terms of what it means for qualitative research. As I indicated in an earlier article, the experiences in the club that semester challenged me to critically examine how I should go about organizing urban ethnographic research courses. Such an examination is particularly warranted in the context of a White supremacist U.S. society. Here, as Stanfield (1999) observed,

in a society such as America, racialism has become so routinized through many generations, that thinking and acting racially is normative on the part of all who are born in this country or have lived here for more than a few years. It is in this sense that racism organizes everyday life in America, shapes the moral character

of Americans, and determines whom we associate with and whom we do not associate with in marriage, church, neighborhood, and school. (p. 420)

This is not to say that these issues were not central when I initially organized the course and offered it for the first time during the 1997 spring semester. On the contrary, from the outset, I raised the issue of racism and racialization, pointing out discrepancies between how the media and school personnel, as outsiders, described the CECEC neighborhood and how the residents, as insiders who lived in the area, described it. However, as Du Bois (1968/1997) pointed out toward the end of his life,

Not simply knowledge, not simply direct repression of evil, will reform the world. In long, indirect pressure and action of various and intricate sorts, the actions of men [and women] which are not due to a lack of knowledge nor to evil intent, must be changed by influencing folkways, habits, customs, and subconscious deeds. (p. 222)

These subtle processes were evident in the way students immediately disregarded the community members' viewpoints when presented with them. In adopting the official narrative as presented by the news media, police, and school system, students exposed themselves as more closely allied with these institutions—and their racializing functions and the histories embedded within them—than with the people who called the CECEC neighborhood home (Frankenberg, 1996). The experiences in that initial course, then, raised for me specific questions of pedagogy related to rendering race explicit in urban ethnographic research. It also made me reconsider how I should go about bringing into the foreground the "folkways, habits, customs, and subconscious deeds" of the course participants in ways to subject them to critiques and to inform them of alternative ways to do qualitative research.

### **CRT, CARE, AND REFLEXIVITY: A CRITIQUE OF LIBERAL IDEOLOGY IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

The most unsympathetic thing you can do is think you have empathized with those of a radically different background. You can easily end up hurting them.

—Law professor Rodrigo Crenshaw  
(Delgado, 1996, p. 13)

As I set out to place race at the center of analysis in subsequent methods courses, part of the task was to address the obstacles that impeded our collective ability to entertain multiple perspectives on the CECEC. One such obstacle was the pathology language that emerged in students' field notes. A major characteristic of this language was the belief that the material conditions of

the CECEC neighborhood caused the children and youth to lack self-esteem, motivation, and hope. The school disseminated similar sentiments in information packets, and police and news media reinforced them in a barrage of official reports. However, as opposed to the indifferent, matter-of-fact language of the packets and reports, the language in the field notes took on an emotional tone that suggested students in the course empathized with the children of the CECEC. In some instances, the students were clearly disgusted with computers, software, and printers that often impeded club activities and assumed that the children's willingness to show up week after week was evidence that they had succumbed to the material conditions of the CECEC. It was also clear from field notes and seminar discussions that some of the course participants visualized themselves in the "children's shoes" and generalized how they imagined they would feel under such circumstances to how they imagined the children experienced these circumstances. In this instance, based on their personal histories of privilege and access to resources and on how they would respond if such privilege and access were taken away from them, students concluded that the material conditions of the CECEC must cause the children to suffer the same emotional distress they imagined that they themselves would suffer if subjected to them.

Delgado (1996) calls this identification "false empathy" (pp. 4-36) and describes the cross-race variety of it in terms of a process "in which a White [person] believes he or she is identifying with a person of color, but in fact is doing so only in a slight, superficial way" (p. 12). He argues that those who would want to do good cannot be "counted on because their empathy is shallow. They think they know what we need, but don't. They visualize themselves in our places and ask what they themselves would want" (p. 18). According to Delgado, ideology, religiosity, bureaucracy, wealth disparities, socioeconomic competition, and racism all contribute to cross-race varieties of false empathy in the United States. This sociocultural perspective on empathy, false or otherwise, supports Boler's (1999) view that "the missing paradigm in theories of emotion across disciplines is an account that shifts emotions from being seen as the property of idiosyncrasy of the individual, towards a collectivist account" and toward what she calls a "semiotics of empathy" (pp. 164-165).

Also implicit in the idea of false empathy is the premise that empathy has power dimensions and can be a dangerous force if it is not genuine (Boler, 1999; Delgado, 1996; Eaker-Rich, Van Galen, & Timothy, 1996; Freire, 1996; hooks, 2000; King, 1986; Noblit, 1993; Noddings, 1999; A. Thompson, 1998). Theoretically, empathy between social groups has the greatest potential for being genuine in just and ethical societies where everyone's experiences are similar and resources are roughly the same (Delgado, 1996). In egalitarian, culturally democratic situations, personal and social values are more closely in accord, increasing the likelihood for one to accurately adopt another's point of view. Under such conditions, as Delgado argues, "empathy ought to

Empathy has power relations

benefit the possessor because it enables him or her to make beneficial trades. If one has the ability to perceive what others want, one can offer them that and get what one wants in return" (p. 16). Empathy, however, is diminished under conditions of social and economic apartheid. In such societies, the relations between social groups are not only distant but also, for the most part, structurally unjust. These relations contribute to a phenomenon captured in a paradox where society marks people of color, Black people in particular, with stereotypes even as it renders them invisible (Young, 1990). Put another way, the concerns of people of color simply do not resonate among members of the larger White society. Moreover, "the poorer and more wretched Blacks become, the less White people will empathize with them. They will dismiss our cries of pain, thinking to themselves that's our normal condition" (p. 17).

We may also understand false empathy as an expression of the abstraction and detachment that characterizes liberal ideology. Here, as Matsuda (1996) stated,

abstraction and detachment are ways out of discomfort of direct confrontation with the ugliness of oppression. Abstraction, criticized by both feminists and scholars of color, is the method that allows theorists to discuss liberty, property, and rights in the aspirational mode of liberalism with no connection of what those concepts mean in real people's lives. (pp. 8-9)

For the most part, abstraction and detachment allow individuals to avoid seeing fundamental relationships between economically devastated cities, such as the one in which the CECEC is located, and the affluence of the suburbs and counties from where many of the students in my courses hail. Engaging in abstraction and detachment allows individuals also to avoid the nitty-gritty details of a world shaped by various levels of power relationships and the discomfort of seeing themselves implicated in the culture of violence in the United States.

The abstraction and detachment that characterize liberalism also shape the very way we often talk about race. It is at this entry point—examining the very nature of race—that I use CRT scholarship in my courses to destabilize the way students see themselves in connection to the larger society and to their work. However, this process is not merely an academic exercise but is translated into concrete action in the field. In the sections that follow, I discuss the theoretical and pedagogical applications of CRT to ethnographic methodology. I situate this discussion within an analysis of its usefulness in revealing the racialized ideas that students take for granted in ways to subject these ideas to critique and to lay foundations for alternative ways to imagine and do our work.

Before I enter into this discussion, however, I want to raise a related issue that is relevant to the present discussion. Although I emphasize in this article cross-race varieties of false empathy to describe power relations in certain caring relationships between White people and people of color, it bears men-

we can be guilty  
of false empathy

tioning that false empathy works as a cultural force through people of color as well. In this instance, people of color identify with members of the dominant society in ways that make the former complicit with the latter in sustaining and maintaining systems of oppression. The destructiveness of false empathy of the same-race variety also comes to bear on communities of color when a member or members of the group tells the dominant group what it wants to know about the former group. The latter group then uses this information to destroy or further the oppression of the subjugated group. In *The Coming Race War?* (Delgado, 1996), Crenshaw uses as an example of the destructive nature of this form of false empathy in the story of *La Malinche*, the Aztec who served as Cortes's translator and, in this role, helped him to destroy her people's empire. Bell (1992) provides another example of this form of false empathy in his racial parable "The Space Traders." In "The Space Traders," Bell details the complicity of a Black professor who identifies with a conservative White House administration and, in doing so, helps to undermine progressive social policy and eventually the basic human rights of the U.S. Black population. To be clear, false empathy plays out mainly through caring relationships in which members of the dominant White society believe they identify with members of communities of color. However, false empathy also plays out in significant ways through people of color who, socialized in the various institutions that certify them to assume positions of responsibility in society, uncritically accept or identify with the values that inform these institutions, to the destruction of communities of color.

## "AAS 400: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE"

### CRT and Transforming Urban Ethnographic Research

At the end of the 1997 spring semester, I reflected on "Literacy in the Schools" and on my role as a researcher and educator in shaping its dynamics that semester. As my approach to the course suggested, I assumed that with a little information, everyone in the course would be on the same page, so to speak. It soon became clear, however, that our shared vocabularies masked fundamental differences in how we understood our work. On one hand, I saw the research problem mainly in terms of the role of a broader racist culture in undermining the human potential of the children in the research setting. The student researchers, on the other hand, understood their work as helping a group of unfortunate, underprivileged children take advantage of the offerings of a fundamentally just society. The general responses of my students to the children and their school conditions, described in the previous sections, serve as a reminder of the potential for the course to reinforce stereotypes that circulate in the larger society about urban schools. Their responses also

Value of  
reflexivity

brought to light the value of reflexivity as a pedagogical strategy in organizing the course as well as a research strategy in conducting and framing my own work.

Specific questions informed subsequent changes to the course: What strategies should one employ to promote the development of multiple consciousness as a basic dimension of qualitative inquiry? How does one organize a qualitative research methods course in ways to engage head on false empathy? And most important, how does one go about shifting—in terms of both the content and structure—the way we engage urban educational research to serve the people and perspectives that are indigenous to these settings? Below, I overview specific changes I made to the course. I focus specifically on changes that went into place in the 1998 fall semester, the third time I offered the course, and emphasize the strategies I used to orient our research prior to entering into the field.

### Urban Ethnography in the Context of AAS

In the spring of 1998, I changed "Education 250: Literacy in the Schools" to "Education 400: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture: Qualitative Inquiry in Urban Education, I." A more significant change came in the fall of 1998 when I formally moved the course from the education department to the AAS program; the course retained both its number and title. Anthropologist Rodriguez (1996) describes at length that the merging of research courses with Africana studies or, as in the case of my institution, AAS programs introduces new epistemological considerations that challenge the disciplinary boundaries of social science. Thus, the course, now housed within the AAS program, was far more amenable to a CRT-driven pedagogy. Although I included CRT material in the course during the 1998 spring semester, it was limited to content, such as reading materials (e.g., Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The inclusion of such materials in the course challenged students in a way that the previous materials did not; however, it provided only a partial illumination of the way race was normalized within the CECEC. Moreover, it did little to challenge pedagogical practices that subjugated student cultural knowledge. To create changes in the class environment along these lines required that I make radical changes in the course, which I describe below. However, before doing so, there are two other results of housing the course in AAS worth mentioning.

First, housing the course in the AAS program and increasing the course number attracted a greater number of cross-listings with other programs in the university. In addition to education, the course is now cross-listed with the sociology and the American culture studies programs and attracts students from anthropology, economics, political science, social work, engineering, and biology as well as from various areas in the humanities. Students



receive either departmental credit to fulfill methods requirements or degree credit to meet general education requirements. The original number of 250 designated the course primarily as a sophomore-level class, although half of the first class was composed of seniors. Increasing the course number to 400 identified it as an upper division course and broadened its appeal, attracting graduate and nontraditional (e.g., nondegree program) students. Second, as I anticipated, the change in the placement of the course increased the number of students and dramatically changed the cultural composition of subsequent classes. The number of students enrolled in the course increased from 9 in the 1997 spring semester to 21 in the 1998 fall semester, which is one more than the limit I eventually imposed. As mentioned earlier, the initial course was composed entirely of White students. In the fall of 1998, 9 Black, 1 Latina, and 11 White students enrolled in the course. Based on comparisons of the numbers and of the composition of students in my other AAS and education classes, I had anticipated that placing the course in the AAS program would result in changes in the number and composition of students in the course. Changing the composition of the class was of critical importance to me for a number of reasons, as described elsewhere (Duncan, 2000). As it relates to the present discussion, however, CRT "is explicitly derivative of the history and intellectual tradition of people of color. . . . It makes no claim of original invention" (Matsuda, 1996, p. 55), and the eventual transformation of the course was directly related to the presence of students of color with whom CRT seemed to have a special resonance.

#### **"But I Think It's Maybe a Little More Complex": Race and Ethnographic Inquiry**

It is fashionable nowadays to downplay and even dismiss race as a factor shaping the quality of life in the United States and instead to favor class-based and gender-based approaches to understanding social oppression. This sentiment is expressed throughout my courses, as students will acknowledge racism but at the same time declare, "Well, it's not only about race. I think it has more to do with class (or with gender)." In fact, many students (and colleagues, I might add) take up the argument that to talk about race is the real problem because to do so either reinforces "socially constructed" myths or consumes time and intellectual energy that could be devoted to understanding "real" social problems. The irony, however, is that students are attracted to classes such as AAS 400 precisely because they explicitly address race. This contradiction reflects an assumption that race is self-evident and that the concept itself need not be made problematic. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), however, assert that unlike gender and class, race remains untheorized (p. 49), and Omi and Winant (1993) argue that popular, self-evident notions of race have epistemological limitations. Popular notions of race generally fall

under one of two categories. On one hand, race is an ideological construct or an imaginary force that "denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on 'raced' people in their everyday lives" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48). On the other hand, race is an objective condition, a set of self-evident and rigid categories that fail to account for the problematic issues of social classification and genetic and cultural hybridity (Omi & Winant, 1993). Omi and Winant offer a theory of racial formation, a dynamic theory of race that focuses on the continuing significance and changing meaning of race, especially in Western societies. Racial formation theory is especially useful for conceptualizing race in urban educational research.

To facilitate an examination of race in AAS 400, I began the 1998 fall semester course with student commonsense understandings of the phenomenon. In previous classes, I tacitly glossed over the powerful force of folk wisdom and introduced the issue of race by way of critiquing its usage in the social science literature. By doing so, I privileged academic definitions of race over others, reproducing the dichotomy between academic theories and the practices of everyday life. Moreover, disregarding the points of view of students at the start of the course made it virtually impossible for their voices to become central to their work once we entered into the field. To place their meanings at the center of the course's inquiry, on the first day of class, I asked students to provide me with (a) racial and/or ethnic profiles of the United States and (b) their definitions of race. These questions provided the opportunity to employ statistical and anecdotal evidence in the discussion of the subordinated status of people of color in the United States and to challenge the use of linear, intent-based notions of causation as explanations for racism (Matsuda, 1996). I anticipated that differences among students in their responses to the questions would complicate the idea of race in the United States. Differences in viewpoints would also set the stage to facilitate the process by which we could engage multiple views in our analyses of urban public schools.

Responses to the first question indicated that students in the course, as a whole, believed that White people composed about 45% of the U.S. population. People of color, it followed, composed the majority of society in various proportions, although students believed for the most part that Black people constituted the largest U.S. "minority" group. After reviewing the current U.S. census data that indicated White people constitute the majority of the U.S. population, we discussed the social and political implications of the class's responses. Briefly, students commented that the gross underrepresentation of the U.S. White population directly related to the issue of power. On one hand, some students observed that the belief that White people, as a group, were a numeric minority gave credence to the politics of White victimization. Relating this point to the issue of care and caring, politics of this sort may compromise empathy as self-absorption, associated with one's sense of victimization, underlies the inability of some individuals to consider the plight of others and to mobilize around their concerns. On the other hand, the

belief that people of color constitute a larger part of the U.S. population than they actually do supports a view that we live in a fundamentally egalitarian society and that social injustice is primarily a matter of the unequal distribution of material resources and social capital. Justice conceived primarily as a matter of fairness or distribution favors class-based and gender-based responses to eliminating social problems. The actual demography of the United States, however, points to domination as the central theme of societal injustice and to the failure of empathy as a form of racial tyranny. On this latter point, self-absorption and the inability to consider the plight of others is realized in society as a social phenomenon, specifically as the systematic and predictable responses of the dominant White society—individually and institutionally—to the plight of people of color in the United States.

Responses to the second question (i.e., What is your definition of race?) reflected popular notions of race that Omi and Winant (1993) previously described. Students generally defined race as a self-evident entity (12 responses), as an ideological construct (4 responses), or some combination of the two (3 responses). One student provided a definition of race that highlighted its political dimension, whereas another indicated that she was unsure of a definition. The following responses are typical of the view that privilege a conception of race as a biological or cultural entity:

Race is confusing to me. I think of it as a kind of mixture of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Usually, people (me too) associate race with skin color and facial features; but I think it's maybe a little more complex. (Ally, a 21-year-old White female Black studies major)

The condition of which beliefs, along with the appearance of a person, on which he or she is categorized. (Ronnie, a 21-year-old Black male pre-occupational therapy psychology major)

Race is a category based on a mixture of cultures, backgrounds, and physical features. It is a definition both chosen by an individual and chosen for an individual. (Sandra, a 21-year-old White female English and French major)

The following response captures a view of race as primarily an ideological construct:

Race is a socially constructed phenomenon that forces people into different groups based on skin color, not necessarily ethnicity or origin. It generally fails to recognize people that have various backgrounds (cultural). (Marilyn, a 21-year-old White female marketing and Black studies major)

Departing from the rest of her peers, Robin, an 18-year-old Black female student with a triple major in print making, education, and philosophy, foregrounds the political dimension of race. She writes that race is "a concept created to categorize people for purposes of power distribution through social institutions and interactions." Robin's definition is consonant with that of the historian and political scientist Marable (1994). According to Marable,

Race is first and foremost an unequal relationship between social aggregates, characterized by dominant and subordinate forms of social interaction, and reinforced by the intricate patterns of public discourse, power, ownership, and privilege within the economic, social, and political institutions of society. (p.30)

In my view, Robin and Marable define race in ways that do more than just highlight the power relations embedded in the social construction of the idea. Both definitions also make explicit references to the fluid relationships that challenge the idea that race is a self-evident, never-changing entity and to the concrete, material dimensions of the phenomenon that defy the idea that race exists "mainly in the head."

### CRT AS A MEDIATOR OF REFLEXIVITY

The definitions of race given by Robin and Marable (1994) allowed me to bridge the distinction between unofficial and official knowledge in the class as well as to create a point of entry to highlight the relational and material dimensions of race that informed the daily realities of the CECEC. Highlighting these dimensions of race also allowed me to directly challenge ideology that contributed to false empathy. However, to mount an effective challenge required "indirect pressure and action of various and intricate sorts" to highlight and effect changes in the "subconscious deeds" (Du Bois, 1968/1997, p. 222) of the students in the course. Reflexivity as an inward focus in qualitative inquiry is a practice that recognizes that boundaries between the observer and the observed are blurred in the research process. It also recognizes that persons whom researchers choose to observe and write about are fully capable of reading and critiquing the work of the researcher (Rodriguez, 1996; see also Blauner & Wellman, 1973/1998; Gwaltney, 1993; R. Williams, 1974). Thus, the significance of reflexivity is in its contribution to making visible the invisible relationships that characterize racial oppression by redirecting the focus on our own perspectives and to fostering a consideration of the multiple viewpoints that may come to bear in the social construction of reality. To facilitate this process among the students in the course, I provided specific resources around which students could reflect on issues that explicated subtle social relationships and that raised disturbing questions about these relationships.

For example, within the first 2 weeks of the course, we read and discussed selections from Du Bois's (1968/1997) *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* and from B. Thompson and Tyagi's (1996) *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*. After reading and discussing these texts, I asked students to compose autobiographical accounts of the race concept, that is, to write personal histories on how they "became" Black, Brown, or White. These autoethnographies were later integrated in the final

course project in which students developed theoretical frameworks that concluded with questions to inform future research projects. For the most part, the autoethnographies recounted how individuals came to know who they were racially in relationship to others. White students often mentioned incidents of racism, prejudice, and discrimination in their autoethnographies, especially as White people, usually family members, directed specific attitudes toward people of color. Here, they used language that generally made indirect references and that rarely described racial dynamics in concrete terms. However, they used concrete language in those instances when they repositioned themselves as "minorities" and as the objects of discrimination and prejudice on the several occasions when they wrote about their experiences outside of North America, in places such as South and Central America, Asia, and Africa. The following excerpt from a theoretical framework developed by Mitchell, a 21-year-old White economics and biology major, shows evidence of this assignment:

My encounter with Cardinal originated from the class for which this framework is being written, *Race, Ethnicity, and Culture: Qualitative Inquiries in Urban Education*. . . . I went into Cardinal expecting to tutor and play with minority children in an after school program designed to keep them off the streets of a ghetto area. My initial belief was that I would be a combination babysitter/tutor for these children until their parents could pick them up after work. I expected the area to be extremely run down with considerable amounts of crime in plain sight. I have owned "the Club" to lock my steering wheel for quite some time, however the first time that I actually used the Club was the first day I went to tutor at Cardinal, under the explicit instruction of my mother.

My initial expectations of Cardinal were reflective of my family's racism. My early childhood was spent in Manhattan; I was isolated from minorities because I lived and went to school in a predominantly White area. I was familiar with the ghetto areas of Manhattan from the back seat of the car whenever we needed to drive outside the city. Upon passing these areas my parents would tell me to roll up the windows and lock the doors because we were entering a "Black neighborhood." My early childhood clearly associated minorities, specifically Black people, with crime and the ghetto area. Thus we see how my initial expectations of Cardinal were derived.

In contrast to their White peers, Black students often made direct, concrete references to the fact of racism in their lives. Moreover, their autoethnographies supported Gwaltney's (1993) assertion that the words of drylongso—that is, ordinary Black people—are plainly analytic and contain within them theory-building properties. The experiences of these students gave flesh and bone reality to concepts such as double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903/1989) and biculturalism (Darder, 1991). The contrast that I am making is not to suggest that students responded to the course and especially to the CECEC according to a rigid color-coded schema. On the contrary, for example, Jane, a 21-year-old Black female majoring in English and AAS, described what she initially expected to encounter at the CECEC.

The way that the packet described the site made it appear as though the students were just getting by in a neighborhood that threatened them as children growing up with "considerable 'baggage' that inhibited [their] academic success" and placed them "at-risk" (Cardinal information packet). I was scared to leave my car and my belongings in my car parked on the street in an area with "one of the highest rates of larceny, burglary, and destruction of property; high rates of robbery, aggravated assault, auto theft, and reported drug sales; and moderate rates of homicide" (Cardinal information packet). How was I supposed to make meaning of these statistics? Not only was someone going to break into my car and steal my radio, but they were also going to leave my car on cinder blocks, rob me on my way into the school after they had hit me over the head for looking at them funny, try to sell me some crack or weed (marijuana), and then kill me for just being in their neighborhood. These statistics are harrowing. Here I am, just a college student, wanting to positively affect some child's life, and before I can do so, I, just like these children, am being set up to fail, if not die.

Although peppered with humor, Jane's language here clearly echoes some of the sentiments found in Mitchell's previous comments and the views of the information packet discussed earlier in the article. However, it should also be noted that midway into the semester, Jane was responsible for calling her peers on their use of White talk or the use of language in a way that insulated individuals from taking responsibility for racism (McIntyre, 1997). In the main, CRT stimulated a kind of reflexivity that created the space for students of color in the course to contribute invaluable subjugated knowledge to the practice of qualitative research. At the same time, these tools also invited students of color to reflect on their own socialization in a White supremacist society and to consider what this meant in terms of their work in communities of color.

As we moved closer to our initial visits to the CECEC, I asked students to begin identifying the critical attributes that defined the ways race played out in their lives. To facilitate this discussion, we viewed a documentary of the life of Gregory Williams (1995), whose story is told in *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He was Black*. Briefly, Williams, recently a law school dean and currently a college president, grew up believing that he was White until his parents separated during his youth. His family split up, and Williams, along with his brother and father, left his White mother in Virginia and moved to Muncie, Indiana. In Muncie, he discovered that his father was the son of a Black woman and that in Virginia, he had been "passing" as an Italian American. Thus, as a result of the move to Indiana, where Williams's father's heritage was common knowledge and where racial categories were closely monitored and rigidly enforced, Williams went from being a White boy to a Black boy literally overnight.

Prior to viewing the documentary, however, I showed the class video footage containing 14 photographs of individuals, which unknown to the students included two of Williams, one as a child and another as an adult. I asked students to identify individuals in each photograph according to how they might be designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. I also indicated to students

that they could choose more than one census category to identify an individual. All students classified Williams as White, with no additional designations, both as a child and as an adult. After identifying Williams's photographs and viewing the video documentary of his life, I asked students how they would classify Williams in light of his personal history. I was less concerned with how students classified Williams and more interested in how they talked about race in the context of his life. Of the 21 anonymous responses, five students described Williams primarily as a sociopolitical construct and in terms of the concrete power relationships that shaped his life. For example, one student stated that

Gregory is neither White nor Black, he is both White and Black. This is a perfect example of why I'll never believe those who say that race is a biological description or a physical description of someone. Race is a completely societal description—100%. Those who knew (defined) him as White treated him one way, and those who knew (defined) him as Black, another. He never changed his appearance nor his actions. People/society labeled him as one or the other race and responded to him because of that label.

Eleven students described Williams primarily in terms of how they viewed his subjective responses to his experiences, whereas the remaining students described him mainly in terms of his perceived physical attributes or purported genetic composition. With respect to the former description, one student stated that Williams is

Black because he thinks he is Black. Race today is so obscure that it is more a state of mind than a gene pool.

Despite the biological and/or psychological language that some of the students used to frame the way they made meaning of Williams's race, discussions around the documentary clearly indicated that we were beginning to destabilize the rigid ideas that initially informed the way we talked about race in the course. Finally, prior to entering the field, we viewed the teleplay "Space Traders" (Hudlin & Hudlin, 1994), adapted from the similarly titled racial parable by Bell (1992) mentioned earlier in this article. In "The Space Traders," Bell uses a fictional story to bring into bold relief the ingrained character of racism that makes it a natural as well as a permanent fixture of U.S. society. Specifically, in this tale, Bell explores the responses of White Americans to an opportunity to accrue great social and personal benefit at the complete sacrifice of the basic rights of Black citizens. Perhaps more than any other strategy, the viewing and ensuing discussion around the teleplay prompted students to turn inward and reflect on a number of disturbing questions. It is interesting that White students in the course for the most part raised the question of whether the events detailed in the essay and vividly rendered in the teleplay could occur in the United States, whereas many Black students concluded that "The Space Traders" described events already in evi-

dence and directed the discussion toward identifying dynamics that supported this view. Among other things, students pointed to the passage of recent anti-immigrant propositions and to the general public's support of anti-affirmative action legislation, to name but two recent examples of the involuntary sacrificial roles that people of color have played in national policies.

It is important to emphasize here that rather than engaging in a fruitless argument on the merits of "The Space Traders," students began to rethink the role of race in U.S. history and contemporary society. Students reflected on the meaning of race, both in the contexts of their own lives and also in the contexts related to the broader purpose of the course, which was ethnographic research at the CECEC. Along these lines, CRT and the focus on reflexivity assisted students in developing a more complicated understanding of their work. For example, reflecting on her experiences in the class, Freda, a 27-year-old White graduate anthropology student, wrote,

This course is a journey for me, or rather, part of a journey, a part which I find it hard to decide whether it's magnificent or insignificant. I find it increasingly hard to explain to anyone outside this classroom what it is I learn here, what its significance is. However, by now, I am also quite aware that those people I explain it to are White, and living in a social setting where the fact that they're White does not matter to them. Thus, when I tell them that one of the things that I learn in this class is that being White *does* matter, some of them balk, whereas the ones that don't, simply find this shift of mindset hard to grasp. And I still do too, sometimes, when caught up in the hegemony of my own Whiteness. And yet, as I believe at this junction on my journey, this shift of mindset is no small thing, even if it is incomplete as yet. Probably insignificant when I look forward, but most magnificent when I look back. However, being on this junction is not without risk. McIntyre (1997) stated that "a little Whiteness could be dangerous" (p. 138) in that the discomfort that comes with this growth process can actually bring a person to flee back into perpetuating the system instead of critically challenging it.

Similarly, Ronnie, a 21-year-old Black male psychology and pre-occupational therapy major, reflected on his role at the CECEC.

It was the fifth week of classes and we were about to start making the weekly trips to Cardinal. I had no idea what to expect. Dr. Duncan told us not to go in there thinking from the Cardinal information packet. I was not trying to read that packet because I know what goes into those packets. Usually, all you will find is a bunch of hasty conclusions about people that the criticizer doesn't even know. . . . Anyway, with this information in my head now I am really hyped up. I want to see the children. I want to help the children. Why do I want to help the children, I asked myself? Who said these children need my help? Who am I? Obviously some hearsay has entered into my thoughts. I heard that these children were in need of help. An obvious misunderstanding of what was suggested in class. Apparently, these children here at Cardinal have been labeled at risk and they are not testing as well as the other public schools. This is what motivated me at first. That was when I was sorely ignorant. In other words, I wasn't hip to the game. So I figured if I just go in there and help one of these kids every



week they would be better. I thought this, can you believe it. You see, now I can laugh at this thought, because it proves my high priced intelligence can lead me to become ignorant at times. . . . Cardinal elementary has been labeled a problem or diagnosed with a problem and they asked for help. But not just us, there are at least seven other major groups of people representing at Cardinal. Yet, there is still a problem? And not to get on a different tangent, but what does high-risk mean? What are these kids at risk for? I was in too deep, and I could not turn back. But at this point I did not want to.

Not unlike most of their peers, Freda and Ronnie described being at cross-roads both in their thinking about race and in their assessment of their work. These junctures are made possible by the ability of the students to examine their value orientations, to consider multiple points of views about the meaning of race in society, and to locate themselves within the webs of societal power relations.

Although I restrict my discussion in this article to the pedagogical strategies that I used with students prior to their participation in the field, this is not to suggest that we did not apply CRT to our work in the CECEC; it simply reflects the focus of this article. Once in the field, concepts borrowed from CRT assisted students to comprehend the way race permeates the day-to-day interactions and processes involved in both the institution of schooling and the enterprise of qualitative research. For example, students identified several dimensions of racialized time within the CECEC that sustained systemic violence through curriculum, pedagogy, and various state-based, district-based, and school-based educational policies. Racialized time refers to relationships between time and material conditions, such as resources and interactions between people, that adversely affect oppressed groups. A critical race ethnography of time is relevant for understanding the way empathy is created and sustained in institutional settings. Synchrony, for example, refers to a process of bringing together two entities under one rhythm where there had formerly been two. Research on the menstrual cycles of women who live together bears this out biologically, and neurophysiological research with infants suggests that synchrony occurs with affect as well (Restak, 1984; Verducci, 2000). Students also devised various categories of White talk to analyze their notes and conversations about their work for the presence of language that interrupted their interrogation of race and racism both in the field and in the framing of their work. CRT, then, provided both the theoretical concepts to rethink the race idea and the methodological tools to transform our approach to ethnography in tangible ways.

## CONCLUSION

As indicated in the introduction, the purpose of this article was to theorize on and to explicate practices that give racial domination a matter-of-fact status in urban educational research. My initial experiences organizing a meth-

ods course suggested that perhaps the greatest obstacle in effecting this in the classroom with students was a form of empathy that worked in the interests of White supremacy. This discussion identified the critical attributes of false empathy that linked it to the limiting ways researchers conceptualize race in research. In particular, false empathy and popular conceptions of race have in common abstract and detached qualities, qualities that are also associated with liberalism. To reestablish the linkages to illuminate the family of concepts that characterizes White supremacy and that gives it its pervasive authority, I employed pedagogical strategies in my methods course that rendered race visible in our work. Such strategies explicated the concrete, relational, and systemic character of racial oppression in ways that made it tangible and subject to intervention. These strategies also assisted us to comprehend empathy as a constellation of related affective and cognitive phenomena (Verducci, 2000) and to recast it in terms of semiotic networks of power relations mediated by language, narratives, genres, and metaphors (Boler, 1999). Thus, among other things, this article illustrates the power of CRT to bring into bold relief subtle forms of racial oppression in the United States and of reflexivity to disrupt false empathy and to lay the foundation for alternative ways to imagine and conduct qualitative inquiry in urban educational settings.

## NOTE

1. All names of persons and institutions are pseudonyms.

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