

MARGINALITY IN THE URBAN CENTER

The Costs and Challenges of
Continued Whiteness in the
Americas and Beyond

Edited by
Peary Brug
Zachary S. Ritter
Kenneth R. Roth



NEIGHBORHOODS,
COMMUNITIES, AND
URBAN MARGINALITY



Neighborhoods, Communities, and Urban Marginality

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Peary Brug • Zachary S. Ritter
Kenneth R. Roth
Editors

Marginality in the Urban Center

The Costs and Challenges of Continued Whiteness
in the Americas and Beyond

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Editors

Peary Brug
Department of Psychology
St. Mary's University
Twickenham, UK

Zachary S. Ritter
University of Redlands
Los Angeles, CA, USA

Kenneth R. Roth
The CHOICES Project
University of California
Los Angeles, CA, USA

Neighborhoods, Communities, and Urban Marginality

ISBN 978-3-319-96465-2

ISBN 978-3-319-96466-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96466-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018953782

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

In the run-up to the 2016 US presidential election, there appeared to be a spike in violence against individuals and Communities of Color, or at the very least an increase in media reports on such violence. These acts did not appear to be confined geographically. There were the police-initiated shooting deaths of unarmed Black men in the US: Philando Castile in Minnesota, and Alton Sterling in Louisiana, to name just two of the more than 250 African Americans killed by police in 2016. Likewise, similar police-initiated violence was erupting in Jamaica with similar outcomes. In Belize, there was an uptick in gang affiliation among Young Men of Color against decaying opportunity, and a subsequent rise in deaths in clashes with police and rival gangs. In each of these disparate locations within the Western Hemisphere, very similar outcomes against a single particular group were emerging in numbers well beyond coincidence.

These seemingly pervasive and similar events begged the question as to whether there were systemic causes for what appeared to be a growing, yet historically consistent and pervasive war waged against Blackness. Upon closer examination, we realized this extreme marginalization of Black males was nothing new in historical record but was brought to mass white audiences by cell phone footage and media coverage, and unfortunately as a form of Black spectacle, in the US and throughout the hemisphere.

A concurrent and rising concern was the divisive political rhetoric infused into most debate, with that rhetoric aiming blame for virtually all emerging and ongoing political concerns on Communities of Color. As if emanating from a parallel yet politically alternate universe, unarmed Black males were seen inciting police to violence, undocumented immigrants

imported crime and mayhem at the US southern border, and Puerto Rico was blamed for poor performance by some Wall Street hedge funds, with Donald Trump tossing rolls of paper towels at hurricane survivors as if making a fast-break pass on the basketball court. President Trump went on to intimate post-hurricane aid to Puerto Rico was slow in coming due to the island territory defaulting on egregious debt caused by propping up a fossil fuel energy grid.

This blame game was consistently and increasingly aimed at anyone who did not represent a white heteronormative America. In the intervening time, these methods of marginalization seem to have only grown more virulent, and this resurgence of an unapologetic Whiteness doctrine most likely is the tie that binds marginality across geopolitical boundaries.

Collected here are 12 chapters that seek to make sense of this moment in time. The book opens with a discussion following this one that Whiteness is on the rise, and poses a threat to Communities of Color throughout the Western Hemisphere. We also draw bright line connections between Whiteness doctrine and marginalization. The ensuing chapters document previous and re-invigorated experiences with colonial racial hierarchies, the media role in reproducing those hierarchies, and the potential lethal outcomes for People of Color. There also is a discussion of double marginalization—being Black and transgendered—and the unique outcomes endured by this community. We also examine efforts in the Caribbean to coalesce divergent backgrounds into a cohesive and tolerant national whole, and investigate the increasing trend across the globe for individuals to identify as biracial, and not necessarily within the Black-White dichotomy of the Americas.

In addition, we present examples of how institutions, particularly colleges and universities, perpetuate the marginalization of groups, through a lack of interrogating practices that diminish education goals, and ultimately student success.

And, finally, we conclude that *any* rise in the proliferation of white supremacy in an increasingly brown hemisphere is both toxic and aberrant, and requires all of us to seek alternatives to any rise in injustice and inequality based solely on skin pigment.

Twickenham, UK
Los Angeles, CA, USA
Los Angeles, CA, USA

Peary Brug
Zachary S. Ritter
Kenneth R. Roth

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Edited books are collective affairs made possible only by the overt contributions of authors and editors, and the often-covert contributions of supporters, mentors, and facilitators. The creation of this volume is consistent with this reality. As such, we would like to thank Drs. Allen and Yeakey for supporting our contribution to their series investigating marginality among communities, cities, and countries. Likewise, we thank our contributors who worked with us to help shape an important view of marginalizing mechanisms in the urban center. We'd also like to recognize Dr. Jerlando Jackson for accepting a last-minute proposal to present our early concept for the book as a roundtable discussion at the 2016 International Colloquium for Black Males in Education in Barbados. The reception at the colloquium was the needed platform to give this project flight. There are indeed others, too many to name, who have supported this project and projects before it that enabled bringing this book to fruition. We thank them in spirit, if not name, and hope the outcomes contained in these pages do not disappoint.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Peary Brug is Programme Director for the Psychology Program at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London, where he teaches courses in social psychology, political psychology and human relationships. His research interests focus on developing a better understanding of the psychological impact that integration has on majority and minority groups in Western cultures.

Nolan L. Cabrera is an associate professor in the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. He is the author of over 50 scholarly publications, and is studying the racial dynamics on college campuses, with a particular focus on Whiteness. He was the only academic featured in the MTV documentary *White People*, and was also an expert witness for the plaintiffs in Tucson Unified Mexican American Studies federal case (*Arce v. Douglas*).

Chris Corces-Zimmerman is a doctoral student in the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. His research centers on a critique of Whiteness in higher education and the ways that it impacts and is maintained by students, faculty, and administrators at both individual and institutional levels. He has worked for over 10 years in the field of higher education and student affairs, primarily in roles related to racial justice, gender equity, and institutional assessment.

Seth M. Fishman is Assistant Professor of Education and Counseling and Director of Curriculum and Academic Outcomes in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Villanova University. Fishman's scholarship includes retirement and higher education, student transition, and higher

education teaching, outcomes assessment, and evaluation. He holds a PhD in Higher Education Administration from the Ohio State University.

Daniel Giles is an undergraduate student in the Psychology Program at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. His research interests lie within the field of social psychology, with a focus on group and team dynamics. He is also Vice President of the Student Psychology Society and volunteers as a support worker for individuals with mental health challenges.

Sara E. Grummert is a PhD student in Higher Education Administration and Policy at the University of California, Riverside. Her research focuses on equity in intercollegiate athletics and higher education.

Siduri J. Haslerig is Assistant Professor of Adult and Higher Education at the University of Oklahoma. Haslerig's research comprises the study of intercollegiate athletics and college athletes within higher education, particularly focusing on equity and access within these institutions.

Adrian H. Huerta is a provost postdoctoral scholar in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. Huerta's research focuses on boys of color, college access and equity, and gang associated youth. His work appears in *Education and Urban Society*, *Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, *Urban Education*, *Urban Review*, and other research and practitioner journals. He holds a PhD in Education from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Felix Kumah-Abiwu is Assistant Professor of Pan-African Studies at Kent State University. He received his PhD in Political Science from West Virginia University. He also studied at Ohio University and the Legon Centre for International Affairs & Diplomacy, University of Ghana. His research focuses on the politics of development, elections/democratization in Africa, African security/international relations, Black males/public education, social movements (African diaspora), and global narcotics policy. He is the author of *The Dynamics of U.S. Narcotics Policy Change: Implications for the Global Narcotics Regime* (2012). He has contributed a chapter on the security challenges of drug trafficking in West Africa to a volume published by the United Nations University for Peace (UPEACE). Kumah-Abiwu's scholarly articles have also appeared in the *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *West Africa Review*, *International Journal of Public*

Administration, Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs, Social Sciences, and Commonwealth & Comparative Politics.

Babacar M'Baye is Professor of English and Pan-African Studies at Kent State University. He received his doctorate degree in American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University. His research includes Black Atlantic studies, immigration, race, class, gender, and hybrid identities in Black literatures, music, films, and cultures.

Anthony H. Normore is Professor of Educational Leadership, and Department Chair of Graduate Education at California State University Dominguez Hills. He is the author of 20+ books, including *Leading Against the Grain: Lessons from Visionaries for Creating Just and Equitable Schools* (2018), and has published 200+ book chapters, research reviews, monographs, and peer-reviewed articles in professional educational leadership journals (e.g., *Journal of Educational Administration*, *Journal of School Leadership*, *Alberta Journal of Educational Leadership*, and *Educational Administration Quarterly*), and law enforcement journals (e.g., *Police Chief*, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, *International Policing Journal*, and *Law Enforcement Today*). Normore serves on various editorial review boards. He is the recipient of the AERA 2013 Bridge People Award for Leadership for Social Justice SIG, and the 2015 Willower Award of Excellence in Research awarded by UCEA Consortium for the Study of Leadership and Ethics in Education.

Zachary S. Ritter is an Adjunct Professor at University of Redlands and University of La Verne. He completed his PhD research on East Asian international students' experiences with cross-racial interaction. He was the Interim Associate Dean of Institutional Diversity, at Harvey Mudd College, where he helped lead equity-centered workshops. At the University of Redlands, he taught social justice history and qualitative methods, and helped create a healthy masculinity program called DUDES. At the University of California, Los Angeles, he taught inter-group dialogue courses on race and socio-economic status and participated in NewGround: a Muslim-Jewish partnership.

Kenneth R. Roth Research Associate, The CHOICES Project, University of California, Los Angeles. Roth is a journalist and award-winning documentary filmmaker, and focuses his research on media representations and ways they may flavor personal decisions associated with education and employment choices.

Faith Speaks Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Restore, Inc., Georgia/Virginia, is a counselor psychologist and educator, who serves in mental health community agency services, education, and community development. Speaks creates and implements community programs, equipping leadership, in various regions, for people nurturance, and economic development, within marginalized communities.

Appollonia Mamadee Uhila formerly Commissioner of Juvenile Justice for San Mateo County, has conducted parent and adolescent training in East Palo Alto for over 40 years.

Rican Vue is Assistant Professor of Education Policy in the School of Public Policy at Oregon State University. Her research focuses on the role of race and its intersections with ethnicity, class and gender in US education, with an emphasis on equity and inclusion in higher education.

Dianne Williams is a criminologist and consultant. She holds a PhD, an MBA and an MSc, and has done additional coursework at Harvard University's The John F. Kennedy School of Government, the International Institute for Restorative Practices and the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies of the National Defense University. She is a Clinically Certified Criminal Justice Specialist, a Certified Sentence Mitigation Specialist in the Division of Counseling of the National Association of Forensic Counselors, a Certified Social and Behavioral Research Investigator and a Certified Mediator. She is a member of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and the American Society of Criminology. Williams is the co-author of the 2012 United Nation's Human Development Report for Trinidad and Tobago and was involved in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) Monitoring and Evaluation of Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Program of the U.S. Department of State.

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PART I

Introduction



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Special Note on the Heightened Effects of Urban Marginality in the Trump Era

Kenneth R. Roth

In the aftermath of the devastation to Puerto Rico by Hurricane Maria and the ensuing publicity surrounding the newly inaugurated Trump Administration's lack of response to the disaster, Mr. Trump, speaking to a small group of faithful, said, "We love Puerrrrr-toe Reecoco," in his best caricature of the Spanish pronunciation of the island. Amid growing snickers, he smiled and repeated, "We LOVE Puerrrrr-toe Reecoco," this time emphasizing the word "love." The laughter grew around him, and he smiled and nodded before deadpanning, "We also love Puerto Rico," spoken as a North American news anchor devoid of dialect. The room erupted in admiration of his parody.

But this very public and seeming disregard for the plight of nearly four million Americans on the island—most of whom were without power for the second time when this book went to press—is not an isolated incident by this president of the caricature or condemnation of nonwhites.

K. R. Roth (✉)

The CHOICES Project, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

e-mail: kr@kenroth.com

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P. Brug et al. (eds.), *Marginality in the Urban Center*,
Neighborhoods, Communities, and Urban Marginality,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96466-9_1

During his campaign for the White House, Mr. Trump railed about the need for a wall that stretched from sea to shining sea to keep out Mexicans and other Latinx populations from entering the US, despite the number of undocumented Latino immigrants trending downward for the past decade. He said Mexicans were rapists and brought crime to the US, yet at the height of undocumented immigration from South of the Border, the US had some of its lowest rates of crime in decades. Not only did Trump make a wall his signature policy promise, he bragged, as the penultimate dealmaker, he would ensure the Mexican government paid for it.

Then, when football quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee during a pregame presentation in protest of continued violence and differential *justice* against Black men, the presumptive leader of the free world said every player in the league taking a knee should be fired. Given nearly 70% of NFL players are Black, and Kaepernick's symbolic gesture was repeated across the league, there likely wouldn't be a league without them, nor would there be the nearly \$15 billion in revenue the 32 teams and associated merchandise generate (Goodman 2016). President Trump's declaration appeared to underscore the purpose and prescience of Kaepernick's concerns.

However, in stark contrast, when a Charlottesville, Virginia, rally of white supremacists protesting the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue in a public park turned violent, and US news carried images of white men hoisting torches through the street, chanting racial epithets, and attacking nonwhite passersby, the president refused any direct comment against them, blaming the violence "on all sides" (Jacobs and Murray 2017). One white woman, Heather Heyer, 32, was fatally run down and 19 others injured when a 20-year-old avowed white supremacist careened his car into a group of counterprotesters. David Duke, a *former* Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, who endorsed the president during the election, was prominent in the rally. When the president finally did condemn the violence, Mr. Duke took to the Twittersphere to remind him, "I would recommend you take a good look in the mirror & remember it was White Americans who put you in the presidency, not radical leftists" (Jacobs and Murray 2017).

Then, again, when a 19-year-old white male returned to the Florida high school, from which he had been expelled, and killed 17 people with a semiautomatic rifle he made fully automatic with a \$50 kit available at gun shows, Mr. Trump offered support to young people who may feel lonely or isolated (Nakamura 2018). He also blamed the country for a lack of mental health services—coincidentally, a legacy of the Reagan

Administration—but never mentioned the travesty of ready availability of antipersonnel weapons and ammunition to nearly anyone, regardless of their mental state.

bell hooks (2004) and others (Heitzeg 2015) have noted when white males act violently, media and other accounts begin exploring psychological issues as likely explanations for antisocial behavior. However, if Black males act out, the media representations point to a flawed, inherently evil perpetrator (hooks 2004). Even in cases such as the Parkland, Florida, high school massacre, medical mediation of white deviance is the rule, as evidenced by Mr. Trump's response. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2011) likely would have argued Mr. Trump's response is an ideological one that absolves Whiteness virtually at every turn.

In Trump's first year as president, 112 Americans died in ten mass shootings, including the nation's deadliest attack in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017, in which 58 people were killed and another 800 injured. In every instance, the shooter was a white male (Bermont 2018).

White supremacy has been the norm, not the exception, since the formation of the US, and European settlement of the Caribbean, and Central and South America. For a time, the US begrudgingly assented to a civil rights movement, mostly to save face under global scrutiny, and the potential threat of a seemingly thriving alternate political economy, communism. It is actually something of an oxymoron to assert you are a land of opportunity and the freest nation on the earth when all nonwhites, and even many white immigrants, have been relegated to second or even third tier status in terms of social rewards. Before the collapse of the Soviet version of communism, America had to step up its game and actually lead the way toward representing a more inclusive, equal, and just society, to push back against much of the globe seeking an alternative to the rapacious consumption necessary to keep capitalism thriving.

As a result, there were some social strides and glimmers of hope, some of which remain today. But, in the main, and under the Trump Administration, to be sure, a virulent climate of marginality has reemerged for all groups and peoples that do not fit or adhere to a white heteronormative patriarchy, both within the US, and throughout the Western Hemisphere. The progressive strides made have been mostly with regard to increasing gender equality and broader acceptance of sexual identity, but the playing field remains unlevel, and even the progress made has returned to the crosshairs under the Trump Administration. Race and ethnic antagonisms have broadened well beyond the typical Black–white dichotomy.

The mechanisms of marginality, therefore, also have become far more sophisticated. While traditional forms based on race, gender, and class remain salient, groups based on age, profession, religion, ability, country of origin, or ideology wavering from Whiteness, increasingly face consequences in a widening swath of the Americas.

Amy Chua, in her 2003 book, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (Chua 2003), demystified a number of regional and ethnic clashes typically represented by the global media apparatus as historical and indelible enmities resulting in genocides and toppled governments. Chua pulled back the curtain to reveal the real accelerant in most cases was transglobal capital interests supported by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other US-led interests. She argued that much of the world's recent civil strife resulted from long-time minority-controlled nations or resources newly subjected to broader plebiscite and market pressures that led marginalized majorities to overturn oppressive and foreign-protected ruling minorities who had traditionally manipulated markets to their own overwhelming benefit.

It is not much of a stretch of the imagination, then, to envision a similarity in these global realities with heightened efforts in the US to gerrymander Congressional districts and to exclude voters whose sentiments and future intentions don't necessarily align with the politics of Whiteness. Mass incarceration, the school to prison pipeline and renewed federal efforts to thwart the wave of marijuana legalization in the states may be other mechanisms designed to manipulate voter outcomes, and even whiten eligible voters, given the populations most affected by differential law enforcement, school discipline and nonviolent drug convictions are overwhelmingly Communities of Color.

These issues and conditions may appear to be US-centric, but upon closer review, tentacles of similar marginalizing mechanisms in Trinidad-Tobago and Jamaica, have emerged and are represented in this book. For our purposes and the clarity of readers, we define marginality as systemic mechanisms that push individuals or groups to the fringes of social rewards and begin a downward trajectory for them over time. Like the revelations in Chua's *World on Fire*, the authors collected here argue in varied and nuanced ways that outcomes for individuals and groups under investigation are not accidental and may be the result of highly organized structures that operationalize specific and intended outcomes.

Much like the sweeping crime bills of the Reagan era, which on their face simply seemed to be get tough on crime initiatives but contained differential penalties for similar crimes that fell disproportionately on urban Communities of Color, the modern mechanisms or ways of applying law and awarding benefits described in these chapters appear to benefit the few while broadening the detriment to an increasingly larger band of others.

However, the rationale behind this compilation is not to incite but to inform: to propose connectivity between disparate outcomes for different groups without laying all of the blame for outcomes on the groups themselves, which is a simplistic explanation that scaffolds adverse stereotypes and proposes no remedy. Even if these examinations are flawed, the opportunities for dialogue and reflection serve the best interests and efforts of us all. Expanding inequality in any form does nothing to promote goodwill among an increasing diversity of peoples, nor does it promote a peaceful planet.

The chapter following this introduction explores the intersection of Whiteness and marginality, and proposes we are currently immersed in a fourth wave of a recurring White Hegemonic Alliance. Specifically, the chapter examines the historic formation of Whiteness and the White Hegemonic Alliance (Allen 2009) as a mechanism of understanding how this oppressive social structure was created and continues to exist despite historical shifts and direct challenges.

As counterpoint, Chap. 3 interrogates the growing perception among whites they too are marginalized, and the rationale argued is one of reverse discrimination based on politically correct rhetoric and diversity initiatives aimed at inclusion of historically underrepresented groups.

Chapter 4 is an autoethnographic narrative by a Pacific Island woman who shares experiences of the colonization of Samoa when a child and how many of the same mechanisms are operative in her adopted home of East Palo Alto, California, a gentrifying enclave in the South San Francisco Bay Area.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the rationalization and media desensitization of violence against People of Color based on how they are represented and what stories gain traction in the 24x7 news cycle. Chapter 5 provides a content analysis of the most popular ESPN network coverage of US college football and how commentary, driven by racial associations, primes viewers to dehumanize Black people in general and Black male athletes more specifically. Chapter 6 examines who controls broadcast content, and how those controls shape worldviews of race, threat, power, and worth.

Chapter 7 uses Schlossberg's theory of mattering and marginality to study first-generation, low-income Latino male students and their experiences transitioning to higher education, in addition to the programmatic and professional support needed to assist them to and through their college career.

In Chap. 8, the author examines the intersection of sexual identity and race within the context of social mores, and long-established gender roles. Again, the interpretation and presentation by media of *transgenderism* pits public opinion and gender identity at odds. Two sites under examination are the US and Jamaica.

Chapter 9 focuses on the twin island country of Trinidad-Tobago as a site for examining nationalism against a diverse population from all over the globe, and its unique stew of cultural practices and norms. Despite the absence of intergroup violence and unrest, there are tensions that seem to be working out over time, with collective involvement and new identities. This chapter chronicles historic immigration to the islands and the unique ways Indian, Chinese, Indigenous, Creole, and other ethnicities have meshed to create a uniquely *Trinibagoian* identity and emerging culture.

Chapter 10 addresses biraciality and the growing permutations of how individuals self-identify. In North America, biraciality has most often been viewed through a Black-white lens. However, there has been an increase across continents in the number of those *who* report being biracial and a concomitant increase in *how* they choose to identify their biraciality. This chapter examines the liminality of nondominant biraciality, with an eye toward understanding the potentially unique social and psychological situations individuals may encounter.

Chapter 11 focuses on institutions of higher education and ways they can marginalize, through the increasing use of part-time faculty against a backdrop of escalating tuition costs and market-based structures that divert tuition to institutional expansion in ways other than tenure track appointments of terminal degree faculty. The increasing reliance on part-time, lesser-degreed, and lower-paid adjunct faculty has implications for proficiency, academic freedom, and knowledge development. It also provides a mechanism to marginalize terminal degree holders who haven't or can't land a tenure track appointment, given this prevailing trend.

We conclude with a chapter that highlights these methods of marginality as intended rather than accidental. These practices are rooted in what the author refers to as the "Whiteness Ego," a descriptor that has definition as pathology within the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) V-TR*,

the globally recognized and accepted manual of human psychoses. The author views the formation and development of the Whiteness Ego in the wake of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, and traces how it separated Europeans from their religion and political economy, paving the way for the atrocities of Black slavery in the Americas, and ongoing racism, classism, and increasing marginalization of individuals by an ever-growing cosmos of criteria. What results is a fractured view of what Western democracies think they are versus what they have become, and the implications these deformations have for the US, Western Hemisphere, and the world. The chapter asserts that the Whiteness Ego is a pathological presence that undermines true human progress because it is focused on the survival of only one phenotype, which represents less than 15% of more than 7.6 billion earthly inhabitants.

While this is not an exhaustive examination of mechanisms of marginality or Whiteness as catalyst, our hope is we've provided spaces to focus inquiry, and a frame for how groups can be marginalized, and the mechanisms, even seemingly benign ones, that may contribute to the spiral of individuals and groups in our modern and complex world. These examinations are set against a resurgent backdrop of Whiteness in the Trump era, and the inherent historical injustices that accompany it. Given Whiteness is a social construct, it is neither monolithic nor above redress. With care, compassion, and our collective humanity, we can modify the systems and institutions that have served those in dominance. While letting go of this inherently unearned advantage may be difficult, it is not impossible, and it is the right thing to do. By conforming our wondrously diverse world into a single formula for the benefit of less than the whole, we have for centuries limited our potential, and in many ways negated our humanity. Globalization, technology, and a reverence for every human soul now provide a moment in which our lived experience, and knowledge advances can shape a brighter future based on each of our better selves.

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PART II

Whiteness and Marginality
at the Center



CHAPTER 2

Beyond “Privilege”: Whiteness as the Center of Racial Marginalization

Nolan L. Cabrera and Chris Corces-Zimmerman

INTRODUCTION

When issues of marginality enter both scholarly and public discussions, there is a tendency to focus on the marginalized in the absence of critically analyzing the social practice of the marginalizer. As Cabrera (2019) argued, “This is akin to saying *up* with no *down*; *good* with no *bad*; *hot* with no *cold*. Unfortunately, this is how a number of contemporary investigations of race occur – engaging racial marginalization without also analyzing advantage” (italics in original, pp. 16–17). Within this spirit and the overall focus of this text, we offer a brief historical lineage of Whiteness as a center of racial oppression in a US context. Specifically, we delve into the historic formation of Whiteness (Allen 2009) and the white hegemonic alliance (WHA) as a mechanism of understanding how this oppressive social structure was created and continue to exist despite historical shifts and direct challenges. Overall, we offer this brief history of racial marginalization drawing from Freire (2000), “Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so they can

N. L. Cabrera (✉) • C. Corces-Zimmerman
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA

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P. Brug et al. (eds.), *Marginality in the Urban Center*,
Neighborhoods, Communities, and Urban Marginality,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96466-9_2

more wisely build the future” (p. 83). Before we are able to fully explain the power of Whiteness to marginalize and oppress People of Color in the United States and beyond, we offer an overview of the WHA by breaking it into its three components: Whiteness, hegemony, and alliance.

THE NATURE OF WHITENESS

Whiteness is a relatively unique form of social oppression, in that it is an empty social category because it is defined primarily by what it is not (People of Color) instead of what it is (Cabrera 2017). However, there is often a great deal of confusion when using the term as it is frequently conflated with an individual level critique of white people. Rather, Leonardo (2009) offered, “‘Whiteness’ is a racial discourse, whereas the category ‘white people’ represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color... Whiteness is not a culture but a social concept” (pp. 169–170). Within this definition, Leonardo acknowledges white people are the substantive beneficiaries of this discourse, and the resulting social system in which white skin and white ways of being are held to be superior and meritorious. Moreover, Leonardo’s description of Whiteness serves to center Whiteness as an oppressive discourse or system meant to oppress People of Color. As Roediger (1994) provocatively argued, it is not just that Whiteness is false and oppressive, but “whiteness is *nothing but* false and oppressive” (p. 13, italics in original). As we provide an overview of the historical formation of Whiteness, the substance of this statement will become clear. Additionally, the idea Whiteness does not represent a culture in traditional understandings will be explored further in the subsequent section. Whiteness, however, should not be understood to be an abstraction, but rather as a foundational component of antiminority policies ranging from slavery, to the attempted genocide of Native Americans, eugenics, *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation, Japanese internment, Operation Wetback, and the rise of the prison–industrial complex, to name a few (Alexander 2010; Allen 1997; Feagin 2006; Omi and Winant 2015; Painter 2010).

HEGEMONY AND WHITENESS

A major part of the oppressive practice of Whiteness relies on its hegemony, a term largely associated with the theorizing of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and others before him (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In seeking to

explain why Marx’s vision of the proletariat revolution did not come to fruition in Italy, Gramsci came to understand this lack of action to be the result of the ruling class’ ability to articulate an ideology to the masses that naturalized their dominant social position (Gramsci 1971). He argued the ruling elite maintained social control through a mixture of coercion and consent, and if they are able to “manufacture consent” (Herman and Chomsky 1988), they do not have to use force to stay in power. That is, if the ruling elite is successful in articulating an ideology that masks the realities of oppression, the masses will pacify themselves (Gramsci 1971). When the ruling elite is able to articulate their dominant ideology, forge necessary alliances to remain in power, and have the masses accept it, Gramsci (1971) referred to this as a “moment of hegemony.” This is an important point because it highlights how hegemony is a malleable form of social oppression—constantly adapting to changing social circumstances—and this is what makes it so difficult to disrupt.

Even though Gramsci (1971) was focused on capitalist exploitation, the term hegemony also has been applied to racial studies (e.g., Cabrera 2009; Hall 1986; Leonardo 2009). In the context of Critical Whiteness Studies, hegemony is essentially a mechanism for exploring the racial alliances, structures, and ideologies, allowing white supremacy to remain a powerful social force of dominance and coercion.

THE WHITE HEGEMONIC ALLIANCE

As was previously explained, the history of Whiteness in the United States has always been inextricably tied to the process and practice of marginalizing People of Color, but it adapts given changing social terrain. In fact, Whiteness itself does not exist except in contrast to the imaginary *other* represented by People of Color (Morrison 1992). As such, in order to maintain and justify their dominant social status, individuals who declared themselves white needed to first establish an “other” to whom they were both physically and mentally superior. In explaining the way white individuals have constructed an imaginary notion of Blackness or Africanism, Toni Morrison (1992) argued, “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American (white) self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (p. 52). Having established Whiteness as not-Blackness,

white individuals then created and have frequently reinvented/reinvested in the WHA. Through a combination of laws, practices, and language, just as Gramsci recognized in Italy, a small group of elite, powerful white individuals have been able to psychologically control and physically ensure allegiance from the larger majority of working-class whites who might otherwise be inclined to identify along socioeconomic lines and join with People of Color of similar social standing (Allen 2009). What is also important to understand about this alliance is in most ways it is maladaptive and against the economic interests of the majority of white-identified individuals who consent to the agreement in order to maintain a false sense of superiority over People of Color. Or, as DuBois (1935) argued, the demeaning of People of Color through systemic white supremacy leads to the “the public and psychological wages of whiteness.” That is, they may be poor and downtrodden, but at least they are not Black.

In a more recent work, Morrison (2017) posed the questions, “Why should we want to know a stranger when it is easier to estrange another? Why should we want to close the distance when it is easier to close the gate?” (p. 38). James Baldwin (1963) similarly problematized this use of language:

Now, here in this country we got somebody called a Ni**er. It doesn't in such terms, I beg you to remark, exist in any other country in the world. We have invented the Ni**er. I didn't invent him ... white people invented him ... I have always known that I am not a Ni**er ... but if I am not the Ni**er ... and if it is true that your invention reveals you...then who is the Ni**er?¹

It is these questions that illuminate the counterproductive and yet entirely controlling nature of the WHA.

Throughout US history, there have been three key moments (or “moments of hegemonic Whiteness”) in which upper-class whites have solidified alliances in order to perpetuate white supremacy. It is important to note these are not three disjointed or discontinuous periods in history, rather each flow one into the next though each features its own unique characteristics and mechanisms for reaffirming the WHA. The first moment came in response to Bacon's Rebellion and was operationalized through

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0L5fciA6AU>