



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN RACE, INEQUALITY AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION



Disrupting Racism in US Schools

Transcending the (un)Civil War

Edited by Amy Murray · Rose Borunda

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Palgrave Studies in Race, Inequality and Social Justice in Education

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This series focuses on new developments in the study of race, social justice and education. Promoting theoretically-rich works, contributions include empirical and conceptual studies that advance critical analysis whilst attempting to destabilise the institutionalised racist orthodoxy that has undermined the notion of education being a tool of social mobility. The series will consider social mobility as a form of equality narrowly defined whilst also critiquing the ideology of social mobility which essentially pits individuals against one another in a sink or swim competition, entirely ignoring the reality of deep and damaging structural inequalities. A central aim of the series will be to address important current policy issues, such as social mobility, widening participation etc., while also recognising that critical studies of race are also concerned with wider, fundamental transformations in education, knowledge and society, i.e. the dismantling of racist structures, concern with education's role in reproducing racial inequality.

Amy Murray • Rose Borunda
Editors

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ISSN 2524-633X

ISSN 2524-6348 (electronic)

Palgrave Studies in Race, Inequality and Social Justice in Education

ISBN 978-3-031-49561-8

ISBN 978-3-031-49562-5 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49562-5>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

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

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FOREWORD

As an immigrant who arrived in this country without a deep understanding of its complex history and the lingering effects of its often violent past, I spent many years learning to comprehend and appreciate the conflicts, as well as the strategies of struggle and survival that form the rich tapestry of American life. I wish I could have read a book like *Disrupting Racism in US Schools—Transcending the (un)Civil War* thirty years ago; it would have saved me a great deal of time in learning the culture and the educational system of contemporary America.

Now, with the benefit of time and experience, I am able to see the incredible value in this edited volume. Its insights and analyses contribute significantly to our understanding of the myriad challenges faced by individuals and communities in the ongoing pursuit of anti-racist social justice work in education. As I reflect on my own journey, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from these authors and to participate in the collective effort to create a more just and equitable society.

This volume assembles a diverse and powerful collection of works that delve into the pervasive issue of racial injustice within the United States educational system. By examining the main themes that weave through these contributions, we can appreciate the breadth and depth of the topics covered and the commitment of the authors to contribute to a more just and equitable society.

A central theme that emerges throughout the volume is the need to dismantle oppressive and colonized curricula. The authors examine the impact of exposing students to historical humanists who fought for racial justice, challenging the worldview perpetuated by a colonized curriculum,

and offering alternative models that encourage the pursuit of racial justice. Efforts to correct false historical narratives that neglect the perspectives of marginalized groups are also emphasized.

Another important theme is the significance of fostering open conversations about racism in various educational settings. The authors highlight the value of exposing students to a curriculum based on the lives of social justice activists, leading to positive shifts in identity development and improved perceptions among both majority and minority students. Creating open dialogues is also emphasized through examining generational trauma and the resulting lack of empathy and fragmentation tied to racialized history.

The value of incorporating diverse perspectives and cultural practices in education is another recurring theme in the volume. The authors showcase the importance of incorporating Indigenous cultural traditions and practices in K-12 education, addressing the achievement gap, promoting equity, and advancing social justice goals. The healing potential of Indigenous practices such as storytelling, music, and dance in both physical and mental health is also emphasized.

Embracing humanist narratives as a means to create a more inclusive and equitable society is stressed throughout the volume. The authors present a counternarrative curriculum focusing on historical humanists who collaborated with marginalized activists, demonstrating the positive impact of this curriculum on students' perceptions and highlighting its potential for growth and the promotion of well-being for all.

As we continue to explore the themes and lessons presented in this volume, it becomes evident that the journey toward anti-racist social justice in education is a multifaceted and ongoing process. Educators, researchers, and activists must remain vigilant and adaptable in their approaches to create more inclusive and equitable educational environments. By engaging in critical self-reflection and embracing diverse perspectives, we can strive to make a lasting impact on the lives of students and communities.

The chapters in this volume provide practical recommendations for educators and administrators, stressing the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, creating safe spaces for open dialogue on race and racism, promoting collaborative and participatory leadership, and fostering empathy and understanding among students and staff of different backgrounds.

A crucial lesson that readers can draw from these chapters is the importance of recognizing and addressing the emotional and psychological dimensions of racism in educational settings. By creating spaces for healing and growth, educators can contribute to the transformation of educational systems and the broader society.

Another key takeaway is the necessity of acknowledging and celebrating the diverse cultural roots and contributions of different communities to American society. By embracing Indigenous knowledge and practices, as well as the histories of other marginalized groups, educators can foster a deeper appreciation for the richness and complexity of our shared human experience. This approach not only contributes to dismantling racist ideologies and structures but also promotes a more inclusive and cohesive society.

Ultimately, this edited volume showcases the power of collective action and the potential for transformative change in the realm of education. The authors' work serves as a testament to the importance of collaboration and dialogue in the pursuit of social justice. Their dedication to creating more equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students is truly inspiring.

This collective work offers a compelling and insightful exploration of the dynamic interaction between theory and practice in the struggle against racism in education. The authors' passion for social justice, their rigorous scholarship, and their commitment to fostering change make this work an invaluable resource for anyone seeking to make a meaningful impact in the field of education. I applaud the authors for their contributions to our collective understanding of these complex issues and for their unwavering commitment to the pursuit of a more just and equitable world.

The chapters presented in this edited volume remind us of the importance of centering marginalized voices and experiences in the fight against racism in education. As educators, researchers, and activists, we must commit to ongoing self-reflection and growth, constantly challenging our assumptions and biases in order to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments. In doing so, we can begin to address the deeply ingrained power imbalances and systemic injustices that have persisted for far too long.

Furthermore, the authors emphasize the significance of collaboration and solidarity among individuals from diverse backgrounds in dismantling oppressive systems. By fostering relationships built on trust and empathy, we can create a more robust foundation for anti-racist work in education.

The importance of cross-cultural understanding and cooperation cannot be overstated, as it is through these connections that we can truly unite in our pursuit of social justice.

The edited volume also highlights the potential for innovative pedagogical approaches and curriculum development in transforming the educational landscape. By centering the experiences of marginalized communities, celebrating the contributions of historically oppressed peoples, and engaging in critical conversations about race and racism, we can inspire a new generation of students to become agents of change themselves.

Ultimately, the lessons imparted in this edited volume serve as a powerful reminder that the work of anti-racist social justice in education is not only a labor of passion but also an intellectual endeavor. To succeed, we must engage in theory work and thoughtful analysis of practices, continually adapting our approaches and strategies to address the ever-evolving challenges we face. As we progress on this journey, we can draw inspiration and guidance from the authors' groundbreaking work, as well as the countless other individuals who have dedicated their lives to dismantling systems of oppression in education and beyond.

In the spirit of collaboration and solidarity, let us move forward together in pursuit of a more just, equitable, and inclusive world. We must continue to learn from the dynamic interaction between theory and practice, between the abstract and the concrete, and always remember that it is through this ongoing process that we can create meaningful change. As we delve into the works presented in this edited volume, let us be inspired by the passion, dedication, and brilliance of the authors and celebrate the power of collective action in the struggle for social justice in education.

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Alexander M. Sidorkin

PREFACE

DISRUPTING RACISM IN US SCHOOLS: TRANSCENDING THE (UN)CIVIL WAR

Disrupting Racism in US Schools: Transcending the (un)Civil War compiles a series of articles, authored by Rose Borunda, and in collaboration with a host of university colleagues, research assistants, and community activists. The original publication of these articles spans a period of several years from 2006 to 2022 and these are connected by common themes that link how the past has bearing on the present realities of individuals, families, communities, and society. More so, the articles articulate how the conveyance of the past created this nation's sociological pathology which, in turn, fuels psychological and existential dysfunctions and discord. With this central theme, the articles reflect the impact of the conveyance on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as their non-BIPOC counterparts living in the United States. In doing so, these articles serve to not only expose the elements that foment a racially constructed reality but more importantly, also address how to deconstruct those elements.

Collectively, these articles go beyond just problematizing the historically tenuous relationship between and amongst the various demographic populations in this diverse nation. The articles draw a direct correlation from this nation's historical origins, rooted in racial ideology, to the polarization evident in American society today. Attention is given to the systems that sustain the discord as well as to the entrenched patterns that emerge from unexamined and submerged ways of thinking and being.

Revealing and shedding light on what has been ‘normalized’ in this nation’s cultural milieu provides the opportunity to disrupt the old patterns and introduce new approaches rooted in inclusive ideology.

Despite the fact that the outcome of the US Civil War (1861–1865) forced this nation to abolish the enslavement of humanity, the soul of the nation continues to be contested within our schools through the content of the curriculum and our children’s (mis)treatment. It is here, in our schools, where the heightened awareness and struggle for equity, inclusion, and resources are either made available to our children or consciously and strategically withheld. In consideration of future generations, the authors shed light on the elements that, within the context of our schools, perpetuate the present-day (un)Civil War, while providing a path forward that transcends deeply rooted and dysfunctional orientations. The ultimate goal of this publication is to generate steps toward healing the soul of a nation held hostage by spiritual discord and entrenched positionalities. In doing so, we strive to elevate our citizenry to their fullest humanity.

Subsequently, the systems created to shape this experiment called “the United States” are examined by the authors who seek to not only correct this nation’s course but to offer solutions to the ensuing inequities. The public education system and its reproduction of historically grounded inequities, is carefully examined throughout this series of articles. With genuine hope and a belief in the goodness of humankind, the authors address the wounds that have yet to heal from the inception of this nation’s founding and offer steps toward creating a more harmonious existence for not just some, but for all. To this end, we offer findings that seek to change the landscapes of our schools from psychological and spiritual battlegrounds to sources of collective reconciliation, community restoration, and mutual uplift, thereby transcending the (un)Civil war.

Sacramento, CA, USA

Amy Murray
Rose Borunda

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Courage is required to love those who are not like us. To open our hearts to those who perhaps do not have a voice and who have been ignored, marginalized, and discarded in all ways calls for witnessing and acting upon what we see. This compilation required many to step forward during an era in which violence, manifested through physical, sociological, and psychological means is evident. Yet, we know that we have the power to create a more loving, kind, and peaceful world. Having the will to act upon what we see, today, is what we recognize and commend.

We thankfully acknowledge the contributions of the many authors contained within this publication. We also acknowledge Sac State's College of Education from where much of this scholarship has originated. Supporting ideas that not only address issues but transform practice is critical if we are to repair the broken relationships and move forward. Because we know that silence and conformity only fuel what we see, we celebrate and amplify those who bear the torch. May this body of work bring light.

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Introduction: The Origins

Rose Borunda and Amy Murray

The authors of the articles contained in *Disrupting Racism in US Schools: Transcending the (un)Civil War* are connected through their affiliation with California State University, Sacramento, California (CSUS, or Sac State). All articles, but one, were coauthored by professors, scholars, education researchers, public school teachers, Indigenous activists, and doctoral and master's level students. The authors represent a wide range of cultural backgrounds, comprising Asian American, African American, Middle Eastern American, Chicanx, and Euro-American heritages, as well as Original Nation identities of Rumsien Ohlone, Potawatomi, Sierra, and Coastal Miwok. The two author/editors of this compilation include Rose Borunda, who is born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area and descended from the Purépecha tribe of Guanajuato, Mexico. Amy Murray identifies as a white American of mixed European ancestry including English and Irish while being raised in a Chinese-American home. While this listing of contributors does not reflect this nation's entire demographic spectrum, the mindful collaboration with a wide range of voices speaks to the intentional value and practice of inclusion.

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A. Murray, R. Borunda (eds.), *Disrupting Racism in US Schools*,
Palgrave Studies in Race, Inequality and Social Justice in Education,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49562-5_1

Coauthor Rose Borunda, Professor Emeritus at CSUS in the Doctorate in Educational Leadership and in Counselor Education, currently serves as a CapEd Faculty Fellow, Emeritus, a consultant with the Division of Inclusive Excellence, and Interim Associate Director for the Doctoral Program. Throughout her career as a scholar and practitioner, she has purposely sought relationships with colleagues and Elders who demonstrate a growth mindset. Serving within academia where she was immersed in the wealth of colleagues and students from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences allowed her to seize the opportunity to expand, enhance, and elevate her understanding of the world. Subsequently, these collaborations led to publications that give voice to a wide range of people whose life experiences and orientations are different from her own.

To this end, she reached out to Amy Murray to coauthor this publication and in doing so, continues the practice of opening the circle and model for the next generation the value of inclusive practices. Borunda and Murray, coauthors of four articles in this book, explicitly espouse in their collaboration a Humanist perspective that promotes Black, Indigenous, and People of color (BIPOC) perspectives and actively seeks the inclusion of non-BIPOC in the dialogue. Through a humanistic lens, these two coauthors seek to transcend the contentious circumstances that not only polarize our nation but that also render our school's educators hostage to these combative forces. With the hope of creating a better future for all, we propose a way forward that embraces and elevates foundational beliefs of Humanism that emphasize common bonds, needs, and compassion.

Murray's background includes 20 years of public school teaching and school administration in the Sacramento, California, area. She received her doctorate degree from CSUS. Murray's teacher training and induction started in the University of California, Davis credential program in the late 1990s. At the time, the California Department of Education (CDE) had recently initiated a Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development credential (CLAD) requirement for new teachers. This CLAD requirement meant that Murray and all other new, preservice teachers were expected to have an immersive student teaching experience in a culturally diverse school. Subsequently, Murray was placed with high schoolers at Valley High School where many of her students were English Learners from immigrant families.

Given the demographics of the California student body, Murray, as a white female from Euro-American, middle-class background, recognizes

that the CLAD requirement was a wise approach on the part of the CDE and the public university system, which trains the majority of preservice and new teachers in the state. Most teachers in California do not reflect the state's demographics, as it is the most diverse state in the country, and, in many ways, one of the most diverse places in the world; 54% of California's students are Latinx, 24% are white, 11% are Asian, 6% are black; 45% come from non-English-speaking households, and 51% come from low-income backgrounds. With such a rich demographic, the desire to ensure that all our children are provided with the opportunity to fulfill their highest aspirations is more than just a statistical benchmark goal; it is personal, which means we see the children in our schools as not someone else's children but as *our* children.

Yet, as educators who are held accountable for the disparities in graduation rates and a host of other quantifiable indicators, we acknowledge that fewer than half of students in California meet state standards for reading and math proficiency. Additionally, test score results reveal discrepancies by race and income (LAO, Calfacts, retrieved August 8, 2022 from <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2018/3905/calfacts-2018.pdf>). While these results speak to quantifiable measures, it is also true that these outcomes are perniciously fueled by opportunity gaps, biased curriculum (Loewen, 1995), and negative social mirroring (Gonzales et al., 2013). Qualitative measures, as revealed in these republished articles, show that students have to navigate an academic battlefield in which the exceptional succeed, others survive, and many are left floundering or worse. Subsequently, the collective data contained in measurements and in the voices of our students calls us to pay attention to the context of schools and how inclusive practices and orientations may ultimately bear the results we all seek.

Murray's experience of becoming a public-school teacher in a diverse public school setting in Sacramento, California prompted a period of uncomfortable self-reflection. Like Murray, most American public-school teachers are Caucasian, mostly women, and the majority are "native" English speakers. For Dr. Murray, the early experience of learning to teach in a culturally diverse classroom meant confronting the reality of her own white privilege for the first time. She promptly noticed vast inequities in educational opportunity as anathema to the American core values of liberty and justice for all. Stark realities such as school bathrooms with no lighting would never be acceptable at middle-class suburban schools, yet structural disrepair was not only common but mirrored the lack of care for and understanding of our most precious resource, our children.

In acknowledging the disparities, Murray remembers: “One of my students was a 16- year-old girl from a Hmong family. She was married, with a baby, and she was entirely responsible for caring for her entire extended family, including 10 younger siblings and her in-laws. The disconnect between the demographics of the teachers and the students was plain to see, and I knew I had a lot to learn. I was inherently ‘advantaged’, yet humbled by the narrowness of my own limited life experience and embarrassed by my own ignorance.” Thus began Murray’s journey of learning how to be more connected to the world outside of a small circle.

Borunda’s professional career started in the child assault prevention field at a time when highly publicized incidents of child abductions and murders in Northern California brought together activists, law enforcement, parents, social services, and educators to enact prevention education. By teaching children how to identify and then act upon inappropriate and abusive adult behaviors, the expanse of abuse occurring within homes and other settings such as schools and child care centers were exposed by children who, given the opportunity to speak to trusted adults, revealed their realities. From her experience of working with children to disrupt the cycle of child abuse, Borunda developed an expanded awareness of the inclination of some adults to exploit children’s vulnerability. Equally important was the valuable lesson that when children are empowered, they will use their voice to change the trajectory of their lives and, often, the lives of siblings and other children. This impressed upon Borunda the fact that children know right from wrong but are most apt to act upon improper behavior that they witness when adults are willing to listen to and believe them. However, when adults model ambiguity and inconsistencies children form their own conclusions about how to respond (or not) to the inequities they witness in their midst.

Going on to serve as a school counselor in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, the themes of community generational poverty, drug addiction, and aspirational foreclosure were evident in the students via easily identifiable symptoms of school underperformance, disciplinary issues, truancy, gang affiliation, and other red flag indicators that, more often than not, prompted punitive responses. In these environments, students were expected to make sense of their toxic reality while status quo responses that lacked reflection, consideration, or empathy perpetuated dominance over—rather than engagement with—the children and their families. The hierarchical structures and authoritarian responses expected compliance and within these unexamined spaces, relationality is absent and the space

left soulless. In listening to and engaging students and their families, who were attempting to hold space for their dignity and survivance, Borunda gained insight to the psychological warfare taking place within the classroom and school settings. Several of the articles in this series capture and give voice to this experience.

Yet, in these same spaces, human engagement that transcends this warfare is possible. When adults put faith in our children and youth and take the time to listen, they consistently express the desire for safe and nurturing educational spaces. Similar to the child reporting abuse with the intent of making it stop, Borunda bore witness to youth galvanizing their social capital and voicing their concerns over their outdated curriculum, school violence, and their mistreatment by peers and by adults. Over a short career working in schools, Borunda had the privilege of working in collaboration with youth whose determination set forth school-wide movements that eradicated gang and racial violence.

In the end, children observe adults. They watch what we say, what we do and, more importantly, what we *don't* say or do. Within our schools and our greater society, children notice who and what is important to us. For example, children observe the willful disregard for their safety when, time and again, a school shooting takes the lives of the most vulnerable in spaces where they should feel the safest. Borunda's first exposure to the phenomenon of school shootings was the Cleveland School Elementary massacre in Stockton, California that left 5 children dead and 32 wounded. This was in 1989. The 24-year-old perpetrator, known for expressing anger and resentment of immigrant Asians, was believed to have specifically targeted this school because of its high Southeast Asian population. It must be noted that he had attended this elementary school from Kindergarten to second grade. After this massacre, the school district in which Borunda was serving as a school counselor at the time sought ways to prevent such an event in any one of their schools. The recommendation for doing so was to have every school employee wear a photo badge. She wondered how her badge would protect her and her students from bullets fired from a semi-automatic rifle.

Ten years later, multiple weapons were employed in a killing spree that left 12 students and one teacher murdered at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado. The perpetrators were two seniors who had, over time, developed a penchant for violence.

This incident sparked false alarms of violent threats that, in response, prompted lockdowns and evacuations in schools across the nation. During

one bomb threat at her school site, Borunda was tasked with going into the building that housed the counseling staff to look for any unusual packages that might be a bomb. She wondered, while she was looking for any such package, what in her training qualified her for such a task.

In review of these two traumatic events, and each and every school shooting since that has left multiple fatal outcomes such as Lindhurst High School (California), Red Lake (Minnesota), Sandy Hook (Connecticut), Marjory Stoneman (Florida), Santa Fe High (Texas), Oxford High (Minnesota), Robb Elementary (Texas), just to name a few, there was a child who was bullied, silenced, negated, overlooked. In this child's world of torment, their feelings of exclusion eventually found a way to be noticed, a way to find significance *and in a profoundly violent way*. Most certainly, adults take notice when these perpetrators, alumni of the schools that they attack, leave death as their calling card. For those children who survive these attacks, they wonder when adults will take notice of all the subtle and not so subtle ways in which egregious behaviors transpiring within our schools and left unchecked mirror what transpires in our greater society.

In the meantime, the (un)Civil war rages on and our children ask when they will be heard and valued enough to be noticed. To this end, we examine the ways in which we practice inclusion even in spaces beyond our K-12 schools.

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I REENVISIONING AND INSTITUTING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES WITHIN THE IVORY TOWER

The inclusion of a wide circle of doctoral students and colleagues in this publication reflects an orientation fostered by a mindset in which diverse ideas and orientations are valued. This practice of inclusion within academia started as soon as Borunda completed her doctorate at the University of San Francisco and started her position as a tenure track faculty at California State University, Sacramento in the fall of 2002. She was invited by Carlos Nevarez, also an assistant professor at the time, to join him in research, presenting, and publication. Despite their appointments to different program areas within the College of Education, they recognized they had common research interests. This collaboration established and launched a precedent that serves as a model for countering practices within the Ivory Tower where professors often work in isolation and even in competition. An outcome from the budding collaboration evolved into an expanded reach within the college and university.