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ABSTRACT

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This manuscript attempts to broaden previously explored concepts about the nature of whiteness in order to describe and analyze its influence on past and current K-12 education policy discussions. From an orientation of critical rhetoric, I attempt to advance the critical intercultural communication project by taking seriously Kent Ono’s (2013) notion that assumptions about nation-states as homogeneous entities vastly undertheorize how nations and the people who embody them actually work. That said, my project makes use of Colin Woodard’s (2011) mapping of 11 American nations. These nations, or dominant cultural hearths, as Woodard argues, reflect the embedded attitudes, deep seated preferences, and governing practices of the various EuroAtlantic colonizers who controlled them (p. 2). I assemble discursive fragments into a text directed at demystifying how—within these colonized lands—whiteness operates uniquely as a cultural practice. Taking education as a form of governmentality, as Foucault suggests (Foucault as cited in Lemke, 2002), I analyze deliberation on K-12 education that takes place where the borders of whiteness as a cultural practice meet. My goal is to shed light on rituals and strategies that work to maintain and/or challenge whiteness within these settings. The two overarching research questions guiding this work are: (1) what can critics learn about the connections between place, whiteness and cultural practices by analyzing deliberation about K-12 education at different locales within the U.S.? (2) How does whiteness intersect, influence, and mediate boundaries of civic identity and national belonging?
Dedicated to my parents for all their love and support.

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CHAPTER 1: K-12 SCHOOLS, GOVERNMENTALITY, & WHITENESS

Introduction

Cultural critic Henry Giroux (1992) suggests that during our lives we “engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power” (p. 136). Expanding on this spatial metaphor, Giroux makes clear that “these borders are not only physical borders, but cultural borders historically constructed and socially organized within maps of rules and regulations” (p. 136). Across the United States, community-level discussions concerning K-12 education policy allow politically engaged speakers to tap into powerful discourses that, as Giroux argues, “serve to either limit or enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms” (p. 136). This implies that by asking questions about how “particular identities” are limited or enabled, we can invite conversations that promote social equity. For instance, we might ask how the rhetorics of race shape and change what borders mean. Or we might wonder how borders operate metaphorically and materially to both limit and empower people, influence public policy, and invite deliberation.

When Michel Foucault discusses governmentality, or the “strategies and tactics that render society governable” (Foucault as cited in Lemke, 2002), he suggests that researchers explore how institutions and policy work to (re)produce and govern cultural practices. K-12 education provides a unique environment for such explorations because it embodies a distinct subset of governmentality within which the youth of a community are sorted, classified, and put into competition with one another. Schools are places where civic and national identities are normalized. Therefore, K-12 education offers critics opportunities to question localized cultural practices and their connections to power and capital. Following Dreama Moon (1999), we can understand cultural practices “as material effects of discourses that produce situated conceptual frameworks and in turn are produced by them” (p. 178). Through cultural performances, then, people invent centers of identification and construct
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ways to participate in public life (Conquergood, 1991). Cultural practices are particular and unique to communities. Following Lacey and Ono (2011), this work attempts to reveal assumptions about race that promote ideological scripts linked to racism by examining routine cultural practices (p. 3). My dissertation, then, concerns cultural practices as they relate to issues of power and race. It utilizes discussions about K-12 education across the U.S. in order to highlight whiteness as a cultural practice and attempts to do so without forgetting about other important intersectional identifiers such as class and gender. I am particularly interested in analyzing deliberation about K-12 education at different locales across the nation because I want to interrogate possible connections between place, whiteness, and cultural practices. To do so, I take education as a form of governing and ask questions about how—as part of that process—whiteness intersects, influences, and mediates boundaries of civic identity and national belonging (Smith, 2003, Rowe, 2004).

The term “whiteness” is intended as a critique of power relations that maintain notions of white dominance. Aanerud (1997) provides a useful definition, when she suggests that whiteness “is a highly-orchestrated product of culture and nature” (p. 43). “The recognition of whiteness,” Aanerud adds, comes “as not a set condition of fact—that is, having white skin—but instead [as] a product whose meaning and status must be sustained by a process of reproduction” (p. 43). There is, of course, not one specific process of reproduction that Aanerud is referring to but an innumerable multitude of such processes. As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) remind us, whiteness is a rhetorical construction with no “true essence” (p. 292). Instead, they suggest that we can reveal whiteness by examining it as historically contingent and localized constructions of the white positionality as a social location of status and dominance (p. 293). Whiteness at the community level then is linked to dangerous performances of exclusion that can invite symbolic or material violence while perpetuating the marginalization of nonwhite people. Frankenberg (1997) notes that, “whiteness turns out on closer inspection to be more about the power to include and exclude groups and individuals than the actual
practices of those who are to be let in or kept out” (p. 13). Narratives that encourage people to accept whiteness legitimize white dominance and simultaneously work to dehumanize people who are deemed nonwhite thus reinforcing their identities as inferior.

Calling attention to the ways in which whiteness has been normalized in K-12 public education discourse is one way to disrupt whiteness. Cultural practices and education policy form a symbiotic relationship. By interrogating cultural practices and the related artifacts, values, and performances that a given community assigns to race, we can illuminate “how dominance is rationalized, legitimized, and made ostensibly normal and natural” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 3). We can also observe how dominance is challenged. Reading whiteness into locales where it may otherwise have remained muted, then, is a way of “naming whiteness” and also a means “to displace it” (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 292).

But, how can whiteness be read into a text or context without hyperbolizing the role of race within a community? Theories on discursive formations and discursive fragments offer critics a means to address this question. Foucault makes clear that communal arrangements of power produce discourses and discursive formations, which are set not to arrive at truth, but to win (Nilson, 2016, p. xiii). Truth in this sense becomes a game—constituted by communication—that can be won through persuasive discourses that are set at determining access to public and social goods (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013, p. 34). As combinations of powerful rhetorical appeals, persuasive discourses can mirror coercive power or operate independently of it. In this way, one version of knowledge and history can win out over another and subsequently be reproduced through education. To provide evidence of discursive formations, Foucault performed genealogies of practices.

When rhetorician Michael McGee (1990) discusses discursive fragments, he offers a similar track to understanding discourse. McGee argues that the task of rhetoricians is to invent “a text suitable for criticism” (p. 288). Gaonkar (1990) explains this when he writes:
In the formation of discourse, the rhetor is no longer the seat of origin but a point of intersection. He or she is surrounded by a sea of fragments—bits and scraps of evidence, disembodied arguments, issues and visions—out of which is woven the rhetor’s own fragment. Hence, the rhetor is preeminently an interpreter who attempts to make sense of the discursive surroundings in the manner of a bricoleur, a hermeneutic Indiana Jones who makes it up as he goes along (p. 307).

McGee notes that when we discuss formation “we are dealing with fragments, not texts” (p. 287). If rhetoric is our text, then it follows that rhetoric as a critical object is fragmentary (McGee, 1990; McKerrow, 1989; Gaonkar, 1990). For McGee, a text whether it be a speech or other rhetorical artifact cannot be whole since its contexts evaporates with time; instead, he argues we are left with rhetorical products that form the residues of bygone persuasive efforts (Gaonkar, 1990, p. 306). A critic’s job, then, is to reconstruct rhetorical processes from their documentary traces (McKerrow, 1989; McGee, 1990). McGee suggests that “The only way [for critics] to ‘say it all’ in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue [readers] to produce a finished discourse in their minds. In short, text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse” (p. 288).

Frankenberg (1993) provides a useful way to understand the interwoven relationship between institutions, discourse, and power when she describes discourses as “historically constituted bodies of ideas providing conceptual frameworks… made material in the design and creation of institutions and shaping [of] daily practices” (p. 265). Institutions and practices are specific to their locale, which refers to the settings and spaces where people live out their lives (Creswell, 2004). When people make use of spaces, they create social spaces that embody interactions between metaphorical and material worlds (Reynolds, 2014). It is in this creative process, that communication facilitates the establishment of community and culture. History itself, then, emerges as a cultural production “through the rhetorical
processes through which spaces take on meanings that differently empower its inhabitants” (Rowe, 2004, p. 118). In the spirit of discovering how inhabitants become “differently empowered,” I will pull fragments of discourse together and interpret them to construct an argument.

Metonym & Cultural Borders

My argument will emerge from an understanding that in the U.S.—with its own particular histories of racial oppression—deliberation at school districts across the country acts as windows allowing us to view the ways that cultural and state borders reflect relationships between the symbolic and the material as well as the “ways in which the symbolic is material and has real, material effects on people’s lives” (Mumby, 2014, p. 119). There is room for critical explorations into how cultural practices operate to privilege and maintain white positionality as a center point as well as how K-12 education policy often comes to support this arrangement. As Giroux (1999) notes:

The dominant features of public schooling are characterized by a modernist project that has increasingly come to rely upon instrumental reason and the standardization of curricula. In part, this can be seen in the regulation of class, racial, and gender differences through rigid forms of testing, sorting, and tracking. The rule of reason reveals its Western cultural legacy in a highly centered curriculum that more often than not privileges the histories, experiences, and cultural capital of largely white, middle-class students (p. 100).

Local histories linked to race, labor, economy, and region act as layers of discursive subsoil for today’s discussion about K-12 public education. As cultural geographer Don Mitchell (2000) notes: “Race is constructed in and through space, just as space is often constructed through race” (p. 230).

Questions about the connections between race and class and the local, therefore, must be asked if we are to advance education policies that promote societal equity (which should be our goal). As “symbol-using animals”, people make and remake meaning through communication, and those meanings are shaped and reshaped by the impact of place (Burke, 1966, p. 375). Places are geographic
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locations that we can pinpoint on a map, but they are also social constructs (Creswell, 2004, pp. 26-29). Places are sites for the co-construction of meaning through culture. Since people make claim to the spaces within a given place, we can acknowledge that places derive their meaning within the context of power (Creswell, 2004, pp. 26-29). As Nedra Reynolds (2007) explains:

> Bodies and places impact upon each other; a body becomes marked with the residue of place, but places are also changed by the presences of bodies. Those changes can’t happen, however, if people won’t cross borders, won’t engage with a new place, or can’t overcome their fear or aversion to a particular location (p. 143)

Reynold’s notion that people should be open to crossing borders is important. Crossing borders in this sense, as Giroux (1992) argues, works as an invitation to (1) engage knowledge of power and difference in productive ways and (2) to interrogate the existence of borders as both unnatural and natural expressions of human invention (p. 136).

The naturalization of borders occurs through processes of cultural and political identification. Borders, in this sense, become centerpieces that other discourses circulate around. They become sites for the collection of discursive fragments that reveal culturally constructed borders that go beyond boundaries that are drawn by legislators. As Couture and Wojahn (2016) note, borders are fluid and drawn and redrawn to suit a community’s needs or more frequently—and often more insidiously—to suit the desires of militarized nation-states. Making borders strange, as Foucault might suggest, can help us critically consider their shifting meanings. Legal borders are abstractions. They often represent unsettled pacts (or grievances) about the ownership of land. Culturally speaking, international and intranational borders exist as even greater abstractions. Rhetorical scholar Victor Villanueva (2016) explains that, “the border is metonym [in that it] is the fiction within the fiction of a nation” (p. 34). Metonymy is Kenneth Burke’s trope of reduction “through which the invisible becomes visible” (Terrill, 2003, p. 228). This happens through a process of forming analogies between the intangible
and the tangible. Through metonym, abstract entities become infused with the qualities of social actors. For instance, in much the same way we refer to the White House as providing press releases, we can also refer to the U.S. or Russia as actors plotting and planning against one another. Metonyms obscure individual parts that make up the whole like people and their practices. They do so in order to give us a sense writ large of people and their practices. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) make clear, “metonymy… is not merely a matter of language. In our culture we look at a person’s face—rather than [their] posture or [their] movements—to get our basic information about what the person is like… metonymic concepts structure not just our language but out thoughts, attitudes, and actions” (pp. 37-39). Metonyms provide a way to reveal cultural practices as the face of a given region, whose outer edges coalesce with the faces of other regions to form fuzzier borderland interspaces. They, therefore, invite closer examination.

“When space is parcelled out…” Reynolds (2004) explains, “the result is boundaries, borders, fences, and no-trespassing signs with varying degrees of subtlety” (p. 37). Borders, then, are representative of a fictionalized “us” and a fictionalized “other” each living within the boundaries of their own homogenous populations. But, lines drawn by political actors are poor indicators of cultural commitments. Reynolds argues that although we often take our geographic identity for granted, it operates rhetorically and is an essential tool for persuasion (p. 11). Regional identities complicate assumptions about a collective national identity. In the U.S. (a “nation of immigrants”), the term nation in one hand is representative but in another is problematic in that it alludes to a group of people sharing a common culture, ethnic origin, language, and historical experience. As rhetorical scholar Kent Ono (2013) opines: “in invoking the concept of the nation what one, in fact does, is cover over the vastly different ways individuals and individual groups live their lives” (emphasis mine, p. 95). One way to avoid doing so is to think of the U.S. as an enduring and dynamic site of intercultural interactions.
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The problematic nature of the term nation that Ono refers to has prompted many critical scholars and cultural historians to rethink national borders and turn toward explorations of borders within the U.S. Some of these studies have led to the development of conceptual maps that emphasize characteristics such as shared values, contested histories, voting behaviors, and other cultural practices. For instance, Joel Garreau (1981) divides the U.S. into nine culturally distinct nations. In *Albion’s Seed* (1989), David Hackett Fischer posits that there are actually four nations within U.S. borders. More recently, Colin Woodard (2011) has argued that the U.S. consists of 11 Americas—or regions that have grown up together under the guise of a culturally unified “nation” while continuing to maintain their own unique identities. Woodard envisions the U.S. not as a unified cultural body but a militarized state that consists of cultural hearths. His work recognizes that American nations, in many ways, still embody distinctive traits established as various EuroAtlantic nations attempted to colonize what eventually became the United States. Although I do not subscribe to all of Woodard’s conclusions, this manuscript will make use of his maps and his articulations of the “national” borders within the U.S. By placing history in the broader transcultural frames suggested by Woodard, Fisher, and Garreau, it becomes possible to better understand the myths, narratives, and fragmented value centers informing today’s K-12 education debates.

Aimee Carillo Rowe (2013) makes clear that at intercultural sites “we do not find each other on a level playing field. Rather, we find one an/other in uneven relations to power and privilege, marginality and subordination” (p. 216). The study of cultural practices, then, can reveal the ways that people reify and negotiate borders, whether formally drawn by a state or not. As Carrillo Rowe (2004) reminds us:

Borders are necessary for the production of any space, since spaces only take on meaning through negation, through their capacity to demarcate boundaries and limits on that space.

Borders provide space with meaning by carving it up and signifying, both materially and
discursively, zones of demarcation between inside and outside, one side of the border and the other. A methodology of rhetoric, space, and power entails a critical examination of the discursive formation through which the borders, and that which those borders distinguish and divide become a material force (p. 119).

For critical scholars, then, it becomes imperative to interrogate borders (both within and between nations) as metonymic zones of difference, as sites of conflict, domination, oppression, coexistence, and collaboration. Ono (2013) solidifies this call for interrogation when he responds to James W. Chesebro’s (1981) view of the nation as a social construction. Ono writes:

Critical intercultural communication departs from a nation-based model of communication precisely because a nation-based model has a tendency to generalize behavior; whereas, critical cultural communication seeks to radically empiricize that reality…Part of what critical intercultural communication aims to do, then, is to seek to define what is actually meaningful to people within their historical, cultural, political contexts, not what is taken for granted as meaningful to the nation (p. 95).

My work is set at asking questions about what is meaningful to Others. Following Foucault (1967), I ask questions aimed at revealing the strangeness (and unique nature) of everyday human cultural expressions and the ideological and physical borders that mediate those expressions. Through a lens that is both critical and rhetorical, I explore local discussions about race, education, and place in the hope of exposing borders and suggesting paths to cross them. My goal is to give credence to the critics whose ideas inspire this manuscript and use them to suggest new understandings of how whiteness as a cultural practice operates in locally specific ways that are both stable and inconsistent, that are formed both in the public sphere and the public screen (Habermas, 2004; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). I consider how whiteness is a practice bound by contingencies of place and local history, which become apparent as one moves from one place to the next. Bonilla-Silva (2014) and a host of other
whiteness scholars argue that, while retaining some of its qualities as an oppressive force, whiteness in the U.S. operates differently than it does in Latin America. There is also much consensus that whiteness operates differently across the U.S. (Collins, 1999; Rowe, 2004; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Whiteness, then, is at least in part bound to place.

As Allan Pred (1984) notes, “Place, in other words, always involves an appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the production and transformation of society in time and space” (p. 279). Across the U.S., spaces and places have been transformed by heterogeneous versions of whiteness as a cultural practice. I explore that heterogeneity in this manuscript. That exploration allows me to interrogate relationships between place, knowledge, power, and identity. My work, thus, acknowledges that, “we experience oppression—and privilege in local, specific ways that cannot be generalized” (Willink, Guiterrez-Perez, Shurki, & Stein, 2014, p. 297).

Democracy & Deliberation

A healthy democracy entices “the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power” through deliberation (Giroux, 1991, p. 136). If, as Foucault (1975) suggests, discourse defines the rules of the game, then critics seeking to create spaces for marginalized voices within a community must interrogate how community members use communication to organize and operate local institutions. This means asking questions about the ties between democracy, power-knowledge and identity markers such as race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so on that are made apparent at local-level debates. This means understanding places as connected to race, labor, and global economy.

Perhaps no institution is more emblematic a lifeblood for a community than its primary and secondary educational systems. In the U.S., reproductions of culture and community through schooling often involve issues of racial and ethnic tension, religious belief, regional identity, socioeconomic status and a host of other relational identity markers, the sum of which interconnect and underlie educational policy deliberation, whether or not speakers directly referenced them. Although I have
mentioned cultural practices several times, it is important that I ground this concept by elaborating on its root word: culture. If we take culture to consist of the overlapping “social meanings and practices and the discursive material… that we use to create our identities, behavior and worldviews” as Halualani (1998) suggests, then it becomes important to understand the implications of culture as people debate issues of policy.

Culture is both verb and noun, both process and product. “Culture is an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own” (Street, 1993, p. 25). González, Houston, and Chen (2000) argue that, “Culture renders coherent the ideas held and the actions performed in a community. At the same time cultural participants engage in communication that constantly defines and redefines the community” (p. xiii). González, Houston, and Chen’s understanding of what culture does highlights its connections to contestations of power and articulation. Culture is historically bound, however, as Carbaugh (1990) notes, not just within its “reproduction of a historical and common sense, but also [by] its fluid shaping and use to meet the various contingencies of everyday living” (p. 5). Culture exists within and creates environments. It is inseparable from the distributions of power that emerge within those environments. “Cultures are” as Scholte (1986) suggests “… not simply about giving meaning, but also projects of domination; knowledge is not only used to communicate, but to control” (p. 10). Cultures inform our means of governing a population.

This in mind, it is crucial that communication scholars continue to interrogate community discussions about schooling and recognize such discussions as both intra and intercultural since local debates on education policy make salient the “creation and affirmation of a shared identity… which mediates between basic discursive dialectics autonomy and union, individual and community, [and] powerful and powerless” (p. 5).
Within the public sphere, communities advance cultural perspectives. Community members weigh in on what it means to be a “good” citizen, what it means to be an American and the types of content children should learn. The public sphere includes the venues, the locations, the places in social life where people meet to discuss and debate pressing issues (Habermas, 2004). The idea of a public sphere has retained its spatially descriptive value as a communication concept though many critics have cited Habermas’ conception of the public sphere as overly reliant on rationality and normative ideals for persuasion, which favor a bourgeoisie perspective (Fraser, 1990; Asen, 2015; Schudson, 1994). Discussions in the public sphere are informed by the epideictic through which people create narratives that “constitute and validate their tradition” and thereby set the conditions for the public sphere (Hauser, p. 18). Mass media also supplements the public sphere, which is interconnected with the public screen, or the “constant current of images and words, abetted by the technologies of television, film, photography, and the Internet” that both distract people and make political engagement unavoidable (Delcuva & Peeples, 2002). That said, the key function of the public sphere is to ensure democracy engages “with questions about the collective interest and the common good [because],” as education policy scholar Gert Biesta notes, “democracy requires the translation and transformation of private trouble into public issues” (Biesta, 2011, p. 147). In short, a healthy democracy requires deliberation.

Deliberation, according to political science scholar Joseph Bessette (1997) “is a reasoning process in which the participants seriously consider substantive information and seek to decide individually and to persuade each other as to what constitutes good public policy” (p. 46). These attempts at persuasion can reveal the physical and cultural borders within communities and allow critics to evaluate power relationships involving access, identity, and representation each of which are informed by historically situated cultural practices. By illuminating cultural practices, then, critics
create the potential to locate marginalized voices and to promote those voices by raising awareness of their existence as well as the elements of oppression that mute them.

Robert Asen (2015) highlights the ties between deliberation, democracy, and education when he opines that “local participation in the formulation of education policy enacts both democracy and education as processes of meaning-making” (p. 184). Asen adds that “policies partially made by members of a community help construct ways of living” (p. 184). The ways of living in a democracy that Asen alludes to are in part historically embedded in the cultural practices of a given community and in part fluid, contested, and mediated through dissensus about those same practices, all of which takes place within an ever-changing milieu of social hierarchies.

Overview

This dissertation examines two sites of deliberation about K-12 public education in order to understand how whiteness operates and is challenged as a norm. I examine the shifting, and place dependent, nature of whiteness as a cultural practice. It attempts to expose whiteness by taking seriously the multiple and varied perspectives extant within communities as people struggle to define relationships between citizenship, democratic rights, and how to best distribute resources at the local level (Giroux, 1997, Yudice, 1995). It does so in the hope of revealing new possibilities with the potentiality to decenter, displace, and open spaces for a rearticulation of whiteness (Krizek & Nakayama, 1995; Frankenberg, 1997; Alcoff, 2015; Giroux, 1997). Movement toward such a rearticulation could, as Giroux (1997) argues, hold the power to inform “a political practice suggest[ing] new subject positions, alliances, commitments and forms of solidarity between [whites] and others engaged in a struggle over expanding possibilities of democratic life, especially as it affirms both a politics of difference and a redistribution of power and material resources” (p. 384).

After first establishing the historical underpinnings of whiteness as well as the discursive shifts and rhetorical trajectories related to its place of domination in U.S. society, I investigate community
deliberations at two different locations within the United States: Jefferson County, Colorado and East Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Each site is an opportunity to understand whiteness as a localized cultural practice. Also, each site will allow me to interrogate different issues currently facing K-12 education policymakers and communities across the U.S. as well as the racial implications these issues hold.

**Summary of Case Study Sites**

Jefferson County Public Schools (Jeffco) has more students than any other county in Colorado’s public school system. The Jeffco community has a predominately-white population. In 2010, 92% of its nearly 535,000 residents identified as white alone, and 80% identified as white alone, non-Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, Jeffco does have a growing Latinx population.

Jeffco’s five-person, school board meets in Golden, Colorado, a cozy, suburb located on the outskirts of Denver. In the fall of 2014, the Jeffco Board of Education came under fire when it challenged updates to the *College Board’s* AP U.S. History (APUSH) framework. During that time, Jeffco would experience massive “sick-outs” and “walk-outs” of students and teachers alike. Local and national media outlets dubbed the student walkouts as the latest evidence of a long line of “culture wars” between those who believed U.S. history should teach patriotism and those who thought it should be a site for articulating the voices of forgotten “Others.” The Jeffco board’s challenge of the APUSH framework came in the wake of contentious contract disputes between Jeffco teachers and school administrators. This complex rhetorical situation and the deliberations that ensued can be understood as unfolding moments of ordinary democracy, or sites that allow for analysis of the dissensus that takes place at school board meetings when everyday citizens speak directly to policymakers (Tracy, McDaniel, & Gronbeck, 2007; Asen, 2015; McCormick, 2003). Jeffco is complicated as a site for understanding whiteness and K-12 education policy. The site is complicated by emergent intersecting interests that involve the privatization of schools, the standardized testing craze, teachers’ performance evaluations, and value centers concerning how children should learn the
nation’s history. In order to manage these complications, my analysis focuses on the communication that took place during deliberations at a hotly-debated school board meeting in Jeffco on October 2 of 2014.

From the well-to-do suburbs of the Far West, I shift to the Deep South to explore a community negotiating the boundaries of its public schools in the minority-majority city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This portion of my dissertation examines the dog whistle politics and rhetorical strategies employed by City of St. George, a grassroots movement in the East Baton Rouge Parish (EBR) whose supporters advocated a breakaway from the failing Parish school system. In this portion of the dissertation, I trace the conditions and discourses connected to housing, property, and K-12 education policy in order to understand how whiteness encourages the creation of borders and influences public space deliberations in Baton Rouge. The EBR school system, I argue, is emblematic of the white flight that has occurred in many places across the U.S. over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In 1965, the EBR’s student population was 61% white, a number that currently hovers at around 11% as black and Latinx now make up a majority of the student body. In 1977, the EBR had a student population of more than 70,000. Since then, that number has dwindled to about 43,000 a decrease of more than 40%. (PAR, 2005; NCTQ, 2014). These numbers, combined with the realities of poor student achievement and that 4 out of 5 EBR students qualified for free- or reduce-lunches in 2014, speak to the practical problems facing EBR community members as they deliberate on how to improve their K-12 educational system (PAR, 2005; NCTQ, 2014). What is interesting about this site is the rhetorical maneuvers City of St. George supporters utilize to obfuscate the racial components correlated with the borders they hope to redraw, borders that if instituted would create the City of St. George as a “white-er” and more affluent school district and leave the EBR with fewer resources. I interrogate the St. George breakaway movement through the lens of Ian Haney López’s (2014) dog
whistle politics, and in doing so explore how St. George leaders invite support without referring to the obvious socioeconomic and racial implications it might have for those left outside of the fantasized borders of their proposed city. With Omi and Winant (2014), I describe the neoliberal values that guide policymaking as inherently racist and argue that this site demonstrates how free markets have allowed people to wield a market rationale for overtly racist acts and have underwritten these ideas into the very laws that form the fabric of social monitoring and social order in American life.

In sum, each case study provides an opportunity to demonstrate the chameleonic role whiteness plays in the cultural practices in communities across the nation as they engage in deliberations about K-12 public education policies. In terms of such policies, I argue that discursive shifts— influenced by the symbolic and material forces associated with neoliberalism—shape current debates about the meanings of social goods and the boundaries of local control. These debates take place within an ever-privatizing and globalizing world. As market-based commodification encroaches on public institutions, the poor, people of color, and others continue to be pushed to the margins, as this happens the shadowy contours of whiteness continue to surface and to vanish. One way to pin-down whiteness, if only momentarily, is by examining communicative settings where scarcity and plurality are apparent and discussed (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). Public education systems inherently involve both. Resources are limited and perspectives bountiful. This dissertation moves into the weeds and complicated webs of education policy, location, and race relations in the spirit of providing critics something useful.

Statement of Critical Inquiry

The ubiquitous and dynamic nature of whiteness and its social spaces makes any comprehensive coverage difficult; yet we find ourselves at a unique moment in intercultural communication and cultural studies and the reconfiguration of racial relations in the United States (Nakayama & Martin, 1999, p. viii).
We remain in the “unique moment” that Thomas Nakayama and Judith Martin speak of in the excerpt above. This project, in keeping with their calls, attempts to extend the coverage of the “dynamic nature of whiteness,” and its relations to deliberations about public education policy and notions of citizenship (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). It is important to note, again, that whiteness is not a stand-in designation for white people. It is instead a worldview—an ideology—one that is expressed and reproduced through discourse (van Dijk, 2006). As Zeus Leonardo (2002) argues, “‘Whiteness’ is a racial discourse, whereas the category ‘white people’ represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color” (p. 31). Whiteness is a racial discourse and it serves a particular racial ideology, a particular vision of the world rationalized through pigmentation and other physical attributes. As a racial ideology, whiteness promotes a space for “white” to exist as a privileged social identity location, one that is to be sought-after and one that is reified through its creation of access to material resources.

In its current form, whiteness manifests itself through meaning-making predicated on supremacy and privilege based upon its alleged distance from blackness, brownness, yellowness, redness, or Otherness and the associated cultural inferiority it attaches to each. Critiquing whiteness is not about hunting down the witch, the one individual racist, and shaming him or burning him on the pyres of a Twitter flaming. In fact, there is a stronger argument that such behavior only works to solidify and further polarize racial discord by making conquering racism as easy as locating an infected area and sterilizing it with a healthy dose of shaming (Feagin, 2013; Fields & Fields, 2012). Interrogations of whiteness implore critics to go beyond the surface of things, of statements, of artifacts, and into the tangled weedy discourses that keep racist ideologies a dominant means for organizing social spaces and entire societies. Critics exploring whiteness studies are not advocating an attack on white people. Instead, we interrogate and challenge the power that whiteness holds as an oppressive racial discourse.
Whiteness is maintained through material practices and social institutions (Leonardo, 2002, p. 31). Challenging, decentering and transforming whiteness is difficult for a number of reasons. Among them are its past and present embeddedness within our legal and social structures; its susceptibility to white fragility, white backlash, and a desire for a post-racial society, and urgent call for people to “see” race rather than pretending that color no longer matters. Critics who study the discursive practices and the rhetorical qualities associated with whiteness are charged with revealing its many forms. My work is important because—as Martin and Nakayama suggest above—it has the potential to extend critical understandings of “the ways that communication about whiteness is embedded in our social fabric” (p. 5). My hope is that my project will eventually move beyond even that lofty goal and point toward a horizon within which whiteness—and more specifically the white identity construct—is detached from its notions of privilege and is instead repositioned as just another among many unique colors across a spectrum of social identity locations (Alcoff, 2015; Warren, 1999).

*K-12 Education & Interrogating Whiteness*

K-12 education policymaking at the federal, state, and local levels, of course, is implicated in the rhetorical power, influence, normalization, and ritualization of whiteness. Patricia Hill Collins (2009) suggests researchers consider the ways in which “schools perpetuate racism and other forms of societal inequity, and what…parents, schools, teachers, and students [can] do about it” (p. xiv). Her suggestion articulates part of what compels me to more closely examine the relationship whiteness has to the specific cultural, social, and material practices of local communities. Such study—it is my great hope—will allow me to show, or at least briefly hit the pause button on, the ever-changing contours of whiteness and its rhetorical qualities within a given community and to thereby add to the ever-growing communication study literature on whiteness. As Dana Cloud (1994) more eloquently suggests, “The critics job is…the task of rhetorical construction—the temporary fixing and stabilizing of discourse to reveal its location in social space and relations of power” (p. 151).
There are two overall questions my project seeks to answer. First, in discussions about public education, I ask what critics can learn about the connections between place, whiteness and cultural practices by analyzing deliberation about K-12 education at different locales within the U.S. Second, I am curious how whiteness intersects, influences, and mediates boundaries of civic identity and national belonging (Smith, 2003, Carrillo-Rowe, 2004). Exploring how communities debate K-12 education policy is a fruitful way to address these questions. This focus allows me as a rhetorical critic to better understand the constructions of possibilities and constraints embodied within the deliberations of community members in Jefferson County, Colorado and in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.

In addressing these questions, I also ask: How are these deliberations informed by historical boundaries within the communities that assume race as a marker of class? In education debates linked to national identity, how do community members, who believe they are oppressed use rituals of self-renewal to challenge the existing “police order”? What types of discursive fragments, rhetorical trajectories, and borders inform debates centered on K-12 public education? What governing practices inform the rhetorical strategies and tactics available to communities locked in moments of deliberation? What discourses might rhetors be tapping into to influence their community to understand education policy in a certain way, and how do those discourses and rhetorical strategies work to both maintain and challenge whiteness? What can critics learn from moments of dissensus about the ways that local communities embody, challenge, and maintain whiteness and notions of citizenship through cultural and social practices specific to those communities? How do rhetors position their interpretation of the community’s cultural practices as racially implicated or sans racially implicated? These are the questions that I address throughout the dissertation. I address them because we are currently at a pivotal moment in the forming and re-forming of not just our educational policies and institutions but also in communicating how those policies and institutions work, should work, and will work as an essential part of U.S. society.
Whiteness fuels inequality. It simultaneously eludes close inspection and often coopts counterhegemonic discourses set at challenging its normative position. Therefore, my questions and the answers I arrive at in addressing them are an effort to “expose the rhetoric of whiteness” (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 95). By exposing the rituals, embodiments, and meaning-making that feed whiteness—particularly those inherent to K-12 public education—it becomes possible to move toward fresh possibilities, unmute suppressed voices, and encourage education policymaking that is more “mindful” of the nation’s sociohistorical underpinnings and more in-line with the equalitarian principles upon which the nation claims to rest.

Preview: Critical Method & Procedures

Critical theory is heavily defined by its investment in the interrogation of power relations that maintain and influence dominant epistemological, axiological, and ontological thought. Ono (2011) suggests that “taking a critical stance means addressing issues of power” (p. 93). Rhetorical studies provide one means to take such a stance.

Edwin Black (1965) suggests that persuasion “refers to intent, not necessarily accomplishment” (p. 15). Rhetoric is a performance that, as Starosta (1984) notes, “unsettles” (p. 230). Rhetoric can be thought of as the process and the product of persuasive effort. It is, thus, the critic’s work to reveal the meanings hidden within these persuasive efforts. Constructing arguments from the fragments left by discourse supports this task. As McGee (1990) argues, “criticism is a vehicle for doing rhetoric” (p. 276). Critical rhetoric is a perspective on how critics should perform persuasion. In other words, how they should go about persuading others to understand the world in a different light and to challenge systems of domination (McKerrow, 1989). As Clark and McKerrow (1987) note, it is a stance that treats a text as if it “were a multi-faceted prism; not to be found as it lies in the present, hiding the facets of its underside, but to be picked up and turned so as to refract the light of the past in wholly unexpected ways” (p. 314). Critical rhetoric invites critics to view a fragment of discourse as an
opportunity to uncover secondary readings that illuminate unobserved truths about relations of power. Critical rhetoric is a performance that entices readers to reevaluate texts. Critical rhetoricians allow the object of analysis to dictate their tools of discovery rather than beginning with a method and applying it to a given object. Still critical rhetoricians must present their tools and means of accessing sites and artifacts. I do so in this section.

My means of analysis include historical artifacts obtained from local libraries, online sites associated with each community as well as from news outlet reports. I also visited the board of education websites for each school district. At the websites, I downloaded available meeting agendas and listened streaming audio and video recordings of meetings, many of which I transcribed. Each of these artifacts afforded me an opportunity to construct arguments about the uniqueness of the locales I discuss.

For instance, part of my dissertation explores community deliberations that took place between 2013 and 2015 at Jefferson County Board of Education meetings in Golden, Colorado. To familiarize myself with the rhetorical context and ongoing debates about education policy, I used ProQuest database to search terms such as “Colorado AND AP U.S. History AND debates” and “Jeffco AND proposed board curriculum AND Common Core”. I also used an EBSCO archive to acquire information from the Colorado Transcript (now the Golden Transcript) a local newspaper in Golden, Colorado. To give myself a sense of the community’s past, I searched Transcript publications ranging from the 1850s until the 1950s. For demographic information, I consulted the U.S. Census Bureau, the College Board’s website, as well as the Jeffco schools’ annual reports (available on its website). I utilized the basic Google search engine to locate information on the College Board, Common Core State Standards, and the politicizing of U.S. History.

In terms of choosing which documents to include, rather than employ systematic sampling, I selected media outlets that presented an array of perspectives. To do so, I chose mass communication
documents from across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, which included reporting and punditry that ranged from the local to national levels, conservative-leaning to liberal-leaning, print/online to broadcast, as well as traditionally trusted news sources and alternative media sites. Traditionally trusted news sources include local and national newspaper publications, such as the Denver Post or The Times-Picayune, whereas alternative media sites include niche media outlets who openly advocate for certain political issues, such as The Colorado Observer. To decide if a media outlet has a conservative or liberal slant, I familiarized myself with the publication’s editorial pages as well as the political candidates they have backed in recent elections.

Another setting I examine is the East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. Here I took a similar tact. Again, I used Proquest database to key search terms, such as “City of St. George”; “Segregation” AND “Baton Rouge”; “EBR schools” and “Norman Browning”. I also incorporated information from a variety of media outlets to understand how the media situated community deliberations as they unfolded in 2013 and 2014. This includes alternative media outlets such as The Rouge Collection as well as mainstream outlets such as The Advocate. I also closely examine PBS Frontline’s documentary “Separate and Unequal, which discusses the EBR situation at length, as a way to understand how media disseminates and interprets issues related to whiteness (Lacy & Ono, 2011). In addition, I consulted local newspapers, television broadcasts, and scholarly articles published about the city.

Much of my research also includes deep background, or the procuring of biographical and historical information that inform the characters of these communities as a whole. This included but was not limited to histories of the school districts, area legislation and politics, and information from Geographical Information Systems (GIS) that demonstrate population, income, housing, employment, and resource flows across time.
Summary of Chapters

The first chapter of this dissertation unpacks my critical questions and provides my rationale. I present the two overarching research questions guiding this work: (1) what can critics learn about the connections between place, whiteness and cultural practices by analyzing deliberation about K-12 education at different locales within the U.S.? (2) How does whiteness intersect, influence, and mediate boundaries of civic identity and national belonging (Smith, 2003, Carrillo-Rowe, 2004)? Further, Chapter One lays the foundation for my interrogation into whiteness as a cultural practice. That exploration will include two case studies. Each focuses on a community engaged in deliberation about K-12 education policy: (1) Jefferson County Public Schools, Colorado; and, (2) East Baton Rouge Parish Schools, Louisiana. The chapter also positions my work as contributing to critical intercultural communication studies, and more specifically to whiteness studies. The chapter sets up a discussion of rhetoric, borders, and critical rhetoric as an orientation, which I elaborate on in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Two functions as a review of literature with several sections that detail the concepts, theories, methods, and definitions that buttress the rest of my dissertation. I begin this chapter with a discussion of reflexivity, and I disclose my positionality as a critic. From there, I include a section dedicated to rhetoric and ideological criticism. In brief, this section alludes to works by Kenneth Burke, Edwin Black, and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell before moving on to the work of Michael McGee and Phil Wander, and finally centering readers on Raymie McKeerow’s critical rhetoric and Michael Lacy and Kent Ono’s critical rhetorics of race (McKeerow, 1989; McKeerow, 2000; Lacy & Ono, 2011). I elaborate on critical rhetoric as an orientation toward the practice of criticism and connect it to theories and methodologies about whiteness proposed by Leda Cooks, John Warren, Judith Martin, Tom Nakayama and Robert Krizek and others.
The next subsection of this chapter is devoted to discussion of the public sphere, public screen and deliberation. Here I include investigations into the meaning of public sphere by scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Ernesto Laclau, Chantel Mouffe, and Jacques Ranciere as well as others. I use their insights to help readers conceptualize the ways in which everyday people come together to share a multitude of perspectives and meanings directed at influencing others. The next section explores the influence of Western thought and neoliberalism on K-12 policymaking in the U.S. This includes several important sociohistorical and socioeconomic elements that, broadly, assist in situating contemporary discussion of education policy.

Chapter Three provides rhetorical highlights that shed light on the discursive shifts in education policy over the past seven decades. Seeking to unpack the how of governmentality from a federal perspective, the chapter includes discussion of landmark Supreme Court cases, influential speeches, anti-miscegenation law, exclusionary acts, and important federal education policy documents such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, A Race to the Top, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. Within this chapter, I analyze governing as sets of discursive practices and attempt to reveal how proponents of whiteness have constituted commonsense understandings about race and culture and used these understandings as a means to patrol the boundaries of public space.

To do so, I assemble discursive fragments into a text that is directed at revealing these connections. Through this newly constructed text, I evaluate the ways in which federal government develops education policies within a political economic environment that oscillates between two ideological value centers: (1) a market-driven perspective based on competition and merit, and (2) a communal perspective that promotes diversity and social equity. I end this chapter with a description of Colin Woodard’s (2011) 11 cultural hearths, or American nations colonized by various EuroAtlantic powers that have grown up together but remained culturally separate. The residues of these cultural
hearths, I argue, continue to shape knowledge and conflict about current education policy and its relation to race. Woodard’s maps provide an inroad to discursive fragments that will help me construct a text that explores whiteness as a unique cultural practice in Jefferson County, Colorado, which lies near the colonized borders of El Norte and The Far West, and also in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which lies on the colonized borders between New France and the Deep South.

In Chapter Four, I present the my first case study, which explores governing at the community level as Jefferson County residents gather at a crowded board of education meeting to deliberate about how best to teach K-12 history courses. In the chapter, I employ Martin and Nakayama’s (2013) present-future/history-past dialectic to understand connections between those deliberations, which took place in October of 2014, and regional histories (p. 67). In order to do so, I characterize Jefferson County as a locale on the border of El Norte and the Far West (Woodard, 2011). I then suggest that whiteness as a cultural practice has evolved differently in each of those regions, which thus allows speakers to tap into divergent understandings about the role race plays in shaping education policy and notions of citizenship. In addition, the chapter explores the ways in which community members create zones of identification and differentiation in order to influence other community members as well as the citizen policy-makers at the board meeting. The rhetorical appeals apparent at the meeting, I will argue, shed light on how whiteness as a cultural practice relates to acts of forgetting and remembering. Elaborating on this notion, I will apply Lee and Wander’s (1998) concepts of discursive amnesia and discursive amnesty to interrogate references to American Exceptionalism, which are pervasive during deliberations at the school board meeting.

In Chapter Five, I engage in another case study, which examines the East Baton Rouge Public School System (EBR) in Louisiana and the efforts of a grassroots movement called the City of St. George to break away from the EBR. I characterize the St. George movement as part of a trend in K-12 public education that is marked by the efforts of predominantly white, middle-class communities to
break away from dysfunctional school districts, particularly in majority-minority metropolitan public school systems. The chapter begins with a discussion of relationships between symbolic and material worlds and the reproduction of white dominance. I, then, attempt to pull together discursive fragments into a text that reveals whiteness as a cultural practice in New France and in the Deep South and argue that community discussions about the breakaway movement reflect Baton Rouge’s position within the borderlands of those historic cultural hearths. From there, I ask readers to consider the ways that speakers can use notions of white victimization and the “race card” to counter charges of institutional racism. A large portion of the chapter focuses on coded language and the strategic ways that it can be used to dodge accusations of racism as well as the ways it can be used to shape subtexts that encourage commonsense understandings about race and cultural inferiority. From there, the chapter will explore how community members both for and against the city of St. George proposal attempt to garner support and how this demonstrates the interconnectedness of the public screen and public sphere (Habermas, 2004; Deluca & Peeples, 2001). In this portion of the chapter, I use PBS Frontline’s hour-long special on K-12 public education “Separate and Unequal” as a bridge to a more focused discussion on the ways in which media outlets use storytelling techniques that craft reductionist narratives of good versus evil, which ultimately reinforce simplified views of racism as individual acts of malice.

In Chapter Six, I offer a conclusion that attempts to address the key questions engaged throughout this dissertation. I reinforce the notion that metonymic borders—within which whiteness as a cultural practice is shaped—are the centerpieces around which discussion of education and race circulate. I review this manuscript’s attempt to name whiteness by etching out the exteriors of four of its many faces. I argue that Critical Intercultural Communication scholarship is still in need of a language to invite productive every day discussions about race at the community level. I, then, promote participatory critical rhetoric and “bridgework” as promising paths forward for this project (Middleton,
Finally, I discuss the limitation of this study and offer some future directions related to its inquiries.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE: CRITICS, CULTURES, BELIEFS, & BORDERS

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an ongoing part of the research process and one that in ways that will become obvious will book end this manuscript. Reflexivity informs research in several ways. Here I mean it as a way for critics to build the trust of their readers by attempting to interrogate their own preferences and to implicate their positionality, their places of privilege, and their purposes. Reflexivity acknowledges that the content of the critic’s positionality has weight on their criticism. Also, I want my practices of critical rhetoric to acknowledge the cultural relationships that have led me to this project. Critical practice, as McKerrow (1989) suggests, is “a performance of a rhetor advocating a critique as a sensible reading of the discourse of power” (p. 108). When as critics we shed light on our preferences, we can at the same time establish why we believe ours to be a sensible reading of discursive spaces. As Dana Cloud (1994) advises, “the critic is implicated in the structures of power under investigation and must be reflexive about his or her own interests in pursuing a particular critical goal” (p. 153). Because I lay claim to the practice of critical rhetoric throughout this dissertation, it is crucial that I explore and articulate my place as a researcher within social structures of power.

In this chapter, I first explore my corporeality by revealing what I believe is my positionality as well as my intersectional identity. In keeping with the recurring theme of spatial metaphor that undergirds this work, I discuss the boundaries and borders of identity that have shaped me as a critic as well as my interest in analyzing K-12 public education. From there, I identify myself as a Critical Intercultural Communication scholar and describe where the whiteness studies project fits within that critical perspective. Next, I move into a brief history of ideological criticism, which centers on a lengthy description of critical rhetoric. After that discussion, I introduce several of the rhetorical strategies that have worked to advance whiteness. Next, I define community and provide an extended discussion of the role that neoliberalism has played in reshaping the K-12 education climate across the
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U.S. Finally, I move to a discussion of deliberation and the public sphere as a shifting social space where people use their democratic rights to persuade others to share in their ideological commitments.

**Place, Positionality, & Intersectionality**

*Begin... not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body.*—Adrienne Rich (Notes, 2003, p. 30)

Before I attempt to contribute to the ongoing conversation whose goal is to destabilize the role race plays in shaping power structures and social hierarchies, my work begins—as Rich advises—with “the geography closest in.” It begins with me, with some disclosure, with a self-reflection, and with a description of my positionality and the intersectional nature of my identity. Advocating self-reflexivity, Rich (2003) motions us toward understanding ourselves—at least in part—as products of place. The places we think of as home, Rich suggests, have more to say about us than geographic coordinates alone might tell. Instead, she asks us to consider—with our identity in mind—how “a place on the map is also a place in history” (p. 30). McKerrow (1998) poses a similar question when he asks, “if the body is an historical entity, what is its relation to history?” (p. 318).

People both have histories and are tethered to places with histories. This interdependence informs our perspectives and the lenses through which we come to understand the world around us. The coexistence of body, place, and history, inform our positionalities as people and as critics. Our positionalities, as Alcoff (1988) suggests are relational positions and not essential qualities. In other words, identity markers such as race, class, and gender shift across time, place, space, and through their relation to Others. The body, then, as Simone de Beauvoir argues, represents a locus of cultural interpretations and cultural possibilities reflected by a contested zone that involves our choices and the prescriptions made by others (as cited in Butler, 1986, p.49).

When Leda Cooks (2013) speaks of the aesthetics of academic forms, she argues that critical scholars—because of the constraints and expectations of academic publishing—are encouraged to
gloss over the ways that their methods, approaches, and orientations actively work to separate them as critic (i.e. as subject, as scholar, as self) from the objects of their critiques (i.e. the communities, the others, and the Othered). This imaginary boundary of analysis complicates the notion that the critic her or himself is also a product of culture, of upbringing, of time, and of place. Instead, critics should embrace such positions and reveal them.

Cooks (2003) instructs that positionality should be thought of “in conjunction and in conversation with other terms such as ‘identity negotiation,’ ‘location,’ and ‘performance’ as a tool to emphasize contexts in which White identity and culture are signified as what is normal” (p. 246). By performing acts of disclosure and reflexivity, critics engage in an identity negotiation set at exposing their biases and implicating the weight their positionality has on their criticism. Cooks (2013) points to the importance of such reflexive acts when she suggests:

The threads that bind and blur cultures, agency and embodiment, get lost in our heady desire to have knowledge of the Other without intimately knowing much about our own (especially dominant culture). (p. 123)

D. Soyini Madison (2011) encourages such a labor of reflexivity, one “that is willfully about the social—about the self-made gloriously and ingloriously through Others” (p. 136). Bernadette Calafell (2013) points to the important relationship between being reflective about our thinking, our bodies, and our histories and asks scholars to consider how they are “marked by the residue of place.” (p. 136). Calafell notes that reflexivity is also “an intersectional critique, an illumination of power,” and an acknowledgment, “of one’s relationality to all of this” (p. 7). Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1998) to describe the prismatic and fluid nature of our identities, their interconnectedness, and their relations to forces of oppressive social power. Heeding this advice, I interrogate my positionality as well as the intersectional borders of my own identity. Particularly, the ones that I believe led me to this project.
As Cooks (2013) notes “intersectional identities often prove that layers of privilege and oppression are uneven” (p. 121). In my life, I have unquestionably benefited from a dichotomous Western tradition that has historically empowered cisgender men over cisgender women, those who identify as cissexual over those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. I also have benefited from a comfortable socioeconomic status. I have been empowered (and in many ways blinded) by life within a dominant Western society. As such, I believe some of my relational identity markers and sectors of my intersectional identity have afforded me opportunity, access, and privilege. Others, perhaps, have not. As someone who is both nonwhite and adopted, I have also—in many circles—felt as if an outsider and a subordinate.

I was raised in a small town in western Pennsylvania, in a middle-class neighborhood not far from the Midwest steel mills that by that time had begun to decay. Our town’s population when I attended public schools was only about 1,100 with less than 1% of that number identifying themselves as nonwhite. Growing up, my brother and I were part of that handful of people. There were about 130 students in my class when I graduated from a rural public school, and perhaps six of us would have been considered nonwhite. Though I rarely addressed it, I certainly felt a sense of racial isolation as I attended public schools, particularly high school.

For years, my dad taught math and coached football at that same high school. He has, since then, taught at both public and private K-12 schools. Our discussions over the years about school choice, vouchers, and at-risk students undoubtedly helped spark my interest in education policy. My mom is a nurse at a local hospital. Her expressions of empathy and concern for others have likely informed my decisions to take up criticism directed at exposing oppressive power structures. Both my parents identify as Italian Americans, an identity that is arguably the latest ethnic group to be enveloped into the “white” construct (Jacobson, 1999). In fact, my grandfather told us many stories of being called a “swamp guinea” or a “dago,” about how hard it was for him to climb into the middle
class as an Italian American. He believed hard work alone had lifted the status of Italian Americans. In this essay, I will challenge meritocratic notions like this. Still the stories my grandfather shared about both the covert and overt oppression that he experienced in his youth hint at the everchanging, shifting nature of whiteness and its workings. Being interracial, and raised by parents who identify as white, my brother and I were raised in many respects both as outsiders and insiders where it concerns white positionality. In this regard, we have occupied a complicated space of (in)betweenness. As Sundstrom (2001) suggests in “Being and Being Mixed Race” people in U.S. society are expected to fit neatly in social categories of white, black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American or American Indian, Hispanic or Latinx. “Those who do not fit into this nation’s racial typology are social anomalies, and,” Sundstrom argues, “are unwelcome reminders to society that race is fluid and that taboos against miscegenation have been transgressed” (p. 285).

In addition, I am adopted as are one of my brothers and my sister. I know little about my biological “parents.” I know that for the first nine months of my life, I had a different name, but I don’t know what it was. I do know that I’m no stranger to questions like: “So, who are your real parents?” and, “don’t you think everyone should know where they come from?” I grew up resisting questions like these. I perceived them in some contexts as inspired by genuine curiosity, in other contexts as a subtle way to remind me that I was unusual, and in still other contexts as a way for nonadoptive people to participate in some fantasy in which they discover themselves as the daughters or sons of someone famous. Over time and space our perspectives shift. And more recently, I have begun to make efforts to uncover the names of whomever may have tried to raise me. As Colaner, Halliwell and Guigon (2014) note adoptees—unlike their nonadoptive peers—experience “layers of differentness” related to their senses of ambiguous loss, identity gaps, and social stigmas about nontraditional families (p. 471).
Boundaries of Family

When Fine and Johnson (2012) discuss the ways in which raising a nontraditional family reshaped their race and gender identities, they do so from the perspective of two white lesbian parents and through the lens of Harding’s standpoint theory. The theory supports exploration into communication that begins with marginalized peoples who exist outside yet within predominant cultural norms (Harding, 1992). Fine and Johnson (2012) argue that in the case of nontraditional families “standpoint is a paradoxical concept” since “[m]embers of a multiracial family are simultaneously normalized within the family and seen as the “other” outside of the family” (p. 202). This argument fits my experience growing up in a nontraditional family. At home, we rarely talked about “blood” as a currency for family. My brother was my brother and my sister, my sister. That’s all we knew. But as we grew up and spent more time outside of home, people reminded us that we were different. We weren’t from our mom’s “stomach.” We didn’t look like our sister. She didn’t look like us. This was not “normal.”

Fine and Johnson (2012) explain that within dominant discourses about family in the US, nontraditional families—whatever their configuration—are “placed both inside and outside the borders of family” (p. 203). Particularly in the case of multiracial families, the tandem suggests, that the boundaries of race are both masked and revealed. This is again consistent with my experience growing up. At home, it was taken for granted that we looked different, that our complexions were different, more precisely, that our pigmentation was different. But, when my siblings and I began to attend school and have friends from around town that was when it became clear to me that our differences were outside of established norms.

As we grew up, my brother and I were often expected to somehow connect to cultural conventions associated with black, Arabic, Samoan, Filipino, or Mexican ethnicities of which we had no more knowledge than did the white students and parents who assumed that we would or should. The
beginning of my time in public education also marks the beginning of my consciousness about the role race plays in shaping society, and the role it would and does play in my life. The first time I rode the school bus for kindergarten, I remember a boy in the back of the bus singing a song I can still hear clearly today: “In 1984, my grandma went to war. She pulled the trigger and shot a nigger in 1984.” He sang gleefully and his words whether targeting me or not had an ugly sort of power to them. This was my introduction to public school.

“I” as the Critic

I must note, I am not innocent. I am implicated in whiteness. I am no stranger to the very real notion of racial passing, a tactic of deception that people, who feel threaten within a social hierarchy informed by race, employ both to fit in and possibly confer in the perceived benefits of a given positionality, which is most times white. Ambiguity complicates the sense of group belongingness that the biological fiction of race facilitates. Being someone who is often read as racially ambiguous, I know the boundaries this ambiguity presents me in aligning or being aligned with a group identity (or in being the self or the known Other). These borders are permeable, but passing through them takes some doing.

In middle and elementary school, I navigated the intersections of my identity as adopted and as interracial with varying degrees of success. My most common approach was silence. If I did not discuss these identity markers, then I would not draw attention to myself. Since in most cases, I was “the” minority. Still, other people could call these identity markers to my attention with questions such as “What are you?” As a young person, my dodges included attempts to pass for Italian by exploiting racial ambiguity. My skin is relatively light, and since both of my adoptive parents identified as Italian, and my grandfather had a naturally dark complexion, I told many of my classmates throughout elementary school that I was Italian. Sometimes it worked, though probably fewer times than I thought. Upon reflection, I think I often rationalized this behavior as a more efficient way to tell people “who I
was” rather than trying to explain my entire genealogical history (much of which I still do not know). Another way I addressed this question—particularly with people whom I didn’t know well—was to simply tell them I didn’t know, which although closer to the truth, rarely satisfied these questioners. To me, questions about my racial identity generally felt as if they were at least in part a way to point out my marginality, my distance from the center and the norm. In short, these questions allowed white people to patrol the borders of whiteness and observe me as different and potentially beyond its boundaries.

Questions about my ethnicity, my native language, and where I am really from have frequented discussions throughout my life. They almost always have begun with someone saying, “You don’t mind me asking, but…” and ended with “you’re exotic whatever it is.” In short, there is some fragility to my personal concept of self as it relates to racial identification. Even if I were to know my racial/ethnic makeup, I’d find it problematic—having grown up with white parents in a predominately white community—to suddenly announce “I’m Latino” or “I’m Filipino” or “I’m black” since I have no substantive connections within those communities or access to the kin who might help me substantiate what each of those identities means. I am also not white and so my existence as interracial, as “half-breed”, as having little knowledge of my own genealogy further frustrates my sense of group belonging in terms of racial identity. As the Other, I’m read differently in different places. As McKerrow (1989) suggests, “The subject is fractured into a multiplicity of selves as the perceptions/labels shift” (p. 105). In my small town in Western Pennsylvania, I was often read as Mexican. In small cities nearby, I was read as Samoan or Filipino. At different times and in different places, I have been read as light-skinned black, as biracial, or even as white.

**The Critic, Voice, and the Other**

I care deeply about people who are oppressed because of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, or gender orientation and I want to help locate the spaces that hold the possibilities
to improve their opportunities because I believe that this is what is best for all of us as well as what is inevitable for any of us to claim a just society. As a critic, my experiences in public schools, being “mixed-race,” being adopted, being middle class, and growing up in western Pennsylvania inform my analysis of the sites explored in this dissertation and the sensible decisions I make in reconstructing discursive fragments, deconstructing metonymic borders, and exploring cultural hearths.

Reflexivity is particularly important as a means to understand others because, as Starosta (1984) notes, “[w]hat we see in the other is a perversion of our own cultural traits, especially in those instances where the other fails to parallel our own. Our image of both cultures is incomplete, as we perceptually fill in or delete expected details” (p. 230). Critics, then, must account for the Other and for existing outside the experiences of the Other. For instance, if I plan to practice critical rhetoric, then, I must engage in a discussion of my own biases, my own positionality and the intersectional identities I occupy as I have attempted to do.

Critical rhetoric, which I explore more fully in a later section, is predicated on both advocating for and interrogating the actions of the Other. Critics, more generally speaking, must then reckon their position of speaking for others and attempt to account for both the limitations and the possibilities that arise from this vantage point. McKerrow (1989) highlights this salient interplay between self and Other when he writes: “[I]t is not so much how I see myself as how I see the Other—my appropriation of an alter-ideology for the Other defines the locus of our struggle (p. 95). Additionally, Ono (2013) cautions critics about “an historical tendency to conceive ‘others’ as fixed in time” (p. 93). The great challenge for critics, then, is navigating the possible disconnections between their own voice and the voices of others. Such navigation must promote respect for the Other but also allow for contextualized evaluations involving identity, persuasion, and power without forgetting the experiences of others as peripheral to our own. As Watts (2001) reminds us, if our voices and the voices we use to speak with others are to be meaningful to rhetorical studies then they must “be capable of salvaging the communal
CONTESTING THE KEYS TO FREEDOM

features of discourse” by “exploring the social commitments that speech entails” (p. 102). This understood, critics must address the issue Alcoff (1988) describes when she discusses the problem of speaking for Others and notes that “even if someone never hears the discursive self [we] present of them they may be affected by the decisions others make after hearing it” (p. 10). The difficulty, then, as Peters (1999) notes, is to “find an account of communication that erases neither the curious fact of otherness at its core nor the possibility of doing things with words” (p. 21).

As critics, it is unlikely we can ever fully represent the emotional investment and internality of the beliefs and desires of others. Therefore, as Alcoff (1988) suggests, when we engage in politics in which we speak or write of others we must take great caution to avoid committing the sorts of erasures and reinscriptions that define the oppressive hierarchies we intend to challenge (p. 29). If we take as truth that communication and behavior are windows that can reveal motives, identifications, and cultural practices, then critics can show respect for the Other by creating spaces where invisible oppressive structures are made visible and where empowerment and collaboration are encouraged.

First though, who are the Others and how can critics come to know them, represent them (as much as is possible) and their struggles against forces of domination? As critics, we can come to know Others through artifacts, through the symbols they imbue with meaning, through what they say, through their observable behaviors, but also through our own empathy. In describing the relationship between himself and Others, Levinas (1986) says:

The absoluteness of the presence of the other… belongs to the present of my life… Everything that constitutes my life with its past and its future is assembled in the present in which things come to me. But it is in the trace of the other that a face shines; what is present there is absolving itself from my life and visits me as already ab-solute. (p. 359)

In echoes of Buber’s I and Thou, Levinas speaks to the ways in which we depend on Others to understand our own existence, and he also notes that this happens experientially, through a present that
is folded within a past and a possible future. Levinas also warns us not to essentialize Others or perceive them as static actors. Similarly, Nainby (2014) explains that the recognition of the absolute difference of the Other, which Levinas (1986) describes, is “the recognition that another person exists fully for himself/herself and cannot be reduced by the logical patterns of scientific data or the figurative patterns of artistic representation” (p. 318). In understanding ourselves as dynamic and unique we can—through empathy—understand Others as dynamic and unique as well. As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain, Levinas emphasizes that we always understand others from a position of exteriority, a position outside the center of their experience since we are confined within our own centers of experience.

Still, if others are dynamic and not meant to be reduced, categorized, or essentialized, then how can scholars focus on critical examinations of the actions of others that involve relational identities such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and so on? In Critical Rhetorics of Race, Lacy and Ono (2011) suggest a possible way forward when they encourage the strategic essentialism of race as a means “to tell novel stories… of how race works” but in doing so maintain a reflexive and self-critical awareness about our moves to essentialize others (p.8). In sum, my work attempts to navigate (1) speaking on behalf of others, (2) remaining aware of my own political commitments, (3) arguing for truths that respect the uniqueness of Others, and (4) being reflexive about the strategic critical maneuvers that I make. This is important since my work here attempts to interrogate the cultural practices of two locales, two of which I am a complete outsider (Baton Rouge and Jefferson County).

Explanation of Key Descriptive Terms

We are always trapped into the web of language; hence, even our most original uses of language are necessarily trapped in a web of all other language that is utilized by our culture. Further, even when we succeed in creating new vocabulary, a new language for dealing with
our world, we necessarily entrench ourselves in a pit, a reified epistemology, which keeps us from becoming the Neitzchean self-creative and shifting poet. (Ono & Sloop, 1992, p. 55)

Throughout this dissertation, I make several decisions about language, about the terms I choose to represent concepts pertaining to gender, sexuality, race, class, and power location. The listing I provide here is not exhaustive but should be useful. My goal is to be consistent throughout the document; meaning that, any terms used outside of quoted material should uphold the guidelines that follow. Also, I do my best to use brackets to change words and phrases within quotations that encourage what I believe uphold paternalistic societal values. These include the catchall use of terms such as “man”, “mankind”, “he (the royal)”, “his (the royal)”. I often use brackets to change these loaded terms into plural forms such as “people”, “humankind”, “we”, and “our”. On a few rare occasions, I do leave the original quote unbracketed, but only if the quote loses its original impact.

In addition, I chose the term “nonwhite” to describe those not identified as white. This is a descriptor suggested by Richard Dyer (1997), which while comparatively bland, is also perhaps more inclusive than other terms set at a similar description. For instance, while “people of color” reads well and seems inclusive, it also allows white people to become an invisible sort of person by draining them of pigmentation, which they most assuredly have. African Americans is another term I avoid. I find it problematic in that it creates assumptions about origins that may not be accurate, unless I am sure that the person overtly self-identifies as such I prefer to use the term black, which I find to be more inclusive. I do not capitalize black or white as they are general descriptors rather than proper nouns. I make use of the term Asian, as I understand this as an accepted, tactical term that invites coalition-building (Keevak, 2011). I choose the plural term Latinx over Latino/s or Chicano/as unless I am sure that the people being discussed are political activists. Whenever possible, I avoid the term Hispanic, as it is a government-invented term that means Spanish speaking. While some might see its potential as a comparative with Asian, I am skeptical of the term and use it only when reporting data related to a
census or when directly quoting a speaker. I am perhaps least sound in my interchangeable use of the terms Native American, Indigenous people, and Indian. My liberal use of these terms demonstrates my confusion about which is more appropriate. When I refer to people as cisgender or cissexual, I mean that they identify with the gender or sexuality commonly assigned to them at birth. When relevant, I make efforts to refer to people as gay rather than as homosexual, although I do leave the term homosexual when it appears within quoted material. Again, I base each of these semantic choices on what I currently understand as ethical representational practices.

Critical Intercultural Communication

Taken as a whole, this project falls within the critical paradigm of communication studies. Critical theory projects are invested in interrogations into the relations of power that maintain and influence dominant epistemological, axiological, and methodological thought. I identify myself as a scholar engaged in Critical Intercultural Communication (Critical ICC) studies, a subfield within the discipline of intercultural studies that emerged during the late 1980s as scholars sought to fill lacunae within the discipline by interrogating the ways in which power operates in intercultural contexts (Moon, 2013, p. 35). Critical ICC scholars explore the ways in which culture renders ideas and actions coherent, and they do so through a variety of orientations that engage with issues of power, context, and ideology within intercultural contexts (Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 19). My identification with Critical ICC comes as a result of my interests, my upbringing, the role race has played within my life, and my sincere desire to teach others practices that work to disrupt whiteness as a dominant ideology within our society. My mission, then, is set at using whatever critical skills I might possess or develop to address what Moon (2013) calls a critical scholar’s conundrum, which involves “how to help students ‘unlearn’ ways of thinking about the world that bolster the status quo” and how to instead inspire them to “envision alternative ways of thinking about the world that challenge it” (p. 43). As Collier et al. (2001) note, a critical lens directed at intercultural
communication practices “sensitizes us to politically charged vocabulary, interests, purpose, issues of power, ideology, voice, identity, visibility/invisibility, marginalization, self-reflexivity, and so on” (p. 227).

**Critique of Dominant Ideologies**

The field of Critical ICC, then, attempts to reimagine foundational communication concepts by offering critiques of the dominant ideologies that inscribe and patrol the social boundaries of our world. This includes interrogations of whiteness and how the U.S. remains “infused with the interests of white hegemony” that continue to produce social inequalities (Moon, 2013, p. 42). Interest in whiteness studies began as intercultural communication scholars noticed that whiteness was dominating their inquiries in at least three ways: (1) “by implicitly defining American as ‘white’; (2) by ignoring transnational relationships developed through migration, displacement, colonization, and imperialism; and (3) by overlooking the voices and experiences of marginalized Americans” (Moon, 2013, p. 42). Within the broader perspective of communication studies, the interrogation of whiteness, then, emerges as a specialized form of Critical ICC set at evaluating symbolic and material practices that produce and reproduce white dominance.

In describing the pervasiveness of whiteness and its connection to communication, Warren (2013) argues that “we are a product of our communicative histories and, because this is so, we continue to reproduce these norms in and through our everyday communication. In this sense, our communication is performative, a generative making (again) of a historical idea [and] social pattern” (p. 448). This social pattern Warren observes, “remakes skin and race as meaningful,” and he adds that, “regardless of where we fall in terms of race, we are always already part of a system of power (p. 456). As Warren notes, whiteness operates as a hegemonic system of power that is capable of reappropriating counterhegemonic discourses. “Whiteness is slippery…” Warren argues, “and because whiteness resists our efforts to speak back, we continue, even without trying, to remake whiteness and
cultural power. That is its power, of course. To shift once named, to take on different clothes, to grow more powerful with critique, to manipulate around critique is the nature of whiteness” (p. 457).

Nakayama and Krizek’s (1995) “Whiteness as Strategic Rhetoric” is a seminal article where it concerns the intersection of Critical ICC and rhetorical studies. They suggest a number of strategies that uphold whiteness in our society and how these strategies tie “white” skin closely to power while simultaneously hiding the white positionality as a space worthy of closer analysis. Their article calls for scholars to consider the local and everyday ways that whiteness works to produce and reproduce uneven power relations based on race, I will explore it further once I have more clearly defined rhetoric.

Rhetoric & Ideological Criticism

In the Western Tradition, rhetoric is both a process and a product, involves the use of symbols, is geared to persuade, and is bound by culture (Burke, 1966; Foss, 2009; Golden et al., 2003). As we learn from R.L. Scott, conceptualizations of rhetoric demand elasticity and defy brief definitions. To operationalize rhetoric is to diminish the complexities of human and symbolic interaction.

Instead, rhetoric is about anticipation and creating anticipations for other people through the use of symbols. In doing so, Startosta (1984) notes that “Rhetoric unsettles” (p. 230). Rhetoric is what speakers use to manipulate the attitudes of listeners in that it induces cooperation and participation in a shared set of attitudes and beliefs (Burke, 1966, p. 4). Listeners too are makers of rhetoric. Scott (1973) notes that as listeners “we seek to be persuaded; that is, we find grounds for our beliefs and, hopefully, continually refine our beliefs in the process” (p. 90). In thinking about rhetoric, then, intent is also important, and decidedly more important than the success or failure of a persuasive act. As Edwin Black (1978) makes clear, “Persuasion…refers to intent, not necessarily accomplishment. Rhetorical discourses are those discourses, spoken or written, which aim to influence [people]. Whether a given discourse actually exerts an influence has no bearing, it is rhetorical” (Black, p. 15). Rhetoric, then, is a
means for emphasizing ideas and making them vivid (Bogost, 2008). As Burke (1966) notes rhetoric is a structured way of using symbols to produce acceptance and authority (p. 20).

Since the critical turn in rhetorical studies that unfolded across the 1970s, definitions of rhetoric have formed around notions of power. Klumpp (1973), for instance, encourages studies of rhetoric that go beyond understanding rhetoric as sets of persuasive acts and toward understanding it as “the molder of a community, functioning to shape and reinforce values, goals and actions” (p. 5). His view is predicated on the notion that language determines society in that language orders our experience and creates “the forms which make communication of experience” possible (Duncan, 1968, p. 144). Our social forms, then, are made possible through language that allows us to understand our places within the social spaces of a community (Procter, 1990, p. 117). As Klumpp and Hollihan (1979) suggest, what rhetoricians do is “study the way in which rhetoric converts experiences into culture and history” (p. 89). Building on this notion, McGee (1998) argues that rhetoric itself is a theory of power. In other words, “rhetoric is a material social process that constitutes (or generates) a wide range of objects—beliefs, attitudes, actions, events, texts, selves, and even communities” (Gaonkar, 1990, p. 290). McGee observes that “rhetoric talks about how opposing ideas and opposing people relate to one another in discourse and how people create discourse in the context of which to execute their power plays and power moves” (p. 31). McGee’s description of rhetoric as communication is underpinned by the idea that all differences between people can be bridged. “Rhetoric” he argues, “assumes that all conflict… can be translated somehow into a rhetorical situation where the conflict can be managed rather than yielded to” (p. 44).

In considering the importance of situational context, Sonja K. Foss (2009) makes clear that a rhetorical situation and rhetoric arise mutually and that “the situation does not control the response of the rhetor, but neither is the rhetor free to create a situation at will” (p. 193). This interconnectedness allows rhetors to create, recreate, and deflect perceptions about reality as they exist within contested
discursive spaces (Burke, 1966, Vatz, 1973, Bitzer, 1992). Ideological rhetorical criticism arises from these foundational notions about the connections between persuasion and power, speaker and community.

**Ideological Criticism**

In the last half of the 1960s, Edwin Black’s (1978) groundbreaking work *Rhetorical Criticism* pointed scholarship squarely toward ideological criticism. In response, critics throughout the 1970s, developed approaches concerned with conceptualizing and evaluating power and its implications in maintaining dominant social structures, in marginalizing people, and in popularizing certain worldviews over others. Foss (2009) points to the eruption of social justice movements during the 1960s as the sociopolitical epicenter that popularized studies of power. Ideological criticism became a buzzword throughout the 1970s as its practitioners adopted ideas from the works of Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Fredrich Nietzsche, Neomarxist thinkers, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Jean Baudrillard, Anthony Giddens, and various thinkers of the Frankfurt School among others.

Sonja K. Foss suggests the growth of ideological criticism was aided by The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies and radical feminism, “which links female oppression to material conditions of social organization created by capitalist political economy [and] holds that the production of knowledge is mediated by situated conjunctions of class, gender, racial, ethnic, and sexual identities” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 58). In discussing the roots of ideological criticism in rhetorical studies, Foss (2009) cites Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1973) and her article “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation” as an essential work in “constitut[ing] the first effort to reconceptualize rhetorical constructs” as a means to understand how power shapes structural social conditions (Campbell as cited in Foss, p. 213). “The primary goal of ideological critics,” Foss argues, “is to discover and make visible the ideology embedded in an artifact” (p. 213). This “making visible” happens through a
process of articulation, or “the establishment of a relationship among elements (such as beliefs, practices, and values) so that their identity is transformed” and the worldviews they privilege made recognizable (p. 213). Rhetorical scholars have taken on a number of projects and approaches to perform ideological criticism: structuralism and semiotics, poststructuralism and deconstructionism, as well as, postmodernism and dialectics (Foss, 2009). I should be careful here to note that these approaches are not meant to act as theories bound to a rigid set of procedures and methods. Instead, as Lawrence Grossberg (1993) argues, studies of culture require radically contextualized approaches that observe theorizing as a type of critical praxis directed at revealing power relations within studies of culture and communication (p. 2). Ideological criticism addresses issues of power. Three rhetorical scholars were particularly influential in shaping the face of today’s ideological criticism: Michael C. McGee, Phil Wander, and Raymie McKerrow.

McGee (1980) defines an “ideology in practice [as] a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decisions and control public belief and behavior” (p. 5). McGee invites critics to discover an ideology by uncovering the myths that operate to furnish its power (p. 4). McGee, thus, introduces the notion of tracing ideographs—the abstract concepts that form the basis for an entire ideology. Political language, according to McGee (1980) is often indicated by slogans, or “a vocabulary of ‘ideographs’ easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy” (p. 5). McGee argues, that if we understand how communities infuse abstract concepts like freedom or property with meaning, then we can reveal the ideological commitments that they uphold. For example, when he was governor of Indiana, Mike Pence argued that shop owners should have the freedom to discourage people who were gay from buying things at their establishments. This use of freedom, traced back in time would reveal a much different set of historical commitments when compared with the opposing viewpoint that “all people should be free to shop wherever they please.” The study of ideographs is directed toward showing how abstract terms such as freedom and patriotism
and property work together to reinforce dominant theories about what a society should and should not be. These dominant theories or ideologies, McGee believes, provide a window into the values and beliefs that reproduce unequal distributions of power in a society (McGee, 1980, p. 7). Ideographs “define a collectivity and warrant the use of power, excuse behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable” (Procter, 1990, p. 117). McGee’s work in ideological criticism remains influential and relevant.

Phil Wander’s theories have also expanded the horizons of ideological criticism. In a world of plurality and scarcity, Wander (1983) argues that critics can ill-afford to ignore “the existence of powerful vested interests, benefiting from, and consistently urging policies and technologies that threaten life on this planet” nor can they shy away from suggesting, or conceiving, the existence of alternatives to such interests (p. 16). Wander (1984) notes that rhetoric that praises certain notions of believing, acting, and being in the world often simultaneously condemns and suppresses alternative rhetorics. He suggests ideological critics move beyond textual criticism and discover the not-said of a particular discourse. In other words, the voices not being heard in public spaces (p. 210). Uncovering these voices, Wander argues has the potential to illuminate a Third Persona, or “that [which] is not present, that [which] is objectified in a way that ‘you’ and ‘I’ are not” (p. 209). The Third Persona, then, highlights the silencing of those who lack access to discursive spaces, which includes “not only being alienated through language…but also being negated in history, a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence” (p. 210).

Both Wander and McGee argue that methods are more valuable as ways of organizing manuscripts than as instruments of discovery. Their post-structural standpoints observe a postmodern world of contingent truths constructed through identifications with attitudes, beliefs, and values that refute universalic Truths. Similar principles inspire Raymie McKerrow’s invention of critical rhetoric. *Principles of Critical Rhetoric*
In “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” Raymie McKe row (1989) calls for an “opening-up” in the way critics think of themselves and of their roles in examining rhetoric. As McGee (1990) notes, critical rhetoric is a play on words that invites critics to understand criticism as a vehicle for performing rhetoric rather than one set at merely evaluating rhetoric as an artifact (p. 276). In this sense, rhetoric becomes a construction of discursive fragments assembled by a critic. Through this assemblage of fragments, critics can promote secondary readings set at unmasking oppressive discourses that are enforced by taken for granted, common sense, beliefs and practices (McKe row, p. 91). “Critical rhetoric,” McGee notes, “does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent” (p. 279). This thought aligns with McKe row’s assertion that “the initial task of critical rhetoric is one of re-creation—constructing an argument that identifies the integration of power and knowledge and delineates the role of power/knowledge in structuring social practices” (p. 102).

Power/knowledge is Foucault’s notion that no knowledge arises independently of complicated networks of power and that power itself produces particular types of knowledge (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 101). It follows, then, that certain ways of knowing can become popularized and even normalized as commonsense. By practicing critical rhetoric, McKe row believes critics and push back against this. He argues that engaging in critical rhetoric grants critics access to the manipulation of doxa, “the commonsense knowledge rooted in the taken for granted character of everyday life” (Gaonkar, p. 313).

This access to doxa invites critics to support emerging ideas that contest commonsense knowledge and the power structures that support them. To do so, McKe row (1989) suggests critics commit to both a “critique of domination” and a “critique of freedom” (p. 91). The “critique of domination” is an orientation toward criticism that reveals conditions of power in order to clear out spaces for emancipatory projects. Alternately, McKe row describes the “critique of freedom” as an
ongoing area of self-reflexive critique and as one that “turns back on itself as it promotes a realignment.” (p. 91).

Ono and Sloop (1992) find the continual self-criticism McKerrow suggests as the “critique of freedom” useful, yet they wonder if it might also inspire paralyzing self-doubt within a critic. As an amendment, they call critical rhetoricians to enhance the “critique of freedom” by keeping in mind a contingent telos, a potential endpoint in which their ideal world is realized: a contingent notion of the good. They argue:

Those who adhere to poststructural views on knowledge and discourse who are committed to critical rhetoric must demand of themselves, at the moment of placing pen to paper, that they relinquish skepticism and advance their argument for that moment as if the direction chosen by the critic (i.e. a telos) were Truth with a capital “T.” Upon lifting pen, however, the critic must relinquish this “Truth” in favor of skepticism, a critique of freedom. (p. 53)

In addition, Norman Clark (1996) addresses the “danger of arrogance” involved in performing critical rhetoric. Clark suggests critical rhetoricians crave out projects in which they are both the Ophelia (help) and the Douleia (servant). Accordingly, critics serve as the Ophelia by asking themselves how they plan to help the oppressed. On the other hand, critics serve as the Douleia by asking themselves if they are serving the good of the people or their own personal interests. Clark encourages those practicing critical rhetoric understand themselves as a “critical servant [who] creates a corrective community in order to critique that community again” (p. 122).

In further defining critical rhetoric, McKerrow suggests eight principles that critical rhetoricians should consider. First, McKerrow notes that critical rhetoric is not a method but a practice. Rather than method, he describes critical rhetoric as “a collection of choices a critic makes in terms of what symbolic action and discursive scraps they choose to embody a particular discursive formation” (p. 102). Second, he suggests that the power of discourse is material in that “an ideology exists, in a
material sense, in and through the language which constitutes it” (p. 102). Third, McKerrow argues that rhetoric consists of doxastic rather than epistemic knowledge. “Doxastic knowledge,” he notes “functions as the grounding of critical rhetoric. Rather than focusing on questions of ‘truth’ or ‘falsity,’ a view of rhetoric as doxastic allows the focus to shift to how the symbols come to possess power—what they ‘do’ in society as contrasted to what they ‘are.’” (p. 105).

Murphy (1995) characterizes McKerrow’s view of the doxastic as an anti-foundationalist position that is directed at exposing opinions within communities that have come to be taken as universal truths, as common knowledge, or as privileged ways of viewing the world. As belief/opinion doxa, then, creates marginality when it operates as a concealment to alternative ways of understanding reality that is supported by discursive practices and oppressive regimes adherent to an existing status quo. McKerrow invites critics to reveal taken-for-granted truths by locating the cultural capital that grants authority to these truths. As Murphy suggests, critical rhetoric is a project that pushes back against consensus of any kind (p. 5). Instead, “the critical rhetoric project views the wisdom of a community with deep suspicion because it is the commonality of common sense… and,” it is often represented by “the ‘norms of a rhetorical culture that oppress individuals and prevent them from asserting difference” (p. 5). The interrogation of acts to preserve the status quo within a community, then, have the potential to illuminate sites where borders emerge as rhetorically constructed social boundaries, whose effects dance between the symbolic and the material. As Murphy observes, when community discourses preserve the status quo as Truth, “doxa throws a long and ominous shadow as episteme because both enforce consensus and disdain marginal practices” (p. 5). McKerrow’s fourth principle continues this line of reasoning and states that naming is the central symbolic act of nominalist rhetoric, which is directed against the universalizing tendencies of a Habermasian communicative ethics or a Perelmanesque philosophical rhetoric” (p. 105). Naming, thus, becomes the critical act of marking discourses of domination.
McKerrow’s fifth principle notes that influence is not causality and thus the task of critical rhetoric is not to establish cause-effect relationships but “to call attention to the myth, and the manner in which it mediates between contradictory impulses of action” (p. 107). McKerrow’s sixth principle states that “Absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluating symbolic action” (p. 107). This principle incorporates the not-said existent within a given textual fragment that can illuminate sites of oppression (Wander, 1983). The seventh principle, McKerrow, discusses is the notion that fragments allow for the potential of polysemic interpretation. “A polysemic critique,” he notes, “is one which uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority, at the same time that the primary reading appears to confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms” (p. 108). Borrowing from McGee’s (1987) notion of the critical inventor, McKerrow (1989) argues that a critical rhetorician’s work is “the 'pulling together' of disparate scraps of discourse which, when constructed as an argument, serve to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices” (p. 101). Murphy (1995) observes that these “‘fragments’ do not remain ‘disparate scraps’ for long. Critical tinkerers arrange, move, and play with the pieces in order to display the ‘web’ of cultural practices” that produce taken-for-granted knowledge (p. 6).

This idea of fragments is important as my project will attempt to arrange discursive pieces in a manner that illustrates how ideological boundaries relate to cultural practices of whiteness that simultaneously inform the metonymic borders extant within three U.S. communities. The success of this attempt will largely depend on whether or not those fragments resonate with people. As McGee (1998) importantly notes “what authorizes any criticism is the wisdom of the fragments of the pieces that we put together—what we choose to put together, and whether or not it makes sense. Whether or not people can recognize it as something that for the moment for them is going to pass for truth” (p. 44). McKerrow’s eighth and final principle, argues that criticism is a performance, with the critic as an inventor who engages in uncovering “the continuation of social practices that ultimately are harmful to
the community” (p. 108). These principles outline the approaches I will take in attempting to uncover whiteness as a cultural practice at the two locales explored in this dissertation.

**Whiteness as Strategic Rhetoric**

In “Whiteness as Strategic Rhetoric” Nakayama and Krizek (1995) establish six rhetorical strategies that work to conceal whiteness during ordinary, everyday encounters. First, they note that while the white positionality is often hidden from analysis, its dominance is not entirely absent, only enough so as to allow speakers to conjure up alternative rationales for the persistence of white dominance in society (p. 299). Second, Nakayama and Krizek emphasize that white is negatively defined. In other words, other groups have colors, such as yellow, brown, black, and red, which become immediate identifiers; whereas, white “is seen as a non-color” (p. 299). For instance, when we read about a robbery in the news, nonwhite people are more frequently identified by their race than are white people. In short, the “white” race is more likely to go unmarked. According to Nakayama and Krizek, this phenomenon reveals “the rhetoric of invisibility and universality… reflected in popular press discourse. This rhetoric,” they note, “extends the white space to universal” (p. 300). Third, Nakayama and Krizek note that when “white” as a social scientific category is placed in comparison with others such as Latinx, its status and historical place of dominance is obscured. For instance, when we compare the third-grade reading scores of white and black children, we often forget the institutional, structural, and societal factors that influence the gaps between scores. As a snapshot racial category, whiteness “eludes any recognition of power relations embedded” within the “white” category (p. 300).

Nakayama and Krizek’s fourth rhetorical strategy of whiteness functions through the use of symbols that conflate and confuse whiteness with nationality. “In this depiction of whiteness,” they note, “the vision of whiteness is bounded by national borders… Whiteness means ‘that I’m of American descent,’ or ‘white’ means ‘white-American’” (p. 300). In this case, nonwhites come to
possess a marginalized citizenship within a white nation. A fifth strategy identified by, Nakayama and Krizek involves the process of labelling. This strategy provides people the opportunity both to be proud of their ethnicity and to express the notion that labels do not matter. The strategy of labelling, therefore, revolves around who is permitted to label others, which historically in the U.S. has been white males. Nakayama and Krizek note that being labelled can be particularly difficult for women who struggle under multiple labels and meanings within our patriarchal society (p. 302). The sixth strategy that Nakayama and Krizek identify, borrowing from Mary Waters (1990), is called symbolic ethnicity, and it occurs when white people identify with an ethnicity as if trying to “accessorize a wardrobe.” (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 302). For such people, Waters (1990) argues, ethnicity has not been a substantial part of their everyday lives, but instead it “meets a need Americans have for community without individual cost,” which in a subtle way reinforces racism (p. 164).

The Local and the Critical Turn

Nakayama and Krizek’s (1995) exploration into whiteness as strategic rhetoric provides critics a frame to evaluate the day-to-day nature of oppressive racial structures and racist ideologies. It also embodies the critical turn to the local, which is acts as the foundation for this project. For the past four decades, rhetorical scholars have moved beyond the study of great men saying great things eloquently and carved out fresh spaces to explore society from more pluralistic positions. In this same vein, Goldzwig (1998) invites critics to understand the critical turn as part of the adoption of a broader critical localism project, which focuses attention on the discourse of local communities and thereby reshapes a critic’s role as uncovering the “tension between commonality and diversity between and among various cultural communities” (p. 286). For example, Ono and Sloop’s (1995) study of vernacular discourse encourages critics to examine the everydayness and lived experiences of marginalized cultural groups. Tracy, McDaniel, and Gronbeck (2007) also highlight the rhetorical practices of local actors, when they focus on ordinary democracy, or moments when everyday citizens
evoke their democratic right to tell policymakers what they want at community-level meetings. Each of these critical perspectives—and there are numerous other examples—are emblematic of the shift away from criticism focused on top-down communication and toward the communicative efforts that work their way up from the local.

**What is Community?**

Although I have mentioned community numerous times throughout this manuscript, thus far, I have yet to sketch out its definition. Communities are historical constructions that can be thought of in two overlapping and often interconnected ways. First, we might think of community—as I do throughout a majority of this dissertation—as grounded in a particular locale, a physical and symbolic site whose boundaries are sites of consensus and dissensus. Cohen (1985), expresses this notion when pointing out that community “is largely a mental construct, whose ‘objective’ manifestations in locality or ethnicity give it credibility” (p. 109). Second, we might understand communities as “imagined” social spaces where people who may not meet face to face are still able to interact and do community. As Drzewiecka and Wong (1999) suggest, “people imagine themselves to be a part of the symbolic community where others they may never meet are imagined to be enacting the same cultural practices” (p. 205). In either instance, the connectedness between histories and possible futures are important.

As Burke (1966) teaches us: “What is determined to be true (and false) of the soul of a community is not a product of an independently observed past; rather, it is an integration of the past and present with respect to what is important, what counts, to those constructing the history for their moment in time” (p. 38). In this way, we can understand community as dynamic. As Procter (1990) notes, “community exists not as a static object to be held up for review, but in symbolic performance… community is a rhetorically contested and emergent process, a phenomena continually in flux” (p. 130). It is in this way that rhetoric molds community at whatever place or social space we might imagine it, whether that be an X-box Live *Skyrim* community or the “Teamsterville” community on
Chicago’s south side that Philipsen (1986) illuminates for us. Community happens as people accept or identify with one another as well as when they do not. As Burke (1966) notes when he discusses how people arrive at sites of identification, “a well-rounded frame of acceptance involves constant discrimination” (p. 33). In short, knowing who we are not is simultaneously a way of knowing who we are, and these distinctions are not arbitrary but linked to perceptions about appropriate relations of power.

What is important to keep in mind is that communities are inextricably bound, at very least, by a shared understanding of what cultural practices mean in terms of power. Malhotra and Rowe (2013) elaborate on this when they explain that “cultural practices are seen to have the power to access any culture and deep cultural experiences and collective memories at will across gender, history, space, and cultural difference” (p. 207). Raka Shome (1999) argues that by studying the “interlocking axes of power, spatial location, and history” we can come to “recognize a nonessentialist and historically specific understanding of whiteness” (p. 109). Communities, then, can be thought of as locales where critics can unearth distinct qualities of whiteness by analyzing how people say and do things and how they rationalize the things they say and do. Since community relies on cultural practice, it creates possibilities to identify how whiteness is in embedded in everyday interactions and rituals that shape knowledge about race and racial superiority. K-12 schools and the localized discourses that surround them, therefore, are extremely important sites where critics can reveal how communities work to both facilitate and counteract performances of racial dominance and racial superiority.

_K-12 Schools & Education Reform_

In the late twentieth century, philosopher and activist Paulo Freire (1999) warned communities against understanding education as a banking system where educators simply transferred knowledge into the minds of children per the cookie-cutter approaches designed by distant government agencies (p. 88). In many ways, however, this is the state of K-12 public education today. While there remains
an ongoing struggle over “local control” between communities and state apparatuses such as the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the U.S. Department of Education, another major player has gained a firm foothold in these struggles: multi-billion dollar corporations. For profit and non-profit standardized test designers such as Pearson and the College Board—by way of their market positioning—exact significant influence on debates about education. In 2012 alone, Common Core states shelled out a combined $1.7 billion for standardized K-12 assessment tests, according to a study by the Brookings Institute (Chingos, 2012). Yet, this should not be surprising. In the late 1990s, critical scholars such as Giroux (1999) warned that education policy was being reframed as “a vehicle for social mobility for those privileged to have the resources and power to make their choices matter” (p. 149). As Lisa Flores (2015) notes, “education has become a commodity and parents the consumers” (p. 250). In this market-exchange era of education, public schooling has often been positioned the generic option to specialty charters, many of which are not required to meet the same standards as their public school counterparts.

Accordingly, narratives have emerged that suggest that the only way to rescue failing public schools is by creating competitive environment through privatization. These narratives invite a public consciousness that understands the market as the friend of freedom and choice, which can vanquish the enemy: invasive government bureaucracy (Aune, 2001, p. 9). In terms of competition, a privatized education system—as the story goes—ensures public school success. A common theme of these narratives, then, is that schools should be thought of like businesses and those that are poorly run do not deserve to survive the conditions of the market. Restructuring K-12 education to reflect the free market, thus, becomes the only way forward. Tangentially, it just happens to be lucrative for corporations, and those with the means to invest in this education model.
Janice Peck (2015) argues that these macro-level narratives supply symbolic capital to locally adaptable versions of the “broken schools” narrative, which is closely associated with today’s education reform movement. Peck suggests that:

In that romantic narrative, the children are victims; the villains are public school teachers, especially teachers unions, who put their own interests and job security above students’ need for quality education, and the heroes are the reformers and their benefactors seeking to rescue children from the flawed public education system. (p. 591)

Critics need to deconstruct and challenge such narratives because they work to rationalize the resegregation of K-12 schools by highlighting certain connections between resources, education, accountability, and race while obscuring others. Within the logic of the “broken schools” narrative, broken public schools (i.e. failing schools) become synonymous with working-class and nonwhite schools, with “inner city” schools. Removing one’s children from that environment is equated with buying a name brand made by experts rather than a generic product that is produced by overpaid and underqualified laborers. Although the name brand is often not held to the same standards of accountability as its generic equivalent. Since it costs more, it is assumed to be the better product. Without much of a leap, speakers set a promoting the privatization of K-12 education, then, can influence audiences to understand this tantamount as a way to circumvent the cultural inferiority that is inherent in schools with particular groups of people: the poor and the nonwhite. Such promotions of cultural inferiority, however, tend to act more as convenient and persuasive Band-Aids that conceal the scars and deep cuts of structural disadvantage than anything else. The broken schools narrative begets a truth that relies on such concealments while it also mystifies the interconnectedness between race, class, and power. As an argumentum ad populum (i.e. three men make a tiger), this narrative influences a quickening in the defunding of public education that only helps to confirm its “truth” that public schools are broken.
Lipman (2012) observes that, particularly within urban environments, “every school that is closed for ‘failure’ reproduces the ‘truth’ of dysfunctional communities of color. This ‘truth’ legitimates turning over schools in Black communities to corporate ‘turnaround’ operators, disbanding Local School Councils, running schools through charter school companies, and top-down decisions by school officials about what kind of school a community should have” (p. 50). As school board meetings become optional rather than required spaces for school administrators to facilitate democratic participation, the interests of the affluent are further privileged. Broken schools narratives advance political economic perspectives that downplay the enmeshment of market inequalities and discrimination on the basis of individual and group identities.

**Neoliberalism, Class, and Race**

Like Einstein’s revolution of space and time as two fabrics that cannot be separated and hence are expressed as space-time, race-class analysis cannot imagine ending racism without a simultaneous critique of capitalism. (Leonardo as cited by Orelus, 2011, p. 41)

Whether or not ending racism is a possibility, its relationship to capitalism, as Leonardo makes clear is best unpacked by race-class analyses. “Racism,” as Malcom X has famously noted “is like a Cadillac. They bring out a new model every year” (as cited in Lipsitz, 1995, p. 701). Critics might also argue that each of those models confuse race with class. Whiteness operates much the same. Its shifts as well as the paralleling swings between overt and covert racism that underpin it, require critics to consciously and continuously retool their strategies for challenging racialized notions of superiority. These efforts, however, can be even further complicated by the ever-shifting ways that speakers advance market perspectives that (intentionally or not) work to diminish and obscure the existence of class and its related market inequities.

Neoliberalism, or a laissez-faire liberalism, is a term used by critics to describe a view of economics in which “the market has its own internal mechanism to correct its imbalances [if]
individuals are left free to decide for themselves what to do with their labor and money” (Bennet et al., 2005, p. 200). What is understood as “neo-liberalism” is not only an economic stance, but a political discourse—emerging as a condition of late capitalism—that acts as a policy framework, an ideology, and a lens of governmentality (Larner, 2000, p. 6).

Whereas under Keynesian welfarism the state provisions of goods and services to a national population was understood as a means of ensuring social well-being, neoliberalism is associated with the preference of a minimalist state. Markets are understood to be a better way of organizing economic activity because they are associated with competition, economic efficiency and choice. In conjunction with this general shift towards the neo-liberal tenant of ‘more market,’ deregulation and privatization have become central themes in debates over welfare state restructuring. (Larner, 2000, p. 5)

The neoliberal critique, political economist Wendy Larner argues, is a critique of a political discourse about “the nature of rule and [sets] of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance” (p. 6). Therefore, we can understand what critics call neoliberalism as a face of governmentality, since governmentality is about the “how” of governing populations (Li, 2007). It is important to note that unlike Foucault’s notion of discipline, governmentality does not seek to reform individuals (neither does what critics call neoliberalism); instead, as Tania Murray Li suggests, governmentality is about how “government operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations, and beliefs” (p. 275). Understanding so-called neoliberalism as a face of governmentality, then, allows us to view it more as a diffuse set of assemblages than as a specific set of instructions on how to run an economy or how to govern people. Assemblages are collections of ideas, people, and actions. “Understanding governmental interventions as assemblages,” Li notes, “helps to break down the image of government as the preserve of a monolithic state operating as a singular source of power and enables us to recognize the range of parties involved in attempts to regulate the conditions under
which we live” (p. 276). In the third chapter of this manuscript, I will elaborate on this notion when I discuss relationships between federal, state, and local level governing actions within the contexts of an emergent and powerful technocratic, or expert, discourse.

For now, coupling the laissez-faire economic stance with governmentality provides an inroad to conceptualize “the ways in which subjects are differently formed and differently positioned in relation to governmental programs” particularly in regards to their capacities for action (Dean, 1999, p. 29). As Lipsitz (1994) suggests, the legitimacy of late capitalism as a reasonable way of life depends on its ability to convince:

people that material goals do not conflict with moral goals [and] that personal happiness can best be achieved in the context of capital accumulation. Under these circumstances, capitalists can capitalize (literally and figuratively) on division and discrimination among groups, as well as on the fears and frustrations of individuals. Advertisers exploit loneliness and alienation, promising us that products will provide us with enhanced identities that will evince admiration and affection from others. Their mode of address turns families into consumption units and market segments; it encourages individuals to own more and better things than their neighbors. In the workplace, employers utilize hierarchies of race and gender to pit workers against each other, to ‘naturalize’ discriminatory job segregation as well as to reinforce biased hiring and promotion policies that enable management to pay lower wages and impose harsher working conditions on aggrieved groups. (p. 56)

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, similar understandings have helped strengthened appeals that advocate privatizing the nation’s K-12 education system. With Omi and Winant (2014), I argue that laissez-faire economic positions associated with neoliberalism are directed at minimizing the significance of race in that they promote notions of a colorblind market that is now both neutral and accessible to all. In this sense, my critique of “neoliberal ideology” focuses on revealing economic
prescriptions that encourage a belief in the market as neutral and simultaneously work to erase the historically prevalent coupling of colorblindness and capitalist accumulation (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 211).

Collins (2009) notes that color blindness absolves guilt and discourages corrective actions toward equity because it “helps manufacture a racism that has virtually no racists, where racism lives on in the realm of ideas but not in everyday life, and where no one really feels responsible for fixing it or even demanding that public institutions try to do so” (p. 73). In short, individuals—for all intents and purposes—choose their lot in life. Race, then, broadly speaking, can be understood a visual experience of difference that we might have during ordinary encounters with others rather than a perpetual basis for oppression. In a neoliberal context, as Flores (2015) argues, terms such as “freedom and choice… function rhetoricly to imbue individuals with the agency that is heralded as foundational to American democracy (p. 250). In this regard, freedom and choice perform three important persuasive functions.

First, these ideas emphasize individuals as the actors most responsible for their place within society. In other words, people are free to choose how they use their time and how they participate in the marketplace. Second, the terms freedom and choice invite individuals to understand that there is a connection between democratic values and capitalist notions of a free market. Individuals, then, are encouraged to observe this so-called free market as neutral and self-correcting, unlike markets tied to socialism or communism which simultaneously are symbolically painted as inferior and undemocratic systems. This second rhetorical function also encourages individuals to participate in the dismantling of democratic welfare states, which are assumed to rob market actors of their freedom by encouraging freebees, handouts, and government intervention. Third, freedom and choice lend persuasive force to narratives that minimize race, class, sexual orientation, and gender as sites of oppression. They do so by deemphasizing the ways in which the U.S. market operates atop a foundation that was directed at
the promotion of white cismale dominance. When historically and politically contextualized, then, class divisiveness is a rhetorical effect common to a “neoliberal” economic stance, to racism, and to sexism (Roediger, 1999). The interconnectedness of these power relations marks the inseparability of race, class, and gender as powerful discursive factors influencing access to marketplaces both broadly speaking within late capitalism and more specifically within U.S. society. Whatever role that these identity markers might play in shaping access to the market, they have the potential to discredit calls for market deregulation associated with the neoliberal economic perspective. This threatens to complicate presumptions about freedom and choice, which generally are terms that enhance the persuasiveness of the laissez-faire economic stance. Therefore, those who support this stance and its related governing actions are incentivized to frame the market as being guided by an “invisible hand” (Smith, 1910) and to downplay or refute the role of identity politics in the marketplace. Continuing salary discrepancies between men and women and between whites and nonwhites, however, work against this logic.

When holding identity markers such as class, race, and gender together, it becomes important not to undervalue the role they play in shaping access to the market. From Stuart Hall, we learn that Marxist notions centered on class alone offer incomplete and inaccurate snapshots of societal realities. Hall (1996), instead, encourages critics to understand race as a “medium through which class relations are experienced” or more simply, he notes, that “race is the way class is lived” (p. 55). In this way race, as Roediger (1994) argues, becomes a means for individuals within the elite, middle, and working classes to patrol the borders of access to the labor market and oppress people according to race, ethnicity, and gender (p. 3). Roediger’s (1999) work demonstrates how nineteenth century elites were able to amplify racial divisions between members of the white and nonwhite working class in order to prevent potential coalition-building that might have led to the rebalancing of wealth, power, and marketplace access.
Today’s market-minded perspectives have similarly worked to dissuade empathy among socioeconomic cohorts by shaping realities in which market success is predominately predicated upon the individual effort of actors who enter the marketplace on relatively equal terms. Giroux (2015) contends the neoliberal critique frames such notions as part of a bigoted economic and social project that is inherently antagonistic toward democratic values. He argues that those who advance a neoliberal ideology understand “profit-making as the essence of democracy, consuming as the only operable form of citizenship, and an irrational belief in the market to solve all problems and serve as a model for structuring social relations” (p. 102). By shifting focus from social goods and public institutions and toward commodification and privatization, Giroux (2005) argues that neoliberal values both reinforce and justify conditions of inequity while simultaneously promoting “rigid exclusions from national citizenship and civic participation” (p. 14). Analyses of civic participation, thus, provide an inroad for critics to interrogate the practice of neoliberal values at the local level. Any economic perspective—in a democratic society—must draw lines between what is private and what is public. Therefore, critics can produce useful analyses that shed light on the connections between a so-called neoliberal ideology and the cultural and identity politics that it denies or makes possible (Duggan, 2012, pp. 11-12). I believe that by tracking community level K-12 education policy debates, we can understand how market perspectives that promote deregulation and privatization exist in a symbiotic relationship with colorblind racial perspectives. The former expresses the desire for a hands-off government approach in public spaces. The latter, ironically, encourages an invasive government approach in private spaces that is geared toward the assimilation of so-called culturally deficient nonwhite populations.

As K-12 education has been commodified, Biesta (2015) argues that a “language of learning” has emerged supplanting a “language of educating”. This unseating has promoted a realignment in the relationship between the responsibilities of citizens and the responsibility of the state. Education, in
this rhetorical frame, occurs as an individual responsibility and the responsibility of the state to educate citizens is deemphasized. According to Biesta, this shift in responsibility works to camouflage the important relations between people as part of the educational process. Biesta’s critique highlights the role of governmentality in that the “language of learning” exemplifies an institutional means of shaping conduct through the construct of symbols and practices associated with a laissez faire (or neoliberal) economic perspective. From the macro-level, free-market ideological perspectives—supporting the notion that individuals are responsible for their own positions within the market—move through the assemblages of governmentality to influence and constrain education discussions at the local level. People who support what critics describe as a neoliberal agenda “advocate privatization of economic enterprises, which they consider fundamentally ‘private’ and inappropriately placed within a ‘public’ arena” (p. 12). In this sense, K-12 education is one among many public services that they believe should be privatized in order to support market competition. Ironically, many charter and private schools request and rely on subsidies and federal funding in order to enter the education market and compete with public schools, which are beholden to state standards in ways that charters institutions are not. One practice specific to public schools, and not to charter schools, is the requirement that school administrators hold regular meetings that are open to the public.

*Encounter & the Public Sphere*

Public school board meetings, then, are a type of public sphere, or place in social life where people meet to discuss and debate pressing issues (Habermas, 1996). In a democracy, a key function of the public sphere is to ensure citizens engage “with questions about the collective interest and the common good [because] democracy requires the translation and transformation of private trouble into public issues” (Biesta, 2011, p. 147). The public sphere does so by allowing expressions of public opinion to both “legitimate and check the power of the state” (Deluca & Peeples, 2002, p. 128). Habermas (1991) argues that when people encounter differences in the meaning of policies, this
conflict beckons them to engage in practical discourse that is a formal discussion of those contested meanings to reach a consensus about them (p. 171). The public sphere, then, acts as “a zone between the law-making powers of the state (the sphere of public authority) and the essentially private pursuit of happiness by ordinary people. It is a space that allows for a more nuanced study of how power constitutes the subject and how citizen-subjects… become aware of their collectivity” (Rivera, 2006, p. 17).

The idea of a public sphere has retained its spatially descriptive value as a communication concept though many critics have cited Habermas’ conception of the public sphere as overly reliant on rationality and normative ideals for persuasion, which favor a bourgeoisie perspective (Fraser, 1990; Asen, 2015; Schudson, 1994). Critics have also questioned Habermas’ notion that consensus is the focal point of deliberation within the public sphere. Motions toward a happy (or unhappy) consensus actually rarely seem to be operating when opposing groups meet within the public sphere. Instead, as Phillips (1996) notes, a belief that there is a sought after consensus has greater potential to silence dissent and encourage critics to overlook efforts at resistance.

Scholars, therefore, have paved other avenues to understand the processes of deliberation that unfold within the public sphere. Mouffe (1999) prefers the term “conflictual consensus” or as a “consensus on the [existing] ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, [but] dissent about their interpretation” (p. 756). Other scholars, who interrogate deliberation within the public sphere have chosen instead to highlight the role of dissensus. For instance, Hauser (1999) characterizes “deliberation discourse [as] definitively factional, with the engaged parties each attempting to appropriate historicity” (p. 18). Similarly focused on dissensus, political philosopher Jacques Ranciere (2003) argues that the public sphere divides along two distinct bodies: (1) the police order and (2) politics. The police order “is all-inclusive in that everyone is included [and] has a particular place, role, position, or identity in it…no one is excluded from the order” (Biesta, 2011, p. 144). Politics, on the
other hand, describes “the mode of acting that perturbs this arrangement” (Ranciere, 2003, p. 226). Put another way, politics arise when people disagree with their positions within the existing police order (read hierarchy). Their dissensus compels them to take up political activity and attempt to “reconfigure” the existing policing order via their claims of inequality or marginalization (p. 144).

In many instances of dissensus, community members tap into discourses that reflect the contested histories of a given locale as well as present and former attempts to wield power with the potential to mold identities and shape values. The power to influence what “home” means is omnipresent and ever important, particularly along cultural, national, or regional fault lines where people partake in sociopolitical contestations that involve the rules, rights, and regulations guiding who is (and can be) what within the given social spaces they call home.

Regional Cultures & the Borders with(in) the United States

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3)

This project is about identifying borders and borderlands. It is intercultural, but perhaps, not in the sense that the term often invokes. In short, it is not about international boundaries, so much as it is about the imaginary walls constituted within nations, walls that embody material consequences for communities, walls that are contested, walls that mark the residues of dominant cultural pasts, walls that point to just how problematic the imaginary of the nation state can be. In his response to Chesebro’s noteworthy but somewhat naïve understanding of the nation state, Kent Ono (2013) argues that:

As constructs, nationstates necessarily have limited explanatory power, especially when attempting to represent the diversity of ideas, opinions, lifestyles, and behaviors of people. Not unlike the building of nationstates, the recurrent discursive representation of nationstates as
coherent entities and as stable and fixed formations often serves to reify notions of difference and commonality—rather than put them into question, as critical intercultural communication seeks to do—rendering nations a problematic standard for cultural comparison. (p. 88)

In order to understand whiteness as informed by the residues of heterogeneous cultural practices that embodied the regions of what is now the U.S. I put Colin Woodard’s maps to work. Woodard (2011), who also problematizes the taken-for-granted presuppositions evoked by the word nation, argues that North America as we know it today represents a joining of 11 dominate cultures cultivated during the colonizing of the New World. He suggests that the borders of U.S. and Mexico and the U.S. and Canada—culturally speaking—“are as arbitrary as those chosen by European colonial powers to divide up the African continent” (p. 4). By the same token, Woodard contends that the lines drawn between states within the U.S. arbitrarily “slash through cohesive cultures, creating massive cultural fissures in states like Maryland, Oregon, or New York, whose resident have often found that they have more in common with their neighbors in other states than they do with one another” (p. 4). Woodard’s notion is not all that shocking considering how culturally dissimilar El Paso, Texas is from Houston, or perhaps how different Tallahassee, Florida is from Miami. As an alternative Woodard maps 11 American cultural hearths based upon linguistic dialects, the spread of cultural artifacts, the prevalence of different religious denominations, and county-by-county voting breakdowns: Yankeedom, New Netherlands, the Midlands, Tidewater, Greater Appalachia, the Deep South, El Norte, the Left Coast, the Far West, New France, and First Nation (Woodard, 2013).
CHAPTER 3: K-12 SCHOOLS & RACE: DISCURSIVE SHIFTS & SEDIMENTED LAYERS

This chapter focuses on governmentality, on the role of governing K-12 education from afar. More specifically, it interrogates how federal government education programs “take hold and change things” (Li, 2007, p. 279) and how these changes are guided by racialized ideological scripts about biological and cultural differences. As anthropologist Tania Murray Li makes clear, “the effects of governmental interventions are both proximate and indirect, planned and unplanned” (p. 280). In the U.S., white dominance has paralleled Li’s thoughts on government intervention. It has unfolded both as planned and unplanned and been maintained both consciously and unconsciously. It has often been paired with the surveillance and discipline of nonwhite bodies within public spaces. Cultural geographer, Don Mitchell (2000) deduces that “like the idea of culture—and the practices that support that idea—the idea of race is powerful only insofar as it organizes particular people, classes, or social groups” (p. 232). Therefore, by analyzing governing as sets of discursive practices, it becomes possible to reveal how proponents of whiteness have constituted commonsense understandings about race and culture as well as how they have used these understandings as strategies to patrol the boundaries of public space.

Raymie McKeown (1989) suggests that part of a critic’s work is to “demystify” existing conditions of domination with the hope of creating emancipatory spaces for oppressed groups. This orientation is particularly useful in examining relationships between K-12 public education policies and efforts to rationalize white dominance and perpetuate inequalities among students in the nation’s secondary and elementary schools. Because of its multifarious quality, whiteness can operate as a standpoint, a structural advantage, a cultural practice, or as any combination of the three, as Frankenberg (2001) notes. Since whiteness operates as an unstable and fluid location of privileged social identity, it can be difficult to pin down. Still, public education provides a useful context for understanding whiteness. Specifically, K-12 education provides a context for exposing some of the
contradictory narratives and dubious taken-for-granteds that fuel whiteness. This chapter explores how whiteness—within the context of K-12 public education—has adapted over the past seven decades. It explores how whiteness has resonated as a source of hierarchical social ordering and how efforts to govern have influenced a perpetuation of this phenomenon.

If it is the case, as Johannesen (1978) suggests, that “rhetoric infuses values into our lives and is the cohesive force that molds persons into a community or culture” and that “human beings are motivated by some conception of what they should be, and a proper order of values” (p. 274), then the values expressed through acts of governance should expose relationships between race, education policy, and power. With Dana Cloud (1994), I argue that “the critic’s job is…the task of rhetorical construction—the temporary fixing and stabilizing of discourse to reveal its location in social space and relations of power” (p. 151). Committing to this task of rhetorical construction, I will, as McGee suggests, use fragments of discourse to assemble a text that allows me to critique whiteness as a “socially and culturally influential thing” (McGee, 1998, p. 84).

In light of this, the chapter explores an individual-communal dialectic as it relates to two prominent ideological stances on K-12 education policy. I must make note that the term individual is not meant to address particular people (i.e. individuals), but instead it is meant to emphasize a fundamental focus of interest. In terms of core assumptions about education, I suggest that there exist tensions between a market-driven ideological (i.e. individual) perspective and a communal ideological perspective. The former encourages the commodification and privatization of K-12 schooling as a means to maximize student achievement, while the latter understands K-12 schooling as a civil interest and civic responsibility.

In spotlighting relational aspects of communication, Yoshikawa (1987) encourages critics to use a dialectical perspective that “focuses not on the either/or type of polar experience but on the dynamic interplay of polar opposites… in the sphere of the ‘between’” (p. 328). Following this
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recognition, Martin and Nakayama (2013) suggest that critics make use of dialectics to help them avoid essentializing ideas and people as they encounter one another (p. 68). “A dialectical approach,” they note “emphasizes that cultures and cultural knowledge are always shaped in relationship to other cultures” (p. 75). This in mind, I attempt to situate two ideological perspectives about education policy as existing within an individual-communal dialectic. The dialectical tension increases as people negotiate whether individuals or communities are most responsible for the successful education of young people. In other words, this dialectic exposes the disagreements about educational responsibility that are salient in idioms that recommend “good ole fashion elbow grease” or that suggest that “it takes a village”. Through the establishment of this dialectic, it becomes possible to tease out complexities about education policy that purport to have both/and answers for how to harmonize this tension. A dialectic approach also creates possibilities for critics to reveal the value centers guiding those policy measures.

In light of this, analysis assembles a text from discursive fragments that involve past choices made by the federal government as it negotiated K-12 education policy in the wake of the civil rights movement and within a milieu of rapidly increasing consumerism. Through this newly constructed text, I observe attempts by the federal government to develop education policies within a political environment that oscillates between two ideological value centers: (1) a market-driven perspective based on competition and merit, and (2) a communal perspective that promotes diversity and social equity. As Stuart Hall (1991) notes, although people often believe an ideology produces truth, instead, what people do is formulate intentions within an ideology (p. 90). As ideologies, the market-driven and communal perspectives espouse value centers that require speakers to participate in the creation and recreation of a mythical past, an ambivalent present, and a perilous future.

When speakers participate in this way, they often tap into historico-cultural discourses about education policy, therefore, this chapter also explores a discursive shift in the U.S. government’s
position on education policy from the discourse of “opportunity” to a discourse of “standards and accountability” (Asen, 2015). By a discourse of opportunity, I mean governing that: (1) promotes domestic social welfare programs; (2) enacts policies directed at redressing past subjugation; (3) favors policy decisions that risk alienating large pockets of white constituents; and (4), supports the perspective that civil rights remain an ongoing struggle. This way of understanding governing is in tension with a discourse of standards and accountability, which is suspicious of social welfare programs as wasteful and operates under the assumption that the U.S. exists in a post-civil rights era. More specifically, by a discourse of standards and accountability, I mean governing that: (1) promotes standardized testing and competition for funds; (2) enacts policies directed at de facto privatization of the education marketplace; (3) favors policies that risk alienating large pockets of nonwhite constituents; and (4), supports the perspective that civil rights have (for the most part) been achieved and that maintaining an established equality is what matters.

As I highlight rhetorical shifts from opportunity to standards and accountability, I argue that each is underpinned by opposing narratives about the nature of equality in U.S. society. The discourse of opportunity operates out of a civil rights frame that aims to achieve expansive substantive equality—which is the idea that past oppression must be addressed in order to create conditions of equity (Asen, 2015; Castagno, 2014; Crenshaw, 1997). Conversely, the discourse of standards and accountability operates out of a post-civil rights frame that assumes equality, for the most part, has been achieved and now must be enforced and maintained (Asen, 2015; Castagno, 2014; Crenshaw, 1997). Since the frames operate from substantially different perspectives concerning the status of societal equity, they lack compatibility and, thus, they afford speakers opportunities to gain acceptance by revealing their attitudes toward certain forms of governing and symbols of authority. As Burke (1966) notes, frames of acceptance provide a way for people to gauge civil rights as a historical situation and adopt a role with relation to it (p. 5). These frames, then, “draw the lines of battle”: a
discourse of opportunity competes with a discourse of standards and accountability (p. 20). The by-
product of a person’s acceptance of one frame becomes their partial or full rejection of the other. As
Burke (1966) observes, such a rejection “takes its color from an attitude towards some reigning symbol
of authority, stressing a shift in the allegiance to [other] symbols of authority” (p. 22).

The shift from opportunity to standards and accountability is a shift that hinges on persuasive
appeals that are directed at negotiating both what racial equality means and perceptions about how
close the U.S. has come to achieving it. These acts of negotiation inform a realignment in federal
policy. This realignment has racial undertones in that it embodies a movement away from policy
measures directed toward substantive equality and toward policy measures that work to maintain and
enforce the boundaries of whiteness while disenfranchising other social identity locations marked by
race. The shift from a discourse of opportunity to a discourse of standards and accountability
Corresponds with the tension between communal and market driven value centers, where responsibility
becomes an idea that oscillates toward the individual and away from the community. This phenomenon
is constituted through the normalization of a laissez faire economic perspective, which gathered force
throughout the 1970s and emerged with particular clout during the Thatcher and Reagan led 1980s
(Asen, 2015). In the U.S., the interconnectedness among race, class, and gender has played a role in the
shifting discourses and ideological perspectives about education that have occurred over the past 70
years. In terms of race, notions of a post-civil rights, post-racial society—both sincere and insincere—
have worked as powerful persuasive support for the market driven ideological perspective and for the
discourse of standards and accountability (Ono, 2013; Hoerl, 2012; Bush, 2004; Omi & Winant, 2014;
Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This ideological shift is often embodied by the popularization of notions that civil
rights progress has resulted in a post-racial society that, as Kent Ono (2010) has argued, “disavows
history, overlaying it with an upbeat discourse about how things were never really that bad, are not so
bad now, and are only getting better” (Ono, p. 227). In this society, power relations are downplayed so
that getting picked on for having red hair is not much different than being nonwhite in a white dominated society.

The concluding section of this chapter focuses largely on the relationship between policymakers and a technocratic, or expert, project that is fixated on sorting students by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender. This technocratic project derives its rhetorical force principally from its visual rhetoric, or its ability to convert social phenomena into visual objects (Grey, 1999). One prominent example is the spatial metaphor we know as the “achievement gap” (Gutiérrez & Dixon-Roman, 2011). Gaps of the like constitute a polysemic form of visual data that can be used to support divergent policy prescriptions. On the one hand, education reformers can use achievement gaps as evidence that privatizing K-12 education promotes a free marketplace and improves schools by forcing them to compete, rather than to stagnate as state regulated monopolies. On the other hand, those who support public education can use achievement gaps as evidence that there is a need for more government intervention and more funding to help at-risk student populations and enhance K-12 education programs.

Whiteness, Education & the “Problem” of Brown Bodies in Public Space

We are often encouraged to think of the past as something that is behind us, as something that is distant, and therefore something that we are separate from. History unrolls in a straight line, it’s linear. Things that happened 50 years ago are separate from us. Things that happened 150 years ago are even further separate from us… Another way to look at this, is to think of history not as a line, and the past not as something that is left behind, but think of it more as the kind of sedimented layers that you see in a geological formation. So, there are layers that are deeper and less visible than others but you’re still standing on them. (Organization of American Historians, 2014)
Whiteness scholar Matthew Frye Jacobson’s (1999) words help forward his argument that in the United States we still communicate within a nation-state that was founded upon racialized and gendered notions of citizenship, which were rationalized by an elite class of white, Christian, male aristocrats who consolidated their power during the post-monarchical West of the eighteenth century. Mitchell (2000) observes that at the end of the eighteenth century the idea of race began to take on “its biological, physical connotations,” and be utilized “to make sense of both European history and expanding colonialism” (p. 236). In the U.S., Jacobson notes that “The nation’s first naturalization law in 1790 (limiting naturalized citizenship to ‘free white persons’) demonstrates the republican convergence of race and ‘fitness for self-government’, the law’s working denotes an unconflicted view of the presumed character and unambiguous boundaries of whiteness” (p. 7).

These boundaries of whiteness, however, would soon expand. As Zeus Leonardo (2009) notes, “white flexibility works in tandem with capital’s flexibility” (p. 182). Over the first two decades of the eighteenth century, a universal white male suffrage would emerge as the federal government removed property considerations from voting requirements. This ensured democratic rights for people identified as white males and promoted capitalism by extending access to the market to a new population based on race and gender (Duggan, 2012, p. 5). At this time in the U.S., people and their labor were also ascribed as properties. As Nakayama and Martin (1999) argue the “slave-race complex”—already part of American culture—was made official in a host of federal and state laws (p. 17). These legislative acts assisted in establishing the great paradox of U.S. history: the notion that ideals of freedom are historically rooted in the institution of slavery and that both are racialized (Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Morgan, 1975).

In teasing out connections between freedom, citizenship, and race, Cheryl Harris (1993) suggests that state constitutions as well as the U.S. Constitution constructed notions of whiteness as a property of empowerment (p. 1709). She argues that, as a type of property status, whiteness “forms the
basis of racialized privilege—a type of status in which white racial identity provides the basis for allocating societal benefits both private and public in character” (p. 1709). Starting with the 1790 naturalization act, American naturalization laws would continue to advance a racial component (i.e. “white persons”) as a requirement of citizenship until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which officially extended citizenship access to Japanese immigrants (Martinez, 2007, p. 2).

Terms such as naturalization shape knowledge through their negation and erasure of history. Conquerors become settlers and so on. In the U.S., “naturalization” symbolically transforms Northern America into a region where indigenous white people become the citizens responsible for patrolling public and private spaces that are at times occupied by nonwhite bodies. This requirement helps erase notions that many of those same nonwhite bodies (i.e. Mexicans and Native Americans) had previously owned the land. As Mitchell (2000) notes race only masquerades as nature, it is reified socially, as people enforce spatial boundaries (p. 258). “As a geographical project,” Mitchell argues, “the co-production of race and space is never uncontested, and thus the spatiality of race often needs ordering and policing. Such policing manifests itself in all manner of quite ordinary—and sometimes extraordinary—ways” (p. 231).

The one-drop rule provides a strong example of the “sometimes extraordinary ways” to which Mitchell refers. The rule—encouraged by formalized tests of racial ancestry—was directed at reducing the dissonance associated with racial ambiguity. More importantly, the one-drop rule helped legitimate anti-miscegenation laws that emerged out of fear that the purity of the white race would be threatened by nonwhite bodies who might manipulate or coerce white women into sexual relationships. David Levernz (2012) explains that the one-drop rule is a uniquely American invention through which white people defined “white” as the opposite of black or brown by labeling all mixed-race (or suspected mixed-race) descendants as nonwhite. The one-drop rule, Levernz argues, was “a scapegoating that unified white people locally, regionally, and nationally” (p. 21). Interracial sexual unions were deemed
an “unnatural” perversion by many elite white men who viewed nonwhites as “less than human” (Feagin, 2011, p. 73). Ironically, more than a few of these same men often had interracial affairs, and/or raped and victimized nonwhite women regularly (Levernz, 2012, p. 43). As Feagin notes, the concern over “blood purity” underpinned efforts toward segregation and “was a major force lying behind the commonplace laws banning interracial marriages” throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 73). Elaborating on this point, Levernz suggests that miscegenation laws provided a subtext for patterns of residential segregation since many white people were more concerned with monitoring property values than they were the sexual transgressions of their neighbors (p.44). As Peggy Pascoe notes, miscegenation law, like immigration law and railroad segregation law, was a key building block of the racial infrastructure of today’s administrative state” (p. 10).

The intersection of these three laws form an important crossroad that defined governing and the nature of K-12 public education policy in the U.S. for nearly 60 years and continues to influence it today. In 1896, the Court heard landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a case that involved an interracial male who attempted to ride in a white train car, which was a clear violation of a Louisiana statute forbidding non-whites to ride in white cars. The case reinforced the one-drop rule—even as Plessy’s attorneys argued that Plessy could pass as “white”—and the Court’s ruling established a “separate but equal” standard that endorsed racial segregation throughout society (Haney-López, 2014, p. 80). The term colorblind also emerged from the lone dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson* when Justice John Marshall Harlan declared that “Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens” (Harlan as cited in Haney-López, p. 80). Ian Haney-López argues against understanding Harlan’s dissent as quixotic. Instead, Haney-López contends that Harlan, who favored laws against interracial marriage, perceived a world in which racial hierarchy was already fixed.

Harlan, Haney-López (2014) notes, “interpreted the Constitution to *allow society to mark boundaries* around those naturally relegated to the bottom… [Yet still] Harlan opposed the segregated
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train cars at issue in *Plessy* because he felt they unfairly limited the capacity of blacks to participate in civil life and the marketplace” (Haney-López, p. 80, emphasis mine). This analysis of Harlan’s notion of “colorblind” provides a window into the type of contradictory discourses that work to maintain whiteness even when at first glance they seem aimed at progressing beyond it. In this case, Harlan understands nonwhites as culturally deficient, inferior by nature, and as populations that should keep to their own. However, he objects to extreme exclusions of nonwhites and encourages equity in their ability to access the marketplace (p. 80). Harlan’s expression of a colorblind Constitution reveals a motive similar to that existent in today’s notions of restrictive formal equality. Each deemphasizes the structural inequalities that are historically built into our free market systems even as it attempts to secure and sanction equality. Notions of a race-blind society are not meant to overthrow white dominance but are instead part of a rhetorics of race that serve to make whiteness an unseen societal phenomenon (Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Lacy & Ono, 2011).

*Contestations of “Separate and Equal” K-12 Public Schools*

During the 1930s as FDR’s New Deal policies offered white people opportunities to participate in social welfare programs designed to jump start and restabilize the economy even as nonwhites tended to be denied full access to these programs (Katznelson, 2005). Ira Katznelson (2005) observes that “under the misleading rubric of ‘separate but equal,’ one in seven public libraries in the South served blacks. Even some roads were segregated. Most black neighborhoods lacked paving and lighting” (p. 36). The segregated schools that developed in the wake of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision were also anything but equal, and this inequality went well beyond a black/white dichotomy. Most nonwhite schools were crude buildings that lacked proper lighting equipment, were unsanitary, and were taught by poorly trained low-wage teachers (p. 35). Nonwhite parents began to push back against separate but equal actions. Some of these efforts were successful in changing legislation.
For instance, in California in 1930, Lemon Grove Grammar School decided to build a new building to house its 75 Mexican students in order to appease white parents who did not want their children’s studies impeded by inferior nonwhite students. Alvarez (1986) explains that:

On January 5, 1931 the principal of the Lemon Grove Grammar School, Jerome T. Greene, stood at the door of the school and directed the incoming Mexican students to go to the new school building, a wooden structure that came to be called “La Caballeriza” (the barn). Instead the students returned home and thereafter their parents refused to send their children to the separate school. This became known in the press as the “Mexican student strike,” but in reality it was their parents who, with the support of the Mexican consul in San Diego, decided to oppose segregation of their children. They formed a group called La Comite de Vecinos de Lemon Grove. (p. 116)

The Mexican parents sued. During the court proceedings, San Diego’s district attorney argued that white students would benefit from not having contact with Mexican students because most of the Mexican students performed poorly in school (p. 124). After hearing the case, however, Judge Claude Chambers saw no valid reason to segregate the Mexican children and actually noted that segregation would likely hinder their ability to learn English language and customs (Alvarez, 1986). Ruling against the Lemon Grove school board, Chambers ordered the children be reinstated to their regular school. Chambers indicated that school could not “separate all the Mexicans in one group” (Madrid, 2008, p. 17). “While it was a victory for Mexicano students,” Alvarez notes, “the Judge had held that their segregation violated state law, which allowed for the segregation of African and Indian children. Thus, the logic underlying the verdict did not challenge racial segregation, and it would remain for later court cases to outlaw that kind of injustice” (p. 122). Still, the Lemon Grove case is considered by many to be the first successful desegregation court case (p. 127).
As a discursive fragment, the Lemon Grove incident sheds light on several important and recurring narratives and practices that continue to inform present day deliberations about K-12 education. First, the school board strategy to discourage the integration of brown bodies involved policing the social space, demarcating its boundaries in support of whiteness, and in this case creating a new inferior physical space where brown people could be monitored and simultaneously forgotten. In response, the Mexican parents and students employed absence as a tactic, a way to communicate the presence of oppression, and they organized to challenge their racialized place within the established hierarchy.

The ruling in the Lemon Grove case also exemplifies what Ali Behdad (2005) calls “the complex dynamics of forgetting in nation building” (p. xiii). Similarly, Lee and Wander (1998) use the term discursive amnesia, or “specific acts of collective forgetting that perpetuate privilege and interest in a particular economic and political context” (p. 152). The ruling in the Lemon Grove case dismisses the illogical notion that presumed Mexican inferiority could somehow rub off on white children. At the same time, the decision also highlights the equally illogical conclusion that since there are no laws against Mexican students attending white schools, it should not have been a problem to allow them into white classrooms; whereas, black and Indian students would pose a problem. In this case, since local, state, and, federal courts are subservient to the rulings of the Supreme Court, the sense of order created through the “rule of law” is kept intact even when it seems obviously irrational and antithetical to the ruling at hand. Acceptance of the Lemon Grove ruling, then, requires what Fredrich Nietzsche (2000) calls “active forgetting,” in that it ignores a paradox involved in the dehumanizing and policing of brown bodies (p. 7). There are vast inconsistencies in how locales demarcate the spaces available to nonwhites; still, legislators and judicial administrators depend on notions of legal consistency to govern and evaluate the existence of nonwhites in public spaces.
This paradox demonstrates the limits of judiciary power as well as how it works to reinforce inequalities established by the legislative and executive branches. In this way, the *Lemon Grove* case reveals “how the apparatuses of knowledge production and the rationalities of rule are implicated in the processes of governing individuals and collectivities” and how “political rationalities aim to render reality intelligible, and, thereby, amenable to government” (Rose-Redwood, 2006, p. 474). Such forms of governing do not merely involve a set of motives relegated to a bygone era, but instead the rationalities that underpin them (re)produce discursive residues. Modern examples of this paradox connect to more recent legislative actions such as the stop-and-frisk programs implemented throughout New York City during the first decade of the twenty-first century. In these programs, brown bodies were similarly the prime suspects in the alleged degradation of white spaces and thus it was necessary for law enforcement to patrol them and keep them separate. These actions reinforce attitudes about the unequal statuses of the rights afforded to nonwhite people under what is presupposed as an unbiased “rule of law”.

*Fear & the Legality of State Imposed Racialized Borders*

As the 1930s and 40s unfolded, nonwhites would continue to be largely excluded from New Deal social welfare programs. To remain in power, President Franklin Roosevelt believed he needed the support of a block of Southern democratic congressmen known as “the Dixiecrats”, who favored segregation and anti-miscegenation laws and railed against attempts at anti-lynching legislation and any other programs designed for the specific benefit of nonwhite populations (Katznelson, 2005). The problem of the 1930s New Deal Era, Rivera (2006) notes, was that even as it produced documentaries and new government programs directed at coordinating attitudes of trust in the federal government and at creating a sense of agency for white people, leaders of the era “did not address the political and economic realities that racial minorities dealt with” (p. 162).
Instead, across the U.S. indigenous people remained in Indian-only “civilizing schools” where they were expected to learn and assimilate to Euro-American customs (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). In California, Asian Americans were patrolled in much the same way as other nonwhites. They were restricted to segregated neighborhoods, often denied citizenship, and were in fact the targets of federal exclusionary acts throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Journalist Jeff Guo (2016) notes that “In 1937, a young U.S.—born Japanese man lamented that even if you went to college, you could only end up being a ‘professional carrot-washer’” (para. 36). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Pascoe (2009) observes that “The naming of Asian Americans in miscegenation laws took place remarkably rapidly, and with little or no debate, in large part because it expressed successive waves of fear that Chinese, Japanese, and finally Filipino men might marry White women” (p. 10). In the western regions of the U.S., Asian Americans were consistently blamed for labor shortages and “all the way through the 1940s and 1950s, Asians were thought of as brown hordes or as the yellow peril” (Wu, 2014).

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. entered the Second World War. Within two months, patrolling the public and private spaces available to the “brown horde” (i.e. Asian Americans) went beyond local-level intimidation and exclusionary actions and became part of federal law and was carried out by federal agents. Japanese Americans were rounded up and placed in “internment” camps such as the Manzanar War Relocation Center (which processed 11,000 Japanese Americans) and Tule Lake Segregation Center (which processed 18,700 Japanese Americans) in central and northern California, respectively (National Park Service, 2016). Under FDR’s Executive Order 9066, which granted the U.S. military the power to ban all Japanese people “from a designated coastal area stretching from Washington State to southern Arizona” and imprison them until the duration of the war (Konkoly, 2006). In 1942, Governor Earl Warren called “the presence of the Japanese in California ‘the Achilles’ heel of the entire civilian defense effort’” (White, 1979, n.pag).
Warren argued that “when dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test [their]
loyalty,’ but ‘when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field’ because of ‘their
method of living’” (White, 1979, n.pag). Joyce Nakaymura Okazaki was 7 years old when her family
was forced to surrender their property and taken to Manzanar where Okazaki would spend two years
(Goyette, 2014). In describing her experiences attending school at Manzanar, Okazaki said:

The interesting thing about school, one of the first things we learned was to be very aware of
the barbed wire fencing. We couldn’t go near the barbed wire fence because we were told we
would be shot if we even went close to it. There were guard towers all around and they were all
manned by sentries. We were also told to be on the lookout for snakes and scorpions. I had no
idea what a scorpion looked like… (Goyette, 2014, para. 10)

For Okazaki and her family, borders were reified through coercive performances of governmental
authority, which proved that Japanese rights to citizenship were largely symbolic. Fear and stereotypes
such as the “shifty, slant-eyed” Asian combined with heightened wartime notions of patriotism, and
they provided a context for rhetorical actions that were directed at consolidating the national identity as
white. This action, however, did not go uncontested. Several Japanese Americans challenged their
banishments.

Fred Korematsu, an American-born citizen of Japanese heritage, refused to leave his home in
San Leandro, California following the ban. Like many others, he was convicted, but Korematsu
appealed his conviction and his case made it to the Court (Konkoly, 2006). In a 6-3 vote, Korematsu’s
sentence was upheld. Justice Hugo Black wrote the opinion and suggested that any imprisonment of
Japanese Americans on the West Coast was not racial antagonism but of “pressing public necessity” to
ensure the safety of all Americans (Konkoly, 2006). In a dissenting opinion, Justice Robert Jackson
argued that Korematsu had not committed a crime and that the only connection he had to the war was
living in a particular place where he was born (Konkoly, 2006). Jackson attempted to peel away the contradictions upon which Black’s opinion rested, and stated:

once a judicial opinion rationalizes such an order to show that it conforms to the Constitution, or rather rationalizes the Constitution to show that the Constitution sanctions such an order, the Court for all of time has validated the principle of racial discrimination… The principle then lies about like a loaded weapon ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of urgent need. (Konkoly, 2006)

The Korematsu case marks the only time that the state “legally” passed the “test of strict scrutiny in its use of a racial classification” as the primary consideration for organizing a community (Crenshaw, 1998, p. 250). The case also drew noteworthy attention to notions of a possible miscarriage of justice related to the equal protections clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which makes clear that any persons born or naturalized in the United States are citizens and thus ensured the rights to due process and equal protection of the law (Bell, 2004, p. 11).

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, Asian Americans would have limited options for social mobility. In addition, as prisoners of wartime internment camps, Japanese Americans lost land, homes, and businesses before they re-entered society and found themselves struggling to survive economically. Behdad (2005), among others, argues that we tend to forget cases like Korematsu because they work to obscure the myth of America as an asylum, as a place of welcoming. Again, it becomes important to avoid such disavowals of our collective past, and fool ourselves into believing that we have moved into a post-racial society; otherwise, we risk calling past decisions like that of Hugo Black’s into the present. For instance, in November of 2016, Carl Higbie, a spokesman for Great America PAC for Donald Trump, told Megan Kelly of Fox News that the Japanese internment camps of World War II were a precedent for Trump’s proposed Muslim registry. Kelly quickly responded: “You know better than to suggest that... You can’t be citing Japanese internment for anything the
President-elect is going to do” (Abadi, 2017). Higbie’s comments provide rhetorical force for Jacobson’s notion that we stand atop layers of a past still existent in the present.

Around the time Japanese Americans were contesting their imprisonment in war time camps, another major school desegregation case was unfolding in Orange County, California. During the 1940s, Alvarez (2016) argues, Orange County officials perpetuated a José Crow that mirrored the Jim Crow South. The county, Alvarez notes, had “separate public schools, movie theatres, public swimming pools and restaurants for Anglos (white Americans) and Mexicans. Here, as throughout the South, people of color, Mexican Americans were subjected to strict Jim Crow laws” (p. 351).

In 1944, 8-year-old Sylvia Mendez and her brothers were denied entrance into a “white school” in their community because they were of Mexican descent. Her parents, Felecítas and Gonzalo Mendez, sued Orange County schools claiming that the county’s refusal to enroll their children violated their rights to the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The subsequent federal court case, *Mendez v. Westminster*, helped set the stage for *Brown v. Board of Education* (Alvarez, 2016, p. 351). For instance, Thurgood Marshall filed the NAACP amicus brief that cited the violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. In addition, it was Earl Warren, then Governor of California and later Chief Justice presiding over the Brown case, who signed the legislation prohibiting segregation in California after Mendez won the suit in 1947 (Alvarez, 2016).

The *Mendez* case offers an example of how the tension between the First (the right to free speech) and Fourteenth (the right of equal protection) amendments creates space for differing interpretations of “freedom” and “protection”, and it reveals McGee’s notion of ideographs as slogans that demonstrate ambiguous worldviews (McGee, 1980). In this instance, the school was interested in maintaining white dominance. In doing so, it interpreted the term “freedom” to mean the ability to exclude whomever it deemed deplorable and the term “protection” as the right to be shielded from interaction with marginalized others. The *Mendez* case challenges this logic and instead asks the courts
to identify freedom as the ability to participate, and it interprets the term protection as a safeguard from exclusionary acts.

Again, such arguments are not divorced from the present. On the contrary, they are part of recurring discourses that reveal attempts to patrol public spaces. In 2015, for instance, Mike Pence, then governor of Indiana, proposed a “religious freedom” law, which allowed businesses to discriminate against people who identified as LGBTQ. After a week of protest, Pence pushed through a reworded version of the law, arguing that it did not allow discrimination against anyone, but instead promoted the protection of business owner’s and their freedom to decide the people they provided their services to (Bradner, 2015).

_Eisenhower and Brown v. Board_

In March of 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower created the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), which marked the first federal department dedicated to education since a short-lived attempt at a Department of Education flopped during the mid-nineteenth century. The HEW, however, would remain a federal department until 1979. Eisenhower’s presidency would coincide with an escalating Cold War. In fact, 1953 was the same year the Korean War ended and the 38th parallel was established as an official boundary between North and South Korea. Also, McCarthyism was in full swing at the time influencing and coercing Americans across the nation to seek out and report suspected communists and their sympathizers.

As Mitchell (2000) suggests, “the particular ways that humans have been classified have been free to vary with the changing political and social winds” (p. 234). Post-World War II America embodies Mitchell’s claim. As the U.S. moved into a Cold War with the Soviet Union in the 1940s that intensified throughout the 1950s, a context was created that influenced several major changes in the governing of public schools as well as in the governing of nonwhite bodies within public spaces. With technological advancements, like television, providing for a more globalized world, federal officials
became increasingly concerned about global perceptions of the U.S. This reaction is affirmed by DeLuca and Peeples (2002) in their notion of the public screen, a term that describes how a “current of images” produced by new technologies can “introduce new forms of social organization and new modes of perception,” and thereby influence discussions within the public sphere (p. 131).

For instance, Haney-López (2014) observes: “federal government took note that enemy propagandists were contesting the global public relations battle [between communism and democracy] by publicizing Southern horrors, whereupon the government finally exerted itself in earnest to end the renewed enslavement of African Americans” (p. 41). Derrick Bell (2004) argues that Cold War concerns, thus, became civil rights concerns (p. 60). Bell cites anxieties about how the U.S. was being perceived globally as a state even more oppressive than the Soviet Union as an important factor influencing the Court’s decision to rule in favor of integrating public schools (p. 60). Dudziak (2011) provides evidence of these claims and notes that, in Eisenhower’s memoirs, he recalled the significant problem of Soviet propagandists, who were “by word and picture… telling the world of the ‘racial terror’ in the United States” (Dudziak, 2011, pp. 130-131).

On May 14, 1954, more than a century of legal precedent was undone with the landmark ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, which disqualified the idea of “separate but equal” educational facilities and held segregation on the basis of race as unlawful. Read (1975) notes that “the Court cited the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment as prohibiting state-imposed segregation of the races in public schools, concluding that ‘in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal’” (Read, 1975, p. 8). The Court found that separate but unequal “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone” (Read, 1975, p. 8). The Court’s unanimous opinion drew heavily from technocratic knowledge. In this instance, testimonies by social scientists, provided powerful persuasive appeals in favor of the plaintiff.
Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark presented evidence from an experiment that required white and nonwhite children to choose between a white doll with yellow hair and a brown doll with black hair. When asked which doll was nicer and which doll had a nicer color, children showed a clear preference for the white doll (Dweck, 2009, p. 371). The Clarks testified that racial segregation created a social situation that impeded upon the development of nonwhite children (Clark, 1953, p. 9). The Brown decision, Clark (1953) argues, established a precedent for admitting social science testimony in cases involving civil rights (p. 9). It also strengthened social science findings as a rhetorical force in shaping social change.

Publicly, Eisenhower was relatively silent about the Brown ruling, telling press only that it was his administration’s duty to ensure the law of the land was followed. When asked what advice he might give Southern legislators on implementing desegregation, Eisenhower said he had none (Dudziak, 2011). Eisenhower understood the ruling as an opportunity to put a kinder face on democracy and allow consumerism to proliferate. In private, however, Eisenhower’s personal exchanges show that he danced a tight rope in attempting to appease multiple audiences concerning the Brown ruling. In correspondences with Southern congressmen upset by the possibility of desegregation, Eisenhower expresses empathy and hints that the change will be slow. He goes as far as to offer them potential strategies for making that change happen even more gradually. On the other hand, in correspondences with military and Court leaders, Eisenhower celebrates the important global image that the Brown ruling puts forth (Dudziak, 2011; Bell, 2004). On some level, his actions were just as contradictory. As president, Eisenhower sanctioned Operation Wetback, the mass deportation of Mexican migrant workers, and he also sent federal troops to force Governor Orval Faubus to integrate Arkansas’s public schools.

Eisenhower’s contradictory stances parallel the sort of logics that work to maintain whiteness as a presence of power familiar yet ever-evolving to suit the needs of a given circumstance. For
instance, following the *Brown* decision, Eisenhower invited Chief Justice Warren to dinner. Warren later wrote that Eisenhower took him by the arm, “as we walked along, speaking of the Southern states in the segregation cases, he said, ‘These are not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little girls are not required to sit alongside some big overgrown Negroes.’” (Dudziak, 2011, p. 130). Just the thought of the *Brown* ruling “crystallized southern resistance to racial change” and governors sent letters petitioning Eisenhower even before the ruling was made (Bell, 2011, p. 134). For instance, in a personal letter written in 1953 to Jimmy Byrnes, governor of South Carolina, President Eisenhower addressed the impending *Brown v. Board* ruling. In the letter, Eisenhower makes clear that his office and duty require him to support federal non-discrimination clauses. After Eisenhower establishes that his hands are tied by his role as head of the executive branch, Eisenhower encourages Byrnes and other governors to challenge any federal mandates that they believe are unfair. Eisenhower wrote: “I do not believe that States should cooperate in, and never impede, the enforcement of Federal regulations where the Federal Government has clear and exclusive responsibility in this case” (DDE, 1953, Aug. 14). Eisenhower goes on to provide Byrnes with an example of how states such as South Carolina might slow desegregation by relinquishing all responsibility for its planning and implementation to the federal government. In November 1953, Byrnes would respond to Eisenhower in a letter that laid out his plans to challenge the Court’s interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment and also insist it had overstepped its power by attempting to enact legislation rather than interpret law. In the letter’s closing sentence, Byrnes tells Eisenhower: “This position… would certainly be in accord with the position you have consistently taken, that the states should have the right to control matters that are purely local” (Byrnes, 1953, Nov. 20).

Throughout history, local control, which I elaborate on in Chapters Four and Five, has been a concept used—in matters of K-12 education policy—both to motivate identification and to stoke contention. These points of identification and contention rely on the attitudes people hold about the
protection of their rights. Since most people favor protecting their rights, speakers can adapt notions of local control to coordinate audiences in ways that support disparate understandings of the proper power relations between federal, state, and local government. For instance, on one hand, when scholars like Paulo Freire (1999) use the term local control, they invite community members to participate in their children’s education and the development of school curricula (pp. 95-96). This invitation transforms “local control” into a catch-all phrase that valorizes inclusion as a means to protect community members against the state and its enforcement of cookie cutter programs, which often work to disenfranchise people. On the other hand, local control has also been used by speakers who wish to promote exclusions based on race. In these cases, as with those that promote inclusion, local control highlights the protection of individual rights. What differs, however, is that speakers, who seek exclusion, use local control to shape a reality within which a forced inclusion of undesirables has worked to disenfranchise the community as a whole. For instance, in a 1959 speech on integration, Virginia governor J. Linsay Almond said:

To those in high places and elsewhere who advocate integration for your children and send their own to private or public segregated schools. To those who defend or close their eyes to the livid stench of Satanism, sex, immorality, and juvenile pregnancy infesting the mixed schools of the District of Columbia and elsewhere. To those who would overthrow the custom, mores, and traditions of a way of life which has endured in honor and decency for centuries and embraced a new moral code… To those who would destroy our way of life because of their pretended concerns over what Soviet Russia may think of us. To all of these and their competitors, comrades, and allies let me make it abundantly clear for the record now and here after as governor of this state; I will not yield to that which I know will be wrong and will destroy every rational semblance of public education for thousands of the children of Virginia.
I call upon the people of Virginia to stand firmly with me in this struggle… (J. Linsay Almond  
School Integration Speech, 1959)

In Almond’s speech, he first invites audiences to understand integration as a power grab by faraway government officials, who hold no stake in the good of the community and who apply their integration ruling hypocritically, since they “send their own children to private or segregated schools.” Almond then appeals to existing fears of miscegenation, when he refers to race-mixing as evil, calling it “the livid stench of Satanism.” This appeal creates possibilities for audiences to identify the tradition of segregation with practices of honor and morality. Almond, next, encourages listeners to view the federal government’s scapegoating of Russia as a means to deflect from its own offenses, which are directed at extending its reach into local communities. Finally, Almond calls his audiences to act in favor of segregation (i.e. exclusion) an action that he has attempted to transform into a way of protecting rights and freedom.

Today, notions of local control continue to be employed as a strategy for excluding nonwhites in public spaces and for expanding or marking the boundaries of whiteness. The term operates as a disciplinary tool. Discipline, Foucault notes, is a technology directed at “how to keep people under surveillance, how to control their conduct, their behavior, their aptitudes, how to improve their performances, multiply their capacities, and how to put them where they will be most useful” (Foucault as cited in O’Farrell, 2005, p. 102). Local control, then, as Foucault suggests, expresses a location of freedom from which one can exercise power (O’Farrell, p. 100). In persuasive efforts like that of J. Linsay Almond, this power, in turn, communicates a desire to normalize racialized ideas about where and how individuals fit within a society. Speakers, who identify with these ideas, can transform calls for “local control” into a game of truth that works to shape attitudes about nonwhites (particularly Latinx and black families) as culturally deficient. This rhetorical action reveals efforts to maintain whiteness as a status quo (O’Farrell, pp. 65-67).
It is important to, again, note that the production of brown bodies as culturally deficient is not a knowledge that has somehow been circumscribed to a bygone era as we have moved toward a post-racial utopia (Ono, 2013). Instead, brownness and cultural deficiency remain interwoven characteristics in common sense narratives about differences between student achievements. This connection, thus, remains a game of truth, and its residues continue to inform public consciousness and public debate about education. Take, for instance, the current school “breakaway movement” within which community members across the nation are attempting to secede from their school district in hope of forming smaller school districts, which also happen to include whiter and more affluent student populations.

For example, in Gardendale, Alabama in 2017, a federal judge ruled in favor of Gardendale City Schools’ proposed breakaway from Jefferson County school district. Gardendale is a white-majority city that exists within a minority-majority county. In the case, Stout v. Gardendale Board of Education, although Gardendale claimed that local control motivated its decision to break away from the county, Stout’s attorneys argued that the breakaway was racially motivated and therefore violated established principles of desegregation. Gardendale, however, countered that desegregation measures were meant to be temporary and busing students from beyond city limits was an unfair burden. Judge Madeline Haikala found that Gardendale’s effort to secede from the county was indeed motivated by race and that “Gardendale’s message to black students that they are unwanted has been ‘unmistakable’ and ‘intolerable’” (Brown, 2017). However, Haikala said she ruled that Gardendale could move forward with its breakaway, “basing her decision in part on sympathy for some parents who want local control over schools and in part on concern for black students caught in the middle… she feared they would bear the blame if she blocked the city’s bid” (Brown, 2017, emphasis mine).

The ruling in Gardendale provides yet another example of what Flores and Moon (2002) call the paradox of race. This paradox suggests that, “our continued reliance on racial categories may
perpetuate the centrality of racial reasoning in social, political, and legal thought;” however, Moon and Flores add, “if we abandon all use of racial categories, we ignore the very real and often necessary rules these categories continue to play in our lives” (p. 186). Haikala’s ruling in *Gardendale* acknowledges the racial implications and potential material consequences of the breakaway, but within a legal environment in which a number of rulings have assumed a post-civil rights era and pushed back against many considerations based on race, Haikala is unable to stop the breakaway. This case reflects the true danger of a society that believes itself post-racial even as it uses race as a constant standard of comparison in schools, neighborhoods, income levels, and student achievement among many other things.

The contradictions, confusion, and fear that surround discussions of race inform part of its symbolic allure as a means of oppressing others, of rationalizing their surveillance, and in some cases of normalizing their discipline within public spaces. Like pushing down on a balloon filled with water, racial oppression squashed in one social space often rises in another.

*Eisenhower and Operation Wetback*

As Dixiecrats ratcheted up legal attacks on the *Brown* ruling, Eisenhower implemented Operation Wetback, in June of 1954. Just over one month after *Brown*, the federal government was patrolling and disciplining brown bodies in public spaces at a feverish clip. As DeChaine (2012) notes: “It is important to remember that since borders are human symbolic constructs, the power that they hold, or wield, does not issue from borders per se, but rather from specific persons who call upon the figure of the border in specific ways in order to do specific things” (pp. 1-2). In this case, the U.S./Mexico border worked to mediate anxieties that the federal government was somehow relinquishing the white dominance that had underpinned it for nearly 200 years. Instead, the border came to represent a place where the U.S. could dictate “law and order” over unruly brown bodies, who in theory were impeding upon consumerism and the American labor market. Operation Wetback was a
legal way to reinforce segregationist views. For instance, one Texas politician, who advocated segregation, justified his views, stating that:

Although there is no discrimination in the Valley, of course there is segregation in a few things, but that is for hygienic, not racial reasons. Spanish-speaking people live in their own part of town and have their own businesses. They prefer it that way. They are excluded from swimming pools and barber shops. The exclusion from pools is because it is not possible to tell the clean ones from the dirty, so we just keep them all out. We just can’t have all those dirty, possibly diseased people swimming with our wives and children. (Saunders & Leonard, 1976, p. 67)

From this perspective, miscegenation again provides a subtext for segregationist views and for the promotion of using legislative actions to remove brown bodies from public spaces. Operation Wetback began on June 17, 1954 in California and Arizona when more than 750 Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS) agents swept northward through agricultural areas, arresting more than 50,000 undocumented immigrants by July and forcing another 488,000 to flee the country to avoid arrest (Dillin, 2006). In context, the operation reflects the contradictory nature of whiteness. It came during the second Red Scare, and while most foreign “communists” actually were entering from the Canadian border, the federal government, instead, seized the rhetorical power of xenophobia embodied by the brown bodies of its southern border (Astor, 2009, p. 11). Astor’s (2009) work uses newspapers, newsreels, and other media distributed throughout the 1950s to show how the U.S. government encouraged citizens to make connections between communism and “illegal aliens”. This propaganda also obscured the INS’s own hand in encouraging undocumented Mexicans to enter the country during World War II when an agricultural labor shortage threatened the viability of the food production system. Astor notes that “the INS would ‘deport’ undocumented immigrants by taking them to the border. However, upon reaching the border, INS agents would give them identification slips that
enabled them to return and be legally contracted as soon as they stepped across the border” (p. 13). Yet
with a U.S. return to economic prosperity during the 1950s, Eisenhower targeted this corruption of
“law and order” in part because he surmised that it slowed consumerism in that Mexican laborers often
sent money home to their families. It also did not hurt that border patrol played well with Dixiecrats
who had been alienated by the Brown decision. Thus, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans,
“were constructed as criminals and potentially subversive threats to American society” (p. 11).

As Operation Wetback continued, the news media began to report on its brutal nature and to
cite heat stroke deaths as among the dehumanizing effects of the operation (Astor, 2009). Armed INS
agents used buses and trains to escort undocumented people hundreds of miles into Mexico. Tens of
thousands more were put aboard ships that ferried them from Port Isabel, Texas to Vera Cruz, Mexico
more than 500 miles away (Dillin, 2006). Operation Wetback helped reaffirm Latinx children and
Latinx culture as suspicions and inferior. Again, U.S. political discourse stands on this same ground.
For instance, during a Republican primary debate in Milwaukee, presidential candidate Donald Trump
proposed that the U.S. take similar actions against undocumented workers as those taken during
Operation Wetback, remarking:

Let me just tell you that Dwight Eisenhower, good president, great president, people liked him,
“I like Ike,”’ right? The expression. “I like Ike.” Moved 1.5 million illegal immigrants out of
this country, moved them just beyond the border. They came back. Moved them again beyond
the border, they came back. Didn’t like it. Moved them way south. They never came back.
(Wang, 2015)

Trump’s speech—set at appealing to the white working class—shows how whiteness loses its
invisibility during times of social or economic uncertainty (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). In this
instance, patrolling brown bodies becomes a point of identification for working class whites, who have
been economically disempowered within a globalized economy that no longer supports manufacturing
jobs. Rather than understanding wealth redistribution as a class issue, Trump’s appeals provide a more tangible enemy, who exists as an Other beyond the limits of a symbolic and racialized border as much as a legal one. The notion of another Operation Wetback—which originally worked to appease Southern Dixiecrats miffed by the Brown decision—also works to embolden white nationalists, who understand Obama’s election as a scourge, as an inappropriate penetration of the boundaries of whiteness.

Cold War & the Rise of the Model Minority

As Latinx culture was being attacked, government officials—attempting to improve the nation’s global image—moved away from promoting notions of an Asian “brown horde” or “yellow peril” and toward attempts to win the hearts and minds of leaders in China and Japan. Exclusionary Acts were overturned and by the mid-1950s, Asians were recast as citizens capable of assimilating into the U.S. “By the 1960s,” Ellen Wu (2014) notes, “what becomes important is that these socially mobile, assimilating, politically nonthreatening people were also decidedly not black” (Wu as cited in Guo, 2016). Newspapers that once included racial epitaphs directed at Asians began to “glorify Asian Americans as industrious, law-abiding citizens who kept their heads down and never complained” (Guo, 2016). This shift makes clear Nakayama’s (1997) argument that “In the case of Asian Americans, U.S. society has continually utilized them for shifting social needs” (p. 238). “At the heart of the model-minority myth,” Asian American studies scholar Victor Bascara (2006) argues, “is the notion that American culture can adapt to absorb persons and populations” (p. 1). He suggests the myth endorses the idea that “the present has reckoned with uncomfortable pasts and is doing right by the wronged by incorporating them, or, more precisely, by allowing a putatively color-blind and gender-neutral market to sort things out” (p. 2).

Where it concerns the myth of the model minority, access to the market is granted or denied through a colorblind rhetoric that induces opposing symbolic representations (Crenshaw, 1998). For
instance, notions that Asians have transcended race also assist in creating notions that black people and their “ghetto culture” cannot transcend their culturally rooted inferiorities. As Wu (2014) observes, “the model minority is a wonderfully telling example demonstrating that racial categories are never static or omnipresent, that they change over time and vary across space, and that they pivot on the contemporaneous making and remaking of other racial categories” (p. 8).

Wu also argues that Asian Americans capitalized on the changes they saw in government policy and media representation. In Chinatowns, community leaders did so, Wu notes, by peddling stories about Chinese traditional family values and Confucian ethics, and these community leaders also acknowledged growing fear of juvenile delinquency by claiming that, “Chinese children always listened to their elders, were unquestionably obedient and never got in trouble because after school they would just go to Chinese school” (Wu as cited in Guo, 2016). Today, the model minority promotes images of tiger moms and overachieving students rather than patriotism and loyalty. Over time, the social construction of the model minority has shown how whiteness can co-opt successful attempts to challenge its power by pitting one racial category against another in much the same way that Roediger (1999) describes historical divides within the working class.

Kennedy & the Emergence of the Discourse of Opportunity

Federal education policy also was a proxy for race politics (Kosar, 2015)

Historian Mark Stern (1989) suggests that “there is scant little evidence that during his pursuit of the presidency, [John] Kennedy treated civil rights as anything other than a problem of vote-optimization” (p. 816). From this perspective, Kennedy’s speeches tended to convey more passion for social equity than did his actions. Yet, even as an opportunist, he was able to create zones of identification that hinted at affirmative action and a new way of understanding how to govern populations. For instance, at a presidential debate with Richard Nixon on September 26, 1960, Kennedy discussed the educational hardships of nonwhites, and said:
If a Negro baby is born—this is true also of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in some of our cities—he has about one half as much chance to get through high school as a white baby. He has one-third as much chance to get through college as a white… student. He has about a third as much chance to be a professional man, about half as much chance to own a house. He has about… four times as much chance that he’ll be out of work in his life as a white baby. (Kraus, p. 349)

Here Kennedy equates lack of opportunity with lack of freedom. He also implies that institutional structures generate this equation and thereby its material effects. Kennedy’s narrative reflects a shift away from the strategy of relative silence on education and school integration that was expressed by Eisenhower. Instead, it fosters a space for “opportunity” as a politically viable discourse.

**LBJ and Opportunity Discourse**

In 1965, less than a year after the Civil Rights Act was passed, less than three months after state troopers viciously attacked protesters in Selma, Alabama, and just two months before the Voting Rights Act passed, President Lyndon B. Johnson spoke at Howard University’s commencement to a crowd of mostly black students and their families. His speech, “To Fulfill These Rights,” would mark the first time a U.S. president called for affirmative action and would help popularize the discourse of “opportunity” in education policy discussion (Katznelson, 2005; Asen 2015). In his closing remarks, Johnson suggested a course for redressing centuries of forced inequity and extending New Deal social welfare policies to nonwhites. In a deliberate and earnest tone, he told the audience:

> The Scripture promises: “I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out.” Together, and with millions more, we can light that candle of understanding in the heart of America. (TheLBJLibrary, 2013)

Fifty-five years later, notions that this “candle of understanding” was burning brightly and that the American people had indeed found “not just freedom but opportunity…not just equality as a right
and a theory, but equality as a fact and a result” (TheLBJLibrary, 2013) were abuzz among media outlets and politicians who commemorated the 2008 election of Barak Obama—the nation’s first black president—as evidence the U.S. had become a post-racial society (Ono, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bush, 2004; Omi & Winant, 2014). “This myth of racial transcendence was intertextual across a myriad of reports which [sic] described Obama’s election as the realization of Martin Luther King’s dream” (Hoerl, 2012, p. 183). In other words, there was a mass appeal in the notion that “We have a black president, so we are finally beyond race!” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 25).

Kent Ono (2013) suggests that these narratives of a post-racial culture derive their rhetorical force from “a discomfort with and related desire to forget, race and racism, which enables them to operate beyond ordinary thresholds of popular consciousness through deferral repression, and forgetting” (p. 301). The rhetorics of post-racism fall within a discourse Lee and Wander (1998) describe as discursive amnesia in that they often require “the collective forgetting (or writing out of history) of people and events that may make us recall catastrophes collectively experienced (e.g. the Trail of Tears; the Chinese Exclusion Act; the stories of Nat Turner and Sojourner Truth; and Operation Wetback)” (p. 154). Ono argues that “the rhetorics of postracism function to insist that racism is elsewhere but, not here, in this time or place, thus bracketing or altogether ignoring present racism” (p. 302). Ralina Joseph (2009) elaborates on this idea and argues that “pundits and politicians proselytize about a post-race world in order to create the illusion that the contemporary United States is a racially level playing field where race-based measures are not only unnecessary for people of color, but actually disempower whites” (p. 240).

That said, media commentary following Obama’s 2008 election worked to bolster notions of America’s exceptionalism as an inclusive nation-state par excellence. The ‘08 election results provided a rhetorical situation in which media outlets could endorse optimistic (and opportunistic) narratives of an established post-civil rights era within which equality had for the most part been realized.
Narratives of the like function as symbolic erasures that dampen past and present inequities and carve out space for rhetors to shape knowledge that conflates opportunity to participate in civic life with opportunity to compete in the marketplace. Presumably, then, the avenues for success are available to all: how wide or narrow those avenues depends on one’s merit, effort, and attitude. This conflation of civic life and the marketplace, however, has had a particularly dangerous influence on education policymaking. As Diane Ravitch (2010) notes:

> Business leaders like the idea of turning the schools into a marketplace where the consumer is king. But the problem with the marketplace is that it dissolves communities and replaces them with consumers. Going to school is not the same as going shopping… Privatizing our public schools makes as much sense as privatizing the fire department or the police department. (p. 220)

When public services are privatized, those who already possess the sort of advantages that facilitate success tend to benefit most. In a society in which the white positionality is a positionality of power, privatization can work to rationalize and to maintain that relation of power. In education, voucher programs—often presented as quick fixes for this conundrum—have not produced strong results in terms of academic achievement for nonwhite and/or at-risk students (Malkus, 2017). It could be that efforts at voucher programs have been underfunded, and/or it could be that as a “good” or “service” education does not reflect a market where consumers have access to more immediate senses of quality as if they were purchasing a product at a store or supermarket or having their home air conditioning unit repaired. In either case, one would expect a fair marketplace would hold all of its participants to a set of unified standards and accountability, which may not be possible within a complex K-12 schooling environment where policymaking vacillates between calls for local control and calls for State regulation and funding measures. This is, of course, also an environment that is further
complicated by existing racial, gendered, and socioeconomic tensions for which the market cannot account without inducing the sort of envy that complicates its myth of being “free”.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, well before the intensification of efforts to privatize K-12 public education began, legislators attempted to expand social welfare programs that were directed at creating opportunities in a number of public arenas, including education. They often did so by using symbols and narratives that connected opportunity to the enrichment of American society.

*From Opportunity to Standards & Accountability*

When President Johnson signed the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it marked an intensification of federal involvement in the K-12 education system. As part of his Great Society initiatives, he connected opportunity narratives to it whenever he spoke in support of the bill. For instance, Johnson said:

> You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say you are free to compete with all the others, and still just believe that you have been completely fair. This is just not enough to open the gates of opportunity. (as cited in Katznelson, 2005, p. 7)

Johnson’s “starting line” analogy implies there is a need to do more than just enact policies that protect equality moving forward. Instead, he expresses a need to redress past discriminatory actions (i.e. bring him up to the starting line…and still just believe that you have been completely fair). This notion of opening up opportunity through the consideration of past injustices aligns with what scholars Kimberle Crenshaw and Angelina Castagno call expansive substantive equality, a view of equality as a result that also includes calls for the redress of past inequities (Crenshaw, 1988; Castagno, 2014).

ESEA backers hoped the carrot of federal funding could ensure more balance between schools serving upper-middle class neighborhoods and schools serving working-class neighborhoods, inner cities, and rural enclaves, which generally had fewer resources.
However, during the final 25 years of the twentieth century, the persuasive power behind calls for a “Great Society” and for a second go at Reconstruction would dissipate. Political science researcher Ira Katznelson (2005) suggests that one reason the Johnson administration’s brand of opportunity stalled was that it failed to account for the hand that legislators themselves had in sustaining inequity (p. 10). Many legislators, particularly in the Deep South, believed their white constituencies would not vote for them if they aggressively supported busing and other measures to integrate schools. Many times, these assumptions were correct.

Instead of starting line analogies that directly addressed race, federal government K-12 policy adapted to reflect notions of ‘rugged individualism’ that were supported by conservatives such as Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. Rugged individualism, according to Ian Haney-López (2014), provides legislators a symbolic means to position social welfare programs—like those of the Great Society—as ill-advised handouts, which create an unfair marketplace. For instance, during his 1964 presidential campaign, Barry Goldwater attacked Great Society programs directed at affirmative action. Goldwater and economic theorists like Milton Friedman (1955) were able to popularize American conservatism, a political perspective that understands government bureaucracy and regulation as impediments to economic growth. This perspective is predicated on assumptions of an existing neutral marketplace where success comes as a product of competition and minimal government intervention. Social welfare programs such as those advocated by policies associated with the Great Society, then, are deemed as not only wasteful but also unfairly discriminatory against white people and against a free marketplace.

Haney-López argues that Goldwater, Reagan and others opportunistically used racially-coded language couched in myths of “rugged individualism” to persuade white voters to see nonwhites as incompetent drains on the economy who were supported by the Democratic Party. For instance, in 1976, Reagan shared an anecdote about “a strapping young buck” in line to buy T-bone steaks with
food stamps (Haney-López, 2014). As such anecdotes became popular in the imagination of the American public, K-12 education policy moved from opportunity as the dominant discourse to guide the distribution of funds and toward measures predicated on standards and accountability.

During the 1980s, a rejuvenated “neoliberal” movement teamed with what was already a highly-entrenched technocratic project that had been informing education policymaking. The decade would be marked by the Reagan administration’s tough stance against unionism, its language promoting government deregulation, and its emphasis on rugged individualism. The Reagan administration was adept at advancing its perspectives on political economy. It took advantage of public faith in techne, that is, faith in skilled experts who advise and administer state policies (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 158). Technocrats of the time help to shape and reshape discourses about, among, and between the nation’s social institutions that still resonate in current discussions about K-12 schooling.

The discourse of standards and accountability gained rhetorical force during the Reagan administration. Reagan backed the 1983 document “A Nation at Risk” (ANAR). Penned by the National Commitment to Excellence in Education and its chair David Pierpont Gardner, ANAR helped call into existence the brand of “standards and accountability” still shaping current debates about education policy. ANAR detailed an intensifying anxiety that American educational institutions and students were falling behind in terms of global achievement as well as a growing disbelief in the competence of local oversight. “Our once unchallenged preeminence,” ANAR reads, “in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (Gardner, 1983). The report, now a landmark doctrine concerning educational praxis in the U.S., also notes:

All regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to be developing their individual powers of mind and spirit upmost. This promise means all children
by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgement needed to secure gainful employment… (Gardner, 1983)

This ANAR excerpt sheds light on how standards and accountability encourage the maintenance of whiteness. The “promise” implies a market like exchange. Since the government is committed to providing a “fair chance,” the public should understand that children succeed “by virtue of their own efforts.” While race and class are noted, ANAR downplays the power relations of race and class in order to highlight individual effort. This displays the notions of meritocracy that underpin both the discourse of standards and accountability and whiteness. By implying the government has delivered on its promise to create an environment of “fair chance,” the document negates the structural forces and cultural practices that have worked, were working, and still work to disadvantage nonwhite students in the U.S and instead suggests an achieved equity.

Also, influential in the discursive shift in federal education policymaking was the rise in post-civil rights discourse exemplified by Supreme Court decisions that worked to curtail affirmative action and integration initiatives. Among these decisions were Regent of University of California v. Bakke (1978), in which the Court ruled that designated number quotas for minorities violated anti-discrimination legislation, and Hopwood v. Texas (1996), in which the Court ruled that race could no longer be used as a criterion for admission decision-making in Texas, Mississippi, or Louisiana. Also, in Milliken v. Bradley (1974) the Court ruled that schools were not compelled to bus students across district lines to integrate schools. Perhaps the most severe blow to integration efforts in recent times came in the 2007 case Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1. In that case, the Court ruled against the use of “explicit racial classifications” in school admissions. In the opinion, “Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. wrote: ‘The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.’ By conflating integration with discrimination, Roberts effectively reversed Brown v. Board” (Nazaryan, 2017).
The influence of ANAR—paired with Court rulings that have pushed back against the Brown ruling—has worked to defang desegregation and affirmative action measures. These measures make salient a discursive shift in the federal government’s identification with a civil rights inspired discourse of opportunity to a post-civil rights inspired discourse of standards and accountability.

President George W. Bush, who supported accountability, would later contend that “‘too often money was spent without regards for results’” (Asen, 2015, p. 27). Accountability under the Bush administration was a polysemous term. It suggested that since the State had upped its responsibility in ensuring that all students succeeded, increased standardized testing should also allow “policymakers and parents to assign blame when students did not reach standards” (Asen, 2015, p. 28). Under the Bush administration’s education policy, notions of accountability and “failure” were linked to funding. If students performed poorly on tests, then schools were failing students and their parents and there had to be consequences. If students performed well on standardized tests, schools should be rewarded with funding. The W. Bush Administration’s The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), further popularized and politicized “accountability” as a means to shape attitudes about how educational opportunity should be understood and rewarded in the United States. The NCLB’s focus on partnering standardized testing with the dueling out of federal funding for local K-12 school districts has worked to invigorate an atmosphere of high-stakes testing across the nation. This atmosphere has made possible a state-backed, federal power grab at the local control of public school curricula while simultaneously encouraging entrepreneurs to invest in less regulated—and potentially lucrative—specialized K-12 schooling options. Since the NCLB’s inception, thousands of charter schools run by private corporations have begun to compete with public schools for students and funding.

**Education Reform as Privatization**

Since the 1990s… the quest to transform public education has revolved around a set of powerful intersecting forces: ideational activism by education entrepreneurs, financial backing
from billionaire philanthropists and hedge fund managers, bipartisan political endorsement supported by lobbyists and think tanks and the assistance of a compliant press and receptive culture industries. Together, the activities of these individuals and institutions constitute a meta-strategy to erode confidence in public education and build ideological consensus around private and market solutions. (Peck, 2015, p. 590)

The political economic stance that critics call neoliberalism relies on persuasion that conflates competition with freedom and freedom with rational choice. In summarizing Robert Nozick’s (1974) work on governing, Aune (2001) suggests there are three principles of rational choice that assist people in advocating for the privatization of public institutions: (1) competition among private associations creates order and minimalizes the costs of the state; (2) since property is a private right, only minimal interference from the state is justified; and, (3) the impulse to ensure equality is impractical and immoral since it inspires envy (p. 94).

In this way, a neoliberal perspective encourages the conceptual coupling of terms such as freedom and choice with notions of opportunity and competition that only markets can create. Taken as ideographs (McGee, 1980), or ideological slogans, then, freedom and equality are used to shape realities about choice and opportunity, which coalesce to set an agenda of privatization. As Janice Peck (2015) notes: “The aim of these combined forces, in which media play a central role and liberal tropes of freedom, choice and equality of opportunity are prevalent, is to build ideological consensus around private and market alternatives to public education” (p. 587). In a business sense, entrepreneurism is created through privatization of a market, which thereby promotes freedom as a synonym for market deregulation (Harvey, 2005).

As the discourse of standards and accountability has come into fashion so too have calls for charter schools to compete with public schools, slogans about freedom and choice have been trumpeted by its supporters. That support has led to material effects. According to the National Center
for Education Statistics (NCES), the number of charter schools in the US climbed from 1,993 during the 2000-2001 school year to more than 6,400 in 2013-2014 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2015). During the same period, the number of public schools remained fairly stagnant, growing by less than 5% (Digest of Education Statistics, 2015). Still, public schools now compete for funding with many charters that often receive a portion of taxpayer dollars to open their doors and maintain their schools. Expansion of market opportunities in K-12 education, then, has materialized in the rise in charter schools and voucher programs, which often syphon taxpayer dollars away from many public schools, an action which leaves public schools fewer resources. Since public schools are accountable to state in federal standards in ways that private and charter schools are not, their constrained resources can play into the “broken schools” narratives, which lends rhetorical force to calls for privatization. The broken schools narrative, Janice Peck (2015) argues, advances the notion that “children are victims [and] the villains are public school teachers, especially teachers unions, who put their own interests in job security above students’ need for quality education, and the heroes are the reformers and their benefactors seeking to rescue children from the flawed public education system” (p. 591).

Jamie Peck (2010) describes this environment as “neoliberalization… an interlocking political, economic and ideological project to establish a new set of rules for governing the functioning of capitalism” (p. 7). Peck argues that this new form of governmentality is fixated on “the capture and rescue of the state, in the interests of shaping a pro-corporate, freer-trading ‘market order’” (p. 9). Researcher Henry Giroux concurs and sites political economic perspective known as neoliberalism as “the latest stage of predatory capitalism and…part of a broader project of restoring class power and consolidating the rapid concentration of capital” (Giroux, 2015). This concentration of wealth facilitates vast pockets of inequality particularly in historically oppressed working-class and nonwhite communities.
Accountability is a term that many education reformers, including current Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, believe applies to K-12 public school but not their private counterparts (Gross, 2017). Noting this unbalanced relationship, activist Jonathan Kozol (2005) cites standards-based reform and school choice as two of the most salient market-thinking innovations hampering social justice in public education (p. 19). Still, education reformers have found powerful means of unification in narratives about failing public schools and their lack of accountability. Parents, voters, philanthropists, and politicians from around the nation have thrown support behind the notion of school choice.

Asen (2015) notes that presidents, operating within the context of laissez faire economics, have highlighted market motives for education reform as ways of providing choice and eliminating waste (p. 191). For example, in promoting NCLB, President George W. Bush linked notions of accountability to federal spending, citing the need to ensure taxpayers’ money was well spent (Asen, 2015, p. 191). The Obama administration continued to promote the discourse of standards and accountability even when its policies directly engaged issues of race. The speech from President Barack Obama that follows demonstrates a reordering in the way that “opportunity” is understood by federal policy shapers within a dominant standards and accountability discourse that is underpinned by a neoliberal project in education.

**Dimming the Flame, Raising the Bar**

On the morning of January 19, 2010, nearly a decade after NCLB was authorized, legitimizing an existing standards and accountability discourse in matters of public education, and roughly three years after Bush had failed to reauthorize it, President Obama stood before an audience at Graham Road Elementary in Fall Church, Virginia to announce the early success of what had been the federal government’s latest investment in K-12 public education reform: the Race-to-the-Top grant. After acknowledging the efforts of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Obama said his administration
planned to set aside $1.3 billion to continue the grant program. He then etched out the details on Race to the Top, which had been implemented the previous July to challenge the so called “business as usual” practices within the nation’s elementary and secondary education system. “Last year,” Obama said, “we set aside $4 billion to improve our schools…but we didn’t just hand this money out to States that wanted it; we challenged them to compete for it” (The White House, 2010).

According to Obama, the plan called for schools to compete for the Race to the Top grant by 1) adopting better standards, 2) creating better assessments, 3) developing “rigorous” methods to evaluate teacher performance, 4) using data systems to track student progress, and 5) showing “stronger commitment” to correcting low performing schools (The White House, 2010). If states and schools wholeheartedly engaged in these endeavors and in this competition, Obama told the audience, they would not only produce positive results but also position themselves to receive an influx of federal dollars and federal support. Race to the Top, the president opined, would raise the bar for all students and close the achievement gap affecting the poor, particularly working-class black and Latinx students. The grant would help “open up opportunity, evenly and equitably, across our education system,” he said (The White House, 2010).

Like many of the president’s speeches, the one at Graham Road Elementary, appeals to what Pauline Lipman calls the “discourse of change” (Lipman, 2011), which is a strategy “mobilized to materialize certain kinds of change and paint the opposition as defenders of the status quo” (Lipman as cited in Castagno, 2014, p. 161). What is interesting about the “discourse of change” in this instance is that when we reposition Obama’s Graham Elementary Race to the Top speech as just another in a long line of “business as usual” post-civil rights era education policy reforms, it becomes possible to start to peel back a corner of the blanket that shrouds whiteness and its powerful presence in our society and particularly within our education system today.
The reasonable question here might be, “what does Race to the Top have to do with whiteness?” Race to the Top and its broader education policy umbrella, NCLB, draw from powerful discourses that presuppose the U.S. has entered a post-civil rights, post-racial era, in which race is acknowledged but individuals (now living in an egalitarian society) earn their own success or failure via their own ability, moxie, personal innovations, and competitive-natures (Ono, 2010; Choi, 2008; Castagno, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Gillborn, 2005). Such a presupposition hinges on the acceptance of meritocracy, which is predicated on the belief that hard work pays off, and this focus on individual work ethic “effectively cancels out race-discourse by minimizing the significance of the impact of racism” (Choi, 2008, p. 62).

In the context of Race to the Top, at-risk schools compete for scarce resources. In this case, as in the case of NCLB, the carrot of funding encourages a zero-sum game, in which some schools, some families, some children will benefit if they work for it while others will not whether they have or have not worked hard (Castagno, 2014). And so, there is a disingenuousness that undergirds a focus on schools, families, or students as the sole arbiters of their own success, especially without consideration for the socio-historical and socioeconomic power structures that mediate access to achievement in different ways for each of them.

*The Technocratic Project & Education Policy*

Since expert knowledge carries rhetorical force in its promotion of ideas and attitudes, technocrats can use data to mediate performances of whiteness or to challenge such performances. This notion is exemplified by the upsurge in output by social psychologists at the dawn of the twentieth century. During that time, Taylorism transformed not only how American factories were organized, but its strict use of measurements, uniformity, and sorting also influenced how the U.S. K-12 education system developed (Rose, 2015, p. 50). “By 1920,” education scholar Todd Rose notes, “most American schools were organized according to the Taylorist vision of education, treating each [white]
student as an average student and aiming to provide each one with the same standardized education, regardless of their background, abilities or interests” (p. 51). Technicists, often assuming the genetic and cultural inferiority of nonwhites, designed instruments to measure intelligence and academic performance, which succeeded in influencing public education policy particularly following World War I (Grey, 1999, p. 303). Social psychologists Robert Yerkes and Carl Brigham supported eugenicist notions to explain correlations they saw between test scores and ethnic categories (Grey, 1999). Stephanie Houston Grey (1999) pinpoints this early social science work as the roots of achievement testing to “cluster students by ability and streamline their choice of adult education” (p. 304). Grey argues that visual depictions in the forms of charts and graphs allow researchers to show achievement in space and time and thus to popularize narratives referencing achievement gaps in public education (Grey, 1999). She argues that works such as Hammerstein and Murray’s *The Bell Curve* use the power of “skilled” knowledge to invite their audiences to partake in visual representations of “normal” that are grounded in whiteness. Grey sees *The Bell Curve* as a late-twentieth century example of a “visual statement”: a rhetorical phenomenon that “uses the processes of depiction to condense historical narratives into a singular graphic representation” and thereby beckons students and parents to objectify themselves by identifying their abilities with points along the graph of a prescribed social order (pp. 307-309). In light of this, achievement gaps act as a visual rhetoric that mediates and depicts the space between students and simultaneously obscures the racialized subtext of those depictions. These visual comparisons become particularly problematic when racial categories are accounted for without consideration for historical and socioeconomic contexts.

Although discussion of a gap between students of different races and ethnic groups had existed during the nineteenth century, namely during the first few years of the (First) Reconstruction, the technocratic project of the early twentieth century, which ushered in visual depictions of achievement in space and time via charts and graphs, popularized narratives referencing achievement gaps in public
education. Of the allure of technocratic practices in education, Grey (1999) cites its consensus-creating rhetorical quality and says:

Since public schools were the primary means for socialization on a national scale, prerequisite skills and values for entry into the workforce had to be transmitted accurately. Statistical tools were developed to quickly and inexpensively determine how effectively educational institutions engaged in this task. (p. 304)

Summarizing the work of education studies scholars C.A. Bowers and David Flinders, McKnight (2003) argues the technicist pattern of thinking involves three key elements: “1) a view of the rational process as culturally neutral 2) a view of language as a conduit 3) a view of learning as individually centered [as opposed to cooperatively]” (p. 138). To elaborate, technicism promotes competition over cooperation, “rewards behaviors such as respect, obedience, and docility in grades and honors,” and eventually material properties (McKnight, 2003, p. 138). In terms of education and whiteness, the technocratic project in the U.S. has often been a naturalizing influence for the acceptance of racial stereotypes. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) have pointed to the notion that scientific classifications about race “drain whiteness of its social status” since they are presented as little other than categories linked to our perceived racial characteristics (p.300). This absence of regard for the interplay between social status in race relations, according to Nakayama and Krizek, allows scientists to circumvent “the history and experiential knowledge of whiteness [that is] hidden beneath a scientific category” (p. 300). In short, the power distribution between racial categories is often overlooked when they are compared as if existing in sterile, equal opportunity environment.

*Big Think & Performances of Whiteness*

Media participate in the construction of the racialized condition in which we live, and it is often through them that people negotiate identities, ideas, and relationships with other subjects. (Ono, 2013, p. 232)
In terms of media, video sharing site, YouTube has emerged as a powerful tool for entertainment and education within today’s visually driven world of media convergence and viewer fragmentation. Big Think, a multi-forum dot com that debuted in 2008 using the mantra “Smarter Faster”, was created with the purpose of helping people “move beyond random information, toward real knowledge” (“About Us”, 2015). The site, which boasted more than 1.2 million YouTube subscribers in September 2015, has produced more than 15,000 videos. Big Think is the brain-child of former “Charlie Rose” PBS coworkers Peter Hopkins and Victoria Brown. Hopkins, a Harvard graduate, sought initial financial backing from elites like former Harvard University President Lawrence Summers, PayPal co-founder Peter Theil, and venture capitalist David Frankel (Arango, 2008). In a 2008 interview with The New York Times, Hopkins described the site as a place “to sit down for a few minutes and listen to people who know more than you do” (Arango, 2008).

To do this, the site features blogs, tweets, wikis, vlogs, and educational videos that cover a variety of intellectual topics. On May 31, 2011, Big Think uploaded “Why Some Races Outperform Others” to YouTube. The title of the nine-minute, eight-second video excerpt reflects the sensationalism sometimes linked to Web 2.0—click-bait media culture that often favors page views over tonal discretion (Blom & Hansen, 2015). As of April 2017, the video had garnered more than 565,000 views and 3,300 comments. Though this number is relatively miniscule when compared with the more than 300 million people living in the United States, the video provides an interesting site to examine how the technocratic project maintains whiteness utilizing the discourse of standards and accountability within a neoliberal context where “the distance between science and politics is often shorter than might be imagined” (Grey, 199, p. 303). The video was uploaded in 2011, which Flores (2015) and other scholars note as “The Year of the Voucher,” since it included “more than fifty-two voucher proposals emerging across thirty-six states” (p. 244). School vouchers are a persuasive vehicle of the market driven ideological perspective on education, and they often coopt terms like opportunity
to garner identification and acceptance. Flores observes that “vouchers—often called opportunity scholarships or choice grants “offer scholarships, money, or credit that can be used by families toward private school tuition” (p. 244).

“Why Some Races Outperform,” features an interview with Laurence Steinberg, who advocates for voucher programs. In the video, Steinberg, a Temple University psychology professor, acts as a stand-in for technocratic knowledge. His credentials include a host of authored books, more than 250 scholarly articles, and having served as an expert analyst on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and “Good Morning America”. Big Think formats its videos so they appear as if the researcher were addressing questions from an audience. A question runs for a few frames before the video cuts to its expert’s response. Taken as a whole, I argue, it provides a valuable example of Ono’s claim that “[m]edia participate in the construction of the racialized condition in which we live…” (p. 232). In the video, Steinberg performs whiteness as he argues that K-12 educational policy needs to generate more challenging schools, more engaged students, more national standards, better test designs, better teacher evaluations, and more equitable property tax distribution. He also shares his findings on why some “ethnicities” achieve higher scores on standardized tests than others do. Along the way, he supports his claims with statistical data and anecdotes, drawing from his personal experiences as a field researcher. The next section more closely examines how Steinberg taps into discourses about model minority Asian students and culturally deficient black and Latinx students to support persuasive appeals that normalize white students as the barometer by which to judge all student achievement. His interview, thus, provides an example of how a technocrat can establish a position of authority and use it to shape realities about race and education that symbolically reference biological difference through talk of cultural difference.
The Techne & the Discourse of Standards and Accountability

The rhetorical trajectory of the jeremiad “demands a return to and revival of an ‘original’” path, laments the probable future, but ultimately does so with the hope of inspiring positive moral change (Bercovitch, 1978; McKnight, 2003). Steinberg’s rhetorical strategy (or at least Big Think’s edit of his discussion) follows this arc. He begins by lamenting the study habits of U.S. K-12 students in comparison with those of Japanese K-12 students. He then links the study habits of American students to their parents, to the community, and to ethnic differences. After establishing that no legislative or funding practices have worked to improve K-12 education in the past 30 years, Steinberg suggests better testing measures, nationalized standards, and unhinging property taxes from funding as ways to return the nation to its past greatness. Steinberg, as an expert, represents the power of the technocratic project. My critique moves chronologically through Steinberg’s responses to Big Think’s questions. I argue that his persuasive appeals offer an example of the “standards and accountability” discourse that maintains and mystifies whiteness. (L.S. designates Laurence Steinberg’s response to the question.)

Question: Can you explain your research into why students are becoming less engaged in academic pursuits?

L.S.

clearly, we are not challenging kids in American schools as much as we should. And you see this if you do international comparisons. We didn't in this study, but if you look at how much time kids spend on homework, for example, the average in our study—and this is a figure that you see in lots of different studies—is about four to five hours a week for a typical high school student. In Japan, it's four to five hours a day. And so, you see the difference in [the] magnitude of how hard we push kids here in America compared to other places. (Big Think, 2011)

In his response to the question, Steinberg establishes a notion that American schools are broken. As Peck (2015) notes, the broken schools narrative positions children as victims of villainous public schools and their lazy, unmotivated teachers, and—as the narrative goes—only education reformers can rescue these children by providing them with choice through market competition (p. 591). Steinberg’s notion that: “we are not challenging kids in American schools as much as we should”
also allows him to invite viewers to identify achievement with notions of meritocracy. Next, Steinberg compares the time that American high school students spend on homework “four to five hours a week” with the “four to five hours a day” that Japanese students spend doing homework. Through this comparison, he is able to both evoke the “model minority” stereotype and simultaneously activate A Nation at Risk anxieties of being overtaken by Asian innovation. This highlights the idea that underlying the myth of the model minority lies a fear of Asian nations as global competitors (Guo, 2016). As Nakayama (1997) notes, “In the case of Asian Americans, U.S. society has continually used them for shifting social needs, as various kinds of ‘enemies’ in some contexts, as ‘model minorities’ in others” (p. 238). Steinberg’s performance of whiteness draws from both contexts.

*Question: Can you explain your research into why students are becoming less engaged in academic pursuits?*

L.S.

Now, perhaps the most controversial finding that we came up with had to do with ethnic differences in achievement. Across all of the schools that we studied, Asian-American kids were doing significantly better than white kids, and white kids were doing significantly better than black and Latino kids. And that's controlling for family income, it's controlling for parental education, it's controlling for other factors that might be correlated with ethnicity and that might have played a role in this too. (*Big Think*, 2011)

In the excerpt above, Steinberg’s first comparison draws from the model minority stereotype that emerged out of the Cold War, and it makes vivid his initial point that Asian students—American or not—are hard working. In replicating Cold War sentiments, Steinberg references Asian performance in school to invite viewers to understand black and Latinx students as underachievers. This comparison operates as a subtext that reinforces hard work and cultural differences as rationales for social location. In addition, Steinberg’s use of the term “ethnic” as he discusses his findings asserts whiteness in that it blurs lines between race and ethnicity, allowing him to talk race and point out racialized cultural-deficiencies without actually having to say race. A closer examination of who makes up the white ethnic group and whether this super-category shows Irish Americans outperforming Croatian
Americans or German Americans is one way to destabilized the persuasiveness of his categories, which play off “popular” perception of real differences. Steinberg reinforces his authority and the Truth of his study through his use of repetition, or anaphora (i.e. that’s controlling for, it’s controlling for, it’s controlling for). In this way, Steinberg encourages viewers to understand social science observations as value-neutral. What makes this video particularly interesting is that although it is named “Why Some Races Outperform Others”, its expert, Lawrence Steinberg, does not use the word “race” throughout the entire piece. This enables Steinberg to avoid talking about “race” while discussing it, and also leaves room for Big Think to benefit from its use of “race” in the video’s click-bait title.

**Question:** Can you explain your research into why students are becoming less engaged in academic pursuits?

L.S.

when we ask kids about the importance of schooling, we see really different patterns in how kids from different ethnic groups answer the question. Asian kids tell us that they are sure that if they do poorly in school, something bad will happen to them. They won't get a good job in life, all right? Black and, to a certain extent, Latino kids don't have that belief. So every -- all ethnic groups share the belief that doing well in school has a payoff. It's how they think about doing poorly in school that makes a difference. And the Asian kids do well in part because they're really afraid of what the consequences of not doing well are. And I think that comes back to the standards that their parents have set for them at home. (*Big Think*, 2011)

In this excerpt, the white ethnic group disappears altogether. There is no mention of a response given by “white kids”. This oversight is illustrative of how whiteness works. Because whiteness so often appears as if is it were the natural position, it can easily get lost in the shuffle of racial comparisons since it is not racialized in the way that nonwhite categories are. Also apparent in this portion of Steinberg’s narrative is the deficit-thinking that operates to maintain whiteness. It does so out of what Bonilla-Silva (2010) calls a color-blind racism, or when white domination relies “more on cultural than biological tropes” to explain the inferiorities of nonwhites across the nation (p. 7). When Steinberg asserts that black and Latinx cultures “just don’t have the fear that doing poorly in school”
will have bad consequences for them, he promotes an endless present that disavows the historio-social components that might inform these positions. Instead, Steinberg implies that the study merely provides a cultural way of understanding education. Such an understanding overlooks centuries of cultural and social oppression insofar as it assumes racial categories as empty containers.

Gutiérrez and Dixon-Roman (2011) note that such oversight is commonplace in achievement gap gazing, and they suggest that “most researchers and practitioners fail to question the underlying assimilationist goal and the ways in which framing the problem as an achievement gap supports deficit thinking and negative narratives about marginalized students. (p. 23).

**Question: Is the idea that being smart can lead to success taking hold at all among the youth?**

L.S.

Well, I don't know about how it's changed attitudes. It certainly hasn't done anything to kids' achievement, which has stayed pretty flat…across the board, I think anybody looking at the data objectively would say that none of the things that we've tried to do in the last 30 years has made a difference. Achievement is lower now than it was in the 1970s, and -- that's partly what prompted us to do the study. We spend all of this money on school reform, and we're constantly having debates about it: how we train teachers, what we pay teachers, how much money we give schools, whether we should have big schools or small schools. People try to do all these experiments where they change these things. And it doesn't make a difference. It really doesn't make a difference. I'm not saying that teachers shouldn't be well paid; of course they should be well paid. But that alone is not going to raise achievement among American students. Do schools need resources? Of course they need resources. But lots of research shows that there is a very small relationship between the resources that a school gets and the output that it produces in kids. (*Big Think*, 2011)

In his response, Steinberg refutes the notion that resources are a prevailing part of the success of K-12 education programs. “It really doesn’t make a difference,” he says. His line of reasoning deemphasizes the role money plays in creating avenues for student and/or teacher success. Left unsaid, is how Finland managed to top the international ranking among K-12 education programs. According to education studies scholar, Linda Darling-Hammond (2012) “Finland was not succeeding educationally in the 1970s, when the United States was the unquestioned education leader in the world” (p. 255). After Finland assessed its policy and curriculum, Darling-Hammond points to its
focus on teacher empowerment as a major contributing factor in the country’s turnaround over the past 35 years. Rather than handcuffing teachers by linking high-stakes testing measures to both their promotions and their school’s funding, Finland invested heavily in teacher education and the equitable distribution of resources among local school districts. Of the Finns’ emphasis on teacher pay and teacher training, Darling-Hammond (2012) says:

Prospective teachers are competitively selected from the pool of college graduates—only 15 percent of those who apply are admitted—and receive a three-year graduate-level teacher preparation program, entirely free of charge and with a living stipend. Unlike the United States, where teachers either go into debt to prepare for a profession that will pay them poorly or enter with little or no training, Finland made the decision to invest in a uniformly well-prepared teaching force by recruiting top candidates and paying them to go to school. Slots in teacher training programs are highly coveted, and shortages of applicants are virtually unheard of” (p. 260).

In negating the distribution of resources as an important factor in K-12 education policy, Steinberg’s narrative reinforces the notions of power blindness and colorblindness that allow whiteness to remain unchallenged. At the same time, his performance in the video encourages the notions of deficit-thinking and meritocracy that underpin whiteness. Finally, his uncoupling of teacher compensation (or school resources) from classroom outcomes reinforces a market driven understanding of education, one in which buyers agree to pay more for “select” or “private” materials.

Education Ideological State Apparatuses

Since the 1990s, a growing confidence in a market-minded ideology constructed in and through cultural politics has had a profound effect on the U.S. K-12 public education system. Persuasive legislators have promoted and funded privatization efforts that conflate competition with transparency and choice with freedom. These efforts have materialized in the form of school vouchers and the rapid
growth of charter schools over the past two decades. The number of charter schools in the US have more than tripled over the past 15 years (Digest of Education Statistics, 2015). As individuals have looked to expand market opportunities, publicly-funded institutions, susceptible to tax dollars, have undergone a de facto privatization.

David Harvey (2005) explains: “As the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in areas such as health care, public education, and social services, which were once so fundamental to embedded liberalism, it leaves large segments of the population exposed…” (p. 76). In educational contexts, these segments include marginalized groups such as at-risk, special education, and nonwhite students. Such conditions work to promote ideological clashes between broadly-held value centers. From Althusser (1971), we learn that ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) are fantasies we hold about how a society should function, and that these fantasies reflect our relations to our “conditions of existence.” According to Althusser, “individuals are always-already subjects” and ideology calls to their imaginary distortions about existence in a way that motivates them to respond: ‘Yes, it really is me!’” (Althusser, 1971).

Each ideology hinges on perceptions about the responsibilities of the state in relation to the responsibilities of citizens. The market-driven ideological position aligns with what critics describe as the neoliberal frame. At its core, it favors competition as a way to promote growth and the notion that “self-interests can serve collective interests” (Smith, 2004, p. 4). This ideological position exists in tension with what I call the “communal ideological position,” which at its core favors “Keynesian welfare state arrangements” (Smith, 2004, p. 36). Both of these ideological perspectives inform two competing hierarchies or social orders that “bind people together in a system of rights and obligations” (Brummett, 1981, p. 255). On a national level, the competition between social orders is reflected in the antagonism between organizations such as teachers unions and the Republic National Committee (RNC). At the state level, conflicts between these social orders reveal themselves in the enactment of
legislation. The dialectical tension between these value centers plays out at the local level, where these clashes are mediated through community deliberations that are interconnected with information reported by media outlets and existing local myths. Harvey (2005) asserts that “The main substantive achievement of neoliberalization… has been to redistribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income” (p. 159).

In obvious ways, we have begun to see how neoliberal-minded policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have reinforced notions of meritocracy and de-emphasized discussions about the influence that historic social structures and cultural practices have had in maintaining a status quo. As such, this discursive phenomenon, which is underpinned by a market-oriented commodification of public education, has worked to reinforce a power blind caste system in place since the nation’s founding, one that works to marginalize people based on race, gender, gender orientation, socioeconomic status, and so on. Pointing to the commodification of education through the privatization of public schools, education scholar Gert Biesta suggests that competition has become a way to live our lives rather than a fact of life (Neilsen, 2005).

Discussion

If your children aren’t meeting standards then an accountability system gives you an opportunity to change and school systems, in my judgment, need to be flexible.

—George W. Bush

The discourse of opportunity associated with the Johnson administration explicitly addressed racial oppression but it became distracted. Johnson’s prolonged involvement in the Vietnam War stripped the federal government of essential funds to bolster his Great Society ideals. There are, however, several other reasons that help us conceptualize why this iteration of the discourse of opportunity lost its rhetorical force, failed to walk the talk of “we shall overcome”, and that “Johnson’s vision came to seem like a mirage from a bygone time, and [that] no social movement has since
developed that could transform American society in this thoroughgoing way” (Katznelson, 2005, p. 144). For politicians, it has historically been, at least understood, as political suicide to demand reparations for traditionally oppressed minority communities. For instance, only after years and sometimes decades of petitioning did American Indians and Japanese internment victims receive some form of reparations. This should not be surprising in that a majority of state and federal legislators have been white males, a standpoint that does not generally provide firsthand experiences of the systematic exclusion and antagonism many nonwhites face. Also, legislators committed to the discourse of opportunity risked alienating large pockets of white constituents as well as their fellow lawmakers. For politicians and citizens alike, engaging in the difficult moral topics that people disagree about in meaningful ways is often framed as “being divisive” or “encouraging handouts.” And so, in instances involving plurality and scarcity, politicians often have found it much easier to accommodate the status quo and to heighten their chances of remaining electable rather than to boldly challenge their constituents to “light a candle of understanding” necessary for the redress of centuries of inequality.

For example, thinking more broadly, one possible reason LBJ’s “Great Society” and the Second Reconstruction have not been achieved is that at the individual level many people would have to capitulate their own access to resources and allow others to benefit from this capitulation. In a market-driven system based on competition and merit, revolutionary concepts of communalism, social justice, and social equality find little ground on which to fortify themselves. This ground is further destabilized when media capitalizes upon and perpetuates the “acute sense of white victimization” linked to rebalancing the scales of access to social goods (Bush, 2004).

Instead, the discourse of opportunity creates spaces that allow for collective moments of catharsis about the nation’s racist past, (as well as about class inequality and gender inequality), but at the same time it disavows the substantial policy changes required to counteract the residues of slavery, of the antebellum, of the Jim Crow era, or of the whiteness and paternalism dominating contemporary
U.S. society (Hoerl, 2012; Reyes, 2010; Behdad, 2005). This cathartic eschewing promotes an understanding of inequality as the work of individuals, of “a few bad apples”, and obscures the structural-societal inequities as the embedded norms they are. “The federal government,” Katzenelson (2005) notes, “though seemingly race-neutral, [has] functioned as a commanding instrument of white privilege” (p. 18). Its measures to counteract this function have often resulted in restrictive formal equality, or creating conditions in which everyone should be treated the same, without creating expansive substantive equality, or conditions in which resources should be distributed to promote social justice (Castagno, 2014, p. 113).

The discourse of standards and accountability, on the other hand, offers solutions for the inactions and rudderlessness that have marked the discourse of opportunity. At the same time, it also allows rhetors to coopt certain embodiments of the discourse of opportunity. This appropriation sometimes happens nominally as we observe in the Bush administration’s co-opting of the Children’s Defense Fund’s “Leave No Child Behind” mantra (“About Us”, 2015), and sometimes through a technocratic project that claims to make value-neutral observations about social phenomena, which the media quickly and often uncritically disseminates. This confluence, within the context of a neoliberal-minded society, creates an environment that releases us from the responsibility of making difficult moral decisions about our public life, about our schools, about social justice, and instead allows the market to decide for us (Sandel, 2012). Giroux (2015) contends that neoliberalism is a bigoted project inherently antagonistic toward democratic values, and describes it as “an ideology [that] constitutes profit-making as the essence of democracy, consuming as the only operable form of citizenship, and an irrational belief in the market to solve all problems and serve as a model for structuring social relations” (p. 102). The rhetorical force of this is that—through a market driven ideological perspective—we become able to jettison responsibility for a society that privileges white positionality,
leaving it up to the market and the oppressed—tugging at their own bootstraps—to somehow lift the “blanket of history and circumstance” ((TheLBJLibrary, 2013).

This, however, is not a viable solution, a realization that politicians, families, teachers, and school administrators came to during the thirteen some odd years in which K-12 education was dominated by NCLB. This realization was substantialized by the Obama administration’s replacement of the NCLB on December 10, 2015. In its place, the newly authorized Every Student Succeeds Act demonstrated the notion that policymakers had over emphasized the powerful discourse of “standards and accountability” and that a redistribution between discursive elements of “opportunity” and those of “standards and accountability” was necessary. A bipartisan effort, the Every Student Succeeds Act eliminates the Adequately Yearly Progress frameworks and declares that its guidelines will reduce “the U.S. Department of Education’s authority over state curriculum frameworks [and] standards and testing decisions” (Robinson, 2016). Although conceding some oversight power back to states, Every Student Succeeds retains NCLB’s mandatory math and reading testing for students in the third through the eighth grades. It also includes some symbolic allusions to the discourse of opportunity, such as phrasings referring to closing the “opportunity gaps” as well as “an ‘opportunity dashboard’ to help close [these] gaps in needy schools and elevate the voices of educators in the policymaking process” (Walker, 2015).

Still some education experts worry that since states are no longer accountable to the federal government for the performance of minority and disabled children, as they were under the NCLB, that those children will slip through the cracks. Commenting on the initial hesitation of civil rights groups to support Every Student Succeeds because of fear that the act would no longer force states to focus on minority students, education reporter Libby Nelson (2015) wrote:

Before No Child Left Behind was passed in 2002, most states didn't hold all students to the same standard on standardized tests—instead, they were compared with their peers…In other
words, some states didn't do anything to hold schools accountable for the performance of poor or minority children until the federal government forced them to. The question is whether states will continue to do so with less pressure from Washington. (para 22)

Nelson points to some of the fresh challenges of arriving at equality within the complexities of the K-12 education system and within the shifting discursive qualities utilized to describe and enact policy. The sheer involvedness of education policy can be dizzying.

Conclusion

Critical rhetoricians share, along with other critical scholars, the responsibility of making visible and of “demystifying” such discursive practices and policies (McKerrow, 1989). Critics must continue to point to moments of symbolic creation and re-creation that condone or disavow oppressive practices linked to education policymaking, and encourage more reflexivity about the mechanisms of the market and the biases they perpetuate. These biases often promote the negation of the objectified “being in history” of Othered peoples’ (Wander, 1984, p. 210). As Phil Wander (1984) notes in his conception of the Third Persona “the moral significance of being negated through what is and is not said reveals itself in all its anguish and confusion…wherein certain individuals and groups are, through law, tradition, or prejudice, denied rights accorded to being commended or, measured against an ideal, to human beings” (p. 210).

In addition to greater reflexivity, critics must continue to seek alternative means for reforming public education; highlight fresh understandings of what opportunity, standards, and accountability can mean; and, critics should do this because, when it comes to race and education, our society has yet to truly measure the flame dancing above the “candle of understanding in our hearts”, and as President Johnson opined at Howard University so many years ago:

It is the great opportunity of this generation to end the one huge wrong of the American nation—and in so doing to find America for ourselves, with the same immense thrill of discovery which
gripped those who first began to realize that here, at last, was a home for freedom. All it will take is for all of us to understand what this country is and what it must become.

(TheLBJLibrary, 2013)

This chapter explored governmentality or “those processes through which objects are rendered amenable to intervention and regulation by being formulated in a particular conceptual way” (Townley, 1994, p. 6). It provided examples of how whiteness, at times, mediates the governing of brown bodies within public spaces, and more specifically public schools. It also offers examples of how whiteness coordinates attitudes directed at disciplining brown bodies as a means to maintain its dominance. In the chapter, I also discussed an individual-communal dialectic that involves polarized ideologies, which support either a market driven fantasy about the world or a communal fantasy about it that privileges civic life. Moving from a macro-level exploration of governing and the patrolling of public spaces, Chapter Four interrogates how whiteness operates as a cultural practice and is negotiated in the public sphere as community members debate pressing education issues at school board meetings in Golden, Colorado during the fall of 2014. In doing so, I introduce a version of what Martin and Nakayama (2013) name “the present-future/history-past dialectic” (p. 67). I argue that this dialectic becomes apparent as speakers make persuasive appeals that oscillate between the history-past and the present-future, since as Burke (1966) notes “a history of the past is worthless except as a documented way of talking about the future” (p. 159). Thus, I will argue that community members create zones of identification using rhetorics of self-renewal and rhetorics of disavowal that shape attitudes about connections between American exceptionalism and education policy.
CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY ONE: JEFFCO SCHOOLS, ORDINARY DEMOCRACY, & RITUAL: EL NORTE & THE FAR WEST

In this chapter, I explore governing at the community level and employ Martin and Nakayama’s (2013) Present-Future / History-past dialectic to understand connections between current deliberations about education policy and regional histories. In order to characterize whiteness as a cultural practice that has evolved differently in El Norte and the Far West (Woodard, 2011), I locate discursive fragments and attempt to construct a text that highlights how past understandings about race still resonate. From there, I will ground my analysis in deliberations that take place within the public sphere. Finally, I will analyze a contentious Jefferson County Board of Education meeting (JBOE) that took place in Golden, Colorado on October 2, 2014. Deliberations at the meeting, I will argue, shed light on how whiteness as a cultural practice relates to acts of forgetting and remembering. As a critical rhetoric project, this case study “seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power,” that assists in preserving white dominance (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91).

Projects in New Racism

By viewing whiteness as a rhetorical construction, we avoid searching for any essential nature to whiteness. Instead, we seek an understanding of the ways that this rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life.

(Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 293)

In the excerpt above, Nakayama and Krizek argue that whiteness is not a monolithic social location of power whose characteristics travel neatly and uniformly across the vast regions of the United States. Instead, they suggest that whiteness has evolved and continues to evolve within uniquely fitted environments within which certain attitudes, motives, and appeals lend it authority and shape its dominance as an acceptable reality. These uniquely fitted environments include material things like resources, landscapes, and kinds of people, and they also include symbolic things that are
produced and reproduced through cultural practices, which in turn produce a materiality that helps shape values. In calling attention to how whiteness can operate both overtly and perhaps more significantly covertly, Nakayama and Krizek’s project fits within what scholars have identified as new racism (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Giroux, 1997). As Giroux notes, new racism involves coded language that alludes to “‘welfare reform, neighborhood schools, toughness on crime, and ‘illegitimate’ births’” (p. 377). This language borrows its persuasive force from the racial subtexts it evokes and it, as Giroux observes, is “cleverly designed to mobilize white fears while relieving whites of any semblance of social responsibility and commitment” (p. 377). Under new racism, notions of meritocracy rely on narratives of a post-racial, colorblind society. In other words, “people of color are responsible for their troubles… racism is a thing of the past,” and we live in a society that rewards effort not identity (Alcoff, 2015, p. 84). “In the Color-Blind Era,” Leonardo (2009) notes:

> success (or more important, failure) is conceived as individual or cultural. If we assume that structural racism has been solved or has negligible impact, then we are responsible for our own lot, not in the sense that we have to take inventory of our bad decisions (which everyone has) but in the sense that structural obstacles to mobility, like slavery and Jim Crow, have been lifted… blacks [then] lack mobility because of their pathological cultural practices. (p. 132) Such narratives encourage historical erasures that show racial discrimination has for the most part been eliminated and that equal access to economic opportunity now, at times, even favors nonwhites, who benefit from quotas and diversity policies (Collins, 2004, p. 178). Race, as DiAngelo (2011) notes, becomes something that “is for people of color to think about… they can bring it up if it is an issue for them (although if they do, [white people] can dismiss it” as playing the race card (p. 63). In this game, the subtext is an assumed identity politics, which is really just coded language for “nonwhite politics”. The taken-for-granted, then, becomes the notion that white people do not engage in identity politics since they make up the norm. However, voting records work to dispel this myth;
instead, these records show that since Lyndon Johnson officially backed affirmative action measures in 1964, a majority of white people have voted for the GOP candidate in every presidential election since (Haney-López, 2014, p. 61).

Thus, within our everyday lives, new racism rewrites the politics of “being white” and attempts to erase the power relations embedded in whiteness while transforming it into as social identity location that is under siege. As such, “race should not be seen, talked about, and race-talk should not be heard with too attentive of an ear because it is tantamount to victimology: see no race, speak no race, hear no race” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 131). This mentality of being under siege assists in shaping attitudes of white victimization, which arise within appeals that call for the policing of cultural boundaries and for (re)assertions of the U.S. national identity as white, and male, and Christian. Collins (2001) laments that the U.S. national identity has been compromised by “deeply embedded racial processes” that have made it difficult for both whites and nonwhites “to conceive of national identity in terms other than racial” and other than white (p. 7). The meanings we ascribe to race are powerful.

John Warren (2013) suggests that, “we live in a social system that remakes skin and race as meaningful—we talk about it, think about it, and thus produce it as meaningful… regardless of where we fall in terms of race, we are always already part of a system of power” (p. 456). According to Foucault (1982), power is neither inherently good nor bad but instead articulates ways of knowing that influence how free individuals conduct a variety of governing practices that occur within families, within the public sphere, within state institutions, and also within institutions that produce content meant to entertain and inform. Popular media, then, is an arena in which power is expressed through people as they (re)produce, encounter, and attribute meaning to images, events, and ideas. These expressions can support both oppressive and liberating discourses depending on the doxastic knowledge that they promote (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). As such, popular media can help social
actors—operating within the public sphere—shape realities that work to maintain or challenge notions of race that promote white dominance.

Whiteness, Media, & the Public Screen

Critical rhetorical scholars argue that popular culture discourse constitutes a diffuse text embodied by discursive signs, fragments, and recurring storylines that tap into, invoke, and activate larger meta-narratives or cultural myths that extend over time and space, yet are independently experienced by people. The deep formal structures of news discourse create audience expectations based on previous similar texts, forms, and experiences, offering mythic storylines and motivations that resolve cultural problems in familiar nostalgic ways, while concealing ideologies and cultural fears or anxieties (Lacy and Haspel, 2011, p. 21).

As Lacey and Haspel (2011) note in the excerpt above, critical scholars often interrogate the ways that both popular media and news media use narratives that reinforce broader discourses about racial inferiority and how, in doing so, those narratives work to ‘create audience expectations’ about race that unconsciously (or consciously) support racial anxieties that target nonwhites (p. 21). These interrogations inform scholarship on new racism in that they are directed at uncovering the covert ways that people normalize taken-for-granted, derogatory, social knowledges about race that depict nonwhites as inherently inferior (p.21). This scholarship does so by deepening our understanding of how mass media often circumvents “racial legacies of the past while recovering the mythic vision of ‘whiteness’ associated with purity and innocence” (Giroux, 2011, p. 378). I include a review of this scholarship in order to highlight the ways in which critics have interrogated symbiotic relationships between public and media discourses and revealed the subtle ways that white dominance is naturalized and reified (Lacy & Ono, 2011).

In analyzing popular media, critics have pointed to attempts by blockbuster films such as Forrest Gump (1994) and hit television series such as Mad Men (2010) to rewrite public memory of
the nation’s past (Gresson, 1996; Ono, 2013). These “rewrites” invite viewers to participate in “a cleansing of the American past” by deemphasizing racial tensions and highlighting an “understanding of racial relations that work on the behalf of the public mourning of the ‘victimized white male’” (Gresson, 1996, p. 13). This cleansing, Dickinson (2006) observes, works to define social spaces through narratives and images that create memory texts that offer viewers “historically grounded images with which to map their spatialized everyday experiences” (p. 217). In analyzing Hollywood films such as Edward Scissorhands (1990), American Beauty (1999), and Pleasantville (1998), Dickinson argues that viewers are encouraged to participate in whiteness through the Pleasantville Effect, which draws its persuasive capital through spatial stories that express “spatial boundaries between city and suburb, black and white, homosexual and heterosexual, bad and good” (p. 226).

Bineham’s (2015) work also highlights the shaping of spatial differences within popular film. In analyzing the film The Blind Side (2009), Bineham points to the suburban paternalism evident within the film’s narrative that, he argues, asks viewers to partake in a post-racial dream of America. Popular media, then, can reflect and reveal motives, desires, and material realities that people live out in their everyday lives.

In light of this notion, suburbs are not just portrayed as white havens on film; they are a part of our own lived experiences. In other words, the social spaces left in the wake of white flight that are taken for granted in film also tend to be taken for granted in everyday society. In this way, suburban areas often become spaces associated with being white and urban spaces, conversely, become nonwhite spaces. Each, then, are marked by the presence of an absence that involves relations of power and the racialization of social space (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 303). As such, unfair housing and hiring practices are among a confluence of factors that have made white dominance a noticeable, material reality across the U.S. (Childress, 2014). According to sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014), “housing audits done in many locations reveal that blacks and Latinos are denied available
hosing from 35 to 70 percent of the time” depending on the geographic location being examined (p. 33). Studies on real estate brokers have also found continued efforts to engage in geographic steering practices that perpetuate and normalize American suburbs (and exurbs) as “white” cultural spaces (p. 33). This phenomenon makes clear, Cloud’s (1994, 1996) assertion that critical rhetoricians must make connections between discursive constructions of race and the material implications that race has for nonwhite people. In the city of Denver, Colorado, for instance, slightly more than 52% of the total population identifies as white, non-Hispanic; whereas, 80% of the people in Golden, Colorado—a suburb of Denver—identify as white, non-Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The suburbs, thus, embody a white space and that embodiment is mirrored and reproduced through artistic depictions of an assumed social reality, a supposed natural order of things (Guess, 2006).

In making connections between imagined and material spaces, Stuart Hall (1990) offers a strand of new racism he calls inferential racism that is embodied by “the apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether ‘factual’ or ‘fictional,’ which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (pp. 12-13). These assumptions are perpetuated by reductionist media narratives that favor stories of good versus evil.

In analyzing news media, for instance, critics have interrogated how news outlets have framed nonwhite people as looters, armed assailants, and rapists in the aftermath of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (Lacy and Haspel, 2011). Other critics have compared the media representations of violent acts committed by white and nonwhite perpetrators, noting paralleling constructions that often frame white perpetrators as suffering from mental illnesses while portraying nonwhites as naturally given to violence (Willis-Chun, 2011; McDuffie, 2017). Critical scholars have also explored the ways in which media coverage of sporting events and sports figures has normalized whiteness through the creation of narratives in which nonwhite people are athletically gifted yet also violent, uncivilized, and in need of
paternal intervention that can govern their presumed culturally deficient behaviors (Griffin & Calafell, 2011; Delgado, 2007; Butterworth, 2007). Still other critics have examined how documentary films like *Waiting for Superman* (2010) have advanced whiteness through narratives that promote the privatization of markets as a way to save nonwhite children from public institutions that seemingly work to perpetuate their marginalized existences (Hermansen, 2014).

News media, popular media, or user-generated social media provide avenues for the creation of content and the mass dissemination of images and narratives that make up part of what Deluca and Peeples (2002) call the public screen. Deluca and Peeples define the public screen as “a constant current of images and words, a ceaseless circulation abetted by the technologies of television, film, photography, and the Internet” (p. 134). “Images, then,” they argue, “are important not because they represent reality but create it” (p. 133). As a supplement to the public sphere, then, the public screen is a concept that takes seriously the persuasion that occurs through “screens” (p. 130). Throughout history, these screens have taken on different forms. Whether these forms be that of desktop computer monitors, tablets, smart phones, television sets, or the front pages of newspapers, the content they disseminate has influenced the ways people perceive and discuss issues within the public sphere (p. 131).

In this sense, the public screen broadens notions of the public sphere by tying it to the information spaces that have developed as our world has become increasingly more connected through the processes of globalization. This interconnectedness is among a number of factors that have influenced a societal shift away from overtly racist acts. Historically, this can be observed in Eisenhower’s fear that if the U.S. were globally perceived as an overtly racist nation (e.g. on television), then it might lose allies or that consumerism might be slowed. More recently, the influence of the public screen can be observed in the witch-hunting and shaming that take place on social media platforms as users help shape new racism as covert by reinforcing narrow legal definitions of racism.
(i.e. racial discrimination) as an overt act of malice. Such actions disregard the covert ways that race informs governing practices and everyday interactions. However, I must be careful not to oversimplify the influence of the public screen and would be remiss if I failed to mention its connection to social media platforms that have also afforded users opportunities to reveal covert racism and organize social justice efforts that unfold in debates within the public sphere.

**Governing & the Present-Future / History-past Dialectic**

Hasian Jr. and Frank (1999) note the constant (re)production of generational social knowledge is not a process that follows an additive linear path” (p. 99). Instead, they argue that critics must “be sensitive to the dynamic interrelationship between rhetoric, history, and collective memory” (p. 99). Sturken (1997) also makes note of this important interdependence, when she suggests that “rhetorics of cultural memory and history [are] entangled rather than oppositional” (Sturken, 1997, p. 5, emphasis hers). In exploring governmentality at the local level and within the public sphere a dialectic relationship emerges. It falls within what Nakayama and Martin (2013) call “the present-future/history-past dialectic” (p. 68). This dialectic invites critics to analyze tensions surrounding a community’s interpretation and negotiation of past and present cultural meanings (p. 68).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note that cultural meanings are expressed through cultural metaphors “and the values entailed by them, are propagated in ritual” (p. 234). They elaborate on this point and suggest that “rituals are not random but are coherent with our view of the world and ourselves and with our system of personal metaphors and metonymies” (p. 235). In this case study, I explore how speakers use symbols and persuasive appeals to mediate the tension related to the present-future/history-past dialectic. In doing so, I argue that speakers commit to *rituals of self-renewal* and/or *rituals of disavowal* about American history and that these commitments can in turn reveal their ideological perspectives on education and the role that race and equality currently play in shaping education policies at the local level.
Speakers participate in rituals of self-renewal when they argue that “the past propels the nation forward, constantly producing new forms and new life” (Behdad, 2005, p. 81). In defining the rituals of self-renewal, I part ways with the portion of Behdad’s definition that suggests these rituals involve “efforts that do not engage with historical and current events to bring about emancipatory politics of memory” (p. 82, emphasis mine). Instead, I argue that rituals of self-renewal feed into Lee and Wander’s (1998) notion of discursive amnesty, which involves attempts to resurrect “knowledge that is subjugated and disqualified” in order to “promote a collective remembering that resurrects causes and events” that would otherwise have been “sealed into oblivion in the name of crime or political misconduct—insubordination, rebellion, revolution, or un-Americanism” (p. 155). In public sphere deliberations, speakers can reference rituals of self-renewal to give rhetorical force to their calls for revisionist historical narratives that otherwise have been silenced by the dominant culture.

Rituals of self-renewal are offset by rituals of disavowal. Behdad (2005) suggests that rituals of disavowal are informed by negations. In negation, he argues, we might acknowledge that an event happened, but deny its significance or refuse to take responsibility for it (p. 4). “As such, disavowal is a split perception of what constitutes our reality, a perception vacillating between denial and a supplementary acknowledgment” (p. 4). Disavowal, then, Behdad argues, “entails deception and deliberate attempts to cover up records and memories of the past. This form of denial, as Ross Chambers (2004) remarks, ‘ensures a perpetually renewable state of cultural innocence, but it does so at the cost of inevitably betraying some knowledge of the injustice, the guilt or the pain that the act of denial fails (or refuses) to acknowledge’ (Behdad citing Chambers, p. 5). Rituals of disavowal feed into what Lee and Wander (1998) call discursive amnesia, or “specific acts of collective forgetting that perpetuate privilege and interest in a particular economic and political context” (p. 152).

Lee and Wander argue that discursive amnesia and discursive amnesty are “like a person and his or her shadow,” in that they never part (p. 154). They note that discursive amnesia encourages
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official (i.e. continuous) histories, while discursive amnesty promotes alternative (i.e. revisionist) histories. They explain:

Thriving on unspoken and uncontested amnesia, official histories legitimize negative labeling of certain individuals. They are ‘rebels,’ ‘trouble makers,’ or ‘criminals.’ They are something that takes away their names and their history. They are something that shuts them up. An amnesty campaign affirms and publicizes alternative histories [and] pushes for a return to forgotten moments in order to inspire a recovery and reappropriation of the potential rhetorical force of artifacts that have historically been denied currency within a state’s dominant social order. (p. 153)

Through rituals of self-renewal community members can challenge what they perceive as whitewashings of history. White people can become white allies. They can support nonwhite interests in raising awareness about past racial oppression in order to challenge its residues of influence within the present. In contrast, through rituals of disavowal, community members can create zones of identification that encourage notions of nativism and support “whiteness as a set of cultural practices and politics based upon ideological norms that are lived but unacknowledged” (Kobayahsi & Peak, 2000, p. 394). In short, revisionist histories often attempt to shape reality in ways that disrupt whiteness; whereas, continuous histories often disavow such attempts in favor of maintaining status quo arrangements. For instance, communities might debate over whether it is better to celebrate Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples’ Day, or they might dispute whether La Raza ethnic studies courses are culturally productive or just plain un-American (Nelson, C. M., 2015). In order to understand the tensions surrounding the Advanced Placement U.S. History (APUSH) debates that unfolded in 2014 at Jefferson County Board of Education meetings, I first listen for and look back at points of identification that have shaped the boundaries of whiteness in that area.

Discursive Fragments and the Residues of El Norte and The Far West
When was the last time you saw a nation walking up your driveway? (Ono, 2013, p. 89)

In *American Nations*, Colin Woodard (2011) argues that the United States does not exist as a homogenous nation, but that it is instead a nation-state made up of 11 nations, or cultural hearths, each with its own “embedded… cultural framework of deep seated preferences and attitudes” (p. 2). Woodard supports his claims by tracing the historical circumstances of the U.S. back to its colonial roots, times during which European nations such as France, Spain, Great Britain, and the Netherlands made efforts to assert their dominance over what now makes up U.S. territory. Woodward suggests that, even today, we can observe the residues of these colonial processes through the distinct ethnocultural nations that have been left in their wake. Recognizing that human migratory patterns and population flows are fluid not rigid, he supports this argument by examining “many different types of maps—including maps showing the distribution of linguistic dialects, the spread of cultural artifacts, the prevalence of different religious denominations, and the county-by-county breakdown of voting in virtually every hotly contested presidential race in our history” (p. 2).

Woodard’s findings attempt to unearth the dominant cultural boundaries that are marked by noticeable differences in regional understandings of big concepts such as citizenship, freedom, and liberty. Woodard’s idea of American nations is not meant as a commentary on the precise beliefs of individuals but instead to capture the dominant cultural ethos extant within given regions. It is about the taken-for-granted and seemingly unchallenged assumptions that make up the norms for a region like El Norte and how those differ from the taken-for-granted and cultural mores of regions like the Deep South or the Far West. These assumptions and mores again might include common sense understandings of how society should work or what citizenship means.

Woodard’s maps create possibilities for critical scholars to locate ideological scripts that have flourished in the U.S. from its earliest formation and that have continued to influence regional beliefs, attitudes, and governing actions. In this way, Woodard’s work is especially useful for communication
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scholars who attempt to answer Kent Ono’s (2013) calls for scholarship that interrogates nationing, which involves the production of power relationships that aim “to put in place a particular worldview for those conceived of as members of the nation who will, in the future, do the labor of maintaining” that nation (p. 88). If we take seriously Woodard’s notion that the U.S. is constituted by several nations which have grown up together but remained culturally separate, then it becomes possible to observe efforts at nationing that exist within the U.S. When we travel across the U.S., we encounter these nationing efforts. For instance, I live in Ohio, and the last time I traveled to Alabama, I spoke with a local resident, who noticed my accent, identified me as a Yankee and, at some point during our conversation, told me that they “do things a little different down here”.

Woodard’s (2011) research draws from a wealth of artifacts that make visible the metonymic borders, such as the Deep South, that divide the U.S. into regions with historically unique dominant cultural practices. Throughout U.S. history, these regions have contested their borders and also formed alliances based on race, religion, and war (p. 3). His remapping of the U.S., then, has the potential to allow critics to understand “how larger geopolitics inform the biopolitics of race, which [are] at the same time a politics of space, territoriality, and colliding modernities” (Shome, 2013, p. 157). For my purposes, Woodard’s map provides an inroad to discursive fragments that will help me construct a text that explores whiteness as a cultural practice in Jefferson County, Colorado, a location that lies near the border of two of Woodard’s American nations: El Norte and The Far West. My goal here is to assemble at text (McGee, 1990) that includes historical narratives that illustrate whiteness as a hybridized cultural practice that achieves racial dominance in this region. My hope is that doing so emphasizes Frankenberg’s (1997) notion that whiteness has an amorphous nature within which “whites have never been culturally identical, nor have all the cultural practices preferred by whites been culturally dominant” (p. 19).
Woodard and Frankenberg’s research intersects. Each reveals characteristics of whiteness as a cultural practice by exploring elements of discourse that are “associated with Western European colonial expansion in the Americas” and in doing so help problematize notions of whiteness as a generic or “apparently empty cultural space” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 192). Although no map (or presentational symbol) can provide a flawless representation of where cultural fissures begin and end, Woodard’s maps give critics an international perspective on the development of the U.S. and help critics to identify some of the symbolic resources of a given community. By revealing the contrasting viewpoints, artifacts, and practices of various Western European colonizers, his work uncovers motives and attitudes that underpin how whiteness—as cultural practice—has operated differently in different locations across what is now the United States. This suggests that critics can locate dominant iterations of whiteness by exploring how colonizers within each American Nation developed a sense of the New World as home, since in doing so, they also shaped common knowledges about the rightful place of nonwhite others. As such, worldviews about the role of race in society are particularly salient along the once contested and now hidden boundaries of dominant Euro-American cultural hearths.

Woodard’s work, then, pairs well with Frankenberg’s notion that to understand whiteness as a cultural practice, critics must understand that whiteness is in a continual state of transformation directed by its “interactions with other systems, institutions, and logics” (p. 192). I begin with El Norte.

**El Norte**

Colonial El Norte was the neglected, far-flung borderland of a distant, collapsing empire and would remain such for a quarter of a millennium. Isolated from regular contact with other European cultures, it would develop its own unique cultural characteristics, many of them very different from those of Central Mexico (Woodard, 2011, p. 27).

According to Woodard, El Norte—which Spain colonized in the late sixteenth century—is the oldest of the 11 American nations (p. 24). The colony reflected Spain’s position as a superpower
during that time, and it included what is now northern Mexico, a west coast strip of California that ran as far north as San Francisco as well as the southern portions of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and a finger-like stretch of land that reached as far north as southern Colorado (p. 25). The Spanish empire attempted to assimilate Native (Indigenous) Americans into “Spanish culture by converting them to Catholicism and supervising their faith, work, dress, and conduct in special settlements governed by priests” (p. 28). Spanish colonizers, who later became known as norteños, believed the cultural practices of the indigenous peoples of its colonies were inferior. They called them gente sin razón (“people without reason”) but felt they could be educated and disciplined into becoming gente de razón [“people with reason”] over time... During this training period, Native apprentices would be called ‘neophytes,’ and every aspect of their lives would be monitored and controlled” (p. 28). The governing efforts of the Spanish promoted assimilation and allowed for romantic partnerships that crossed racial and cultural boundaries. Woodard, in part, attributes these practices to Spain’s lack of female colonists, which he argues, created an environment where inter-ethnic relationships were necessary to sustain settlement populations (p. 28). “The empire,” Woodard observes, “had never had many female colonists, so Spanish soldiers and officials took Aztec wives or otherwise begat mixed Indian-Spanish children, or mestizos. By the early 1700s, mestizos constituted a majority of the population of what is now Mexico and El Norte. Accordingly, race, which initially embodied the forms of colorism that exist today in places such as China and Latin America (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), became less influential in shaping social hierarchies within Spain’s New World settlements. As Woodard notes: “The Spanish world had a caste system—pure whites dominated the highest offices—but it broke down over time in the New World, especially on the empire’s northern frontier, where almost everyone had at least one nonwhite ancestor. Being part Indian themselves, colonial authorities weren’t inclined to denigrate Indians on racial grounds” (p. 28). While race was relatively deemphasized as a
justification for power throughout the Spanish colonies in what would now be Colorado, discipline was an aspect of governing that resonated as Spain established its foothold in that part of the New World.

This was reflected by the Spanish treatment and surveillance of Native Americans who swore allegiance to the empire. These people who came to be known as *neophytes* (or novice citizens) by Spanish missionaries were not allowed to “return to Native life, and those who escaped were hunted down and then flogged in the public square. The missionaries also used whips to drive neophytes to church services, to compel them to kneel at the right times, and to maintain work discipline in the fields, workshops, and tanneries…Because neophytes weren’t paid for their labor, it was relatively easy for priests to turn a profit, and they therefore had little incentive to ever declare the neophytes to be civilized and turn the mission properties over to them” (Woodard, 2011, p. 29). This system of oppression also influenced a non-neophyte culture that consisted of indigenous people as well as former colonizers who no longer felt beholden to the Spanish empire. Non-neophytes, often became cattle hands who moved from ranch to ranch, and their behaviors influenced what became the “cowboy culture” of the American West, characterized by a fierce sense of independence, self-sufficiency, and favorable attitudes toward commercialism (p.32).

As the Spanish empire became increasingly insolvent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, other European colonizers overtook El Norte’s eastern and northern borders. The invaders saw the interracial features of norteños as signs of inferiority and mongrelism. As Woodard (2011) notes:

Norteño landowners quickly found themselves strangers in their own land as tens of thousands of additional Appalachian and Deep Southern immigrants poured into the country. (Census records show that Appalachian people settled the north-central tier of the state, while Deep Southerners colonized east Texas, concentrating their slave plantations in the Brazos River valley.) The invaders regarded norteños as inferiors and enemies to be disposed, just as the
Cherokee had been… norteños were robbed of their livestock and landholdings by force, threats, and fraud, then relegated to the lower ranks of society. All norteños were denied citizenship and property rights unless they could prove they had supported the revolution, while a bill to forbid nonwhites from voting was only narrowly defeated (p. 212).

In El Norte, whiteness as a cultural practice can be characterized as promoting personal independence, self-sufficiency, benevolent attitudes toward commercialism, and acceptance of the integration of nonwhite peoples and their cultures. In, its bordering nation, the Far West whiteness would share some but not all of these characteristics.

**The Far West**

Jefferson County, Colorado is located near the hidden border between El Norte and the Far West.

The Far West, uniquely in North America, is a nation defined not by ethnoregional cultural force but by the demands of external institutions. It is the one place where environment really did trump the cultural heritage of settlers, imposing challenges that Euro-Americans tried to solve through the deployment of capital-intensive technologies: hard rock mines, railroads, telegraphs, Gatling guns, barbed wire, and hydroelectric dams. As a result, the Far West has long been an internal colony of the continent’s older nations and federal government, which possessed the necessary capital. Its people are still often deeply resentful of their dependent status but have generally backed polities guaranteed to preserve the status quo (Woodard, 2011, p. 244).

The Far West spans from the western portion of what is now North Dakota into the eastern half of Washington state. Its interior includes what is now Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. In addition, the Far West forms a border with what was El Norte in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. Woodard argues that the Far West was “the last region of North America to be colonized,
and for good reason; it was remarkably inhospitable for Euro-Atlantic civilizations, with their emphasis on cropland agriculture, water-dependent plants and animals, and fixed settlements” (p. 243).

Since early colonizers were so dependent on jobs supplied by outsiders, labor unions developed strong roots in the Far West. An important part of their work was ensuring that nonwhites did not take “white” jobs. Although the Territory of Colorado was a free territory as early as 1860, white workers used strategies of de facto segregation with de jure segregation to suppress marginalized voices. Woodard notes that “local railroad labor unions focused ‘not on advocating for their constituents but on keeping nonwhites (especially Chinese) out of the mines and other workplaces, sometimes by use of mob violence” (p. 247). For instance, in the years leading up to the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of all Chinese laborers, white working class men in Denver organized several anti-Chinese riots (Ellis, 2011; Wortman, 1965). Some were stoked by the local press. In 1880, “Denver’s Rocky Mountain News… launched an anti-Chinese campaign igniting Denver's working class. In its October 23 issue, for example, the newspaper called the Chinese the "Pest of the Pacific" and pointed out that if they invaded Colorado in greater numbers, white men would starve and women would be forced into prostitution” (Ellis, 2011). These xenophobic appeals motivated white workers, who in late October of 1880, attempted to run nearly 300 Chinese people out of Denver. A mob of 3,000 white men flooded into Denver’s Chinatown where they “sacked businesses, burned homes, and attacked innocent victims. By early evening rioters had burned every laundry in Chinatown. When the mob found Sing Lee, a laundryman, they pounced on him, kicking him as he lay on the ground. The helpless laundryman was dragged down the street with a rope around his neck and eventually was beaten to death” (Ellis, 2011).

The Far West was marked by unstable race relations. While peaceful alliances could be formed, racial tensions could also quickly erupt into dehumanizing acts of violence as evident in the Sandy Creek Massacre during which a volunteer Colorado Calvary unit murdered more than 100 Arapaho and
Cheyenne indigenous people, most of whom were women and children (Svaldi, 1989). Today, much of the land in the Far West is still owned by the federal government, including approximately a third of Colorado (p. 251). In the Far West, whiteness as a cultural practice can be characterized by adverse attitudes toward government intervention, a resentment of outside corporations, and ambivalent attitudes regarding the integration of nonwhite peoples and their cultures.

_El Norte & The Far West: Revealing the Hidden Borderlands_

_Borderlands address a sense of in-betweeness and overlapping boundaries of identities and communal spaces and the tensions of embodiment and location._ (Cooks, 2013, p. 125)

As Kobayashi and Peake (2000) note: “All geographies are racialized” (p. 395). One way, then, to (re)construct “white” as a color, and denormalize it, is to characterize whiteness as a cultural practice rooted in time, space, and locale (Frankenberg, 1993; Haritgan, 1992). For instance, although the Spanish colonizers who settled in El Norte initially engaged in practices that supported a racial caste system, that system broke down due to Spain’s lack of female colonizers. In this case, whiteness retained its paternalistic and gendered qualities but race lost some of its rhetorical force as interracial couples established a mestizo culture. In El Norte, diversity became a means of survival and thus a point of cultural coherence whose residues, I will argue, are apparent during the 2014 board of education deliberations in Jefferson County (Jeffco).

“Metonymic concepts,” Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note, “allow us to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else” (p. 39). As metonym, El Norte came to represent the reclamation of territory, properties, narratives, and most importantly histories that were taken by other American nations (i.e. the Deep South, Greater Appalachia, and the Far West) as they overwhelmed and marginalized nortenos.

In the Far West, as in El Norte, whiteness as a cultural practice was marked by a complex of contradictory rhetorical appeals that helped shape reality as a mixture of de facto and de jure
segregation. However, unlike El Norte, in the Far West exclusion functioned as a symbolic and in some ways material means of white survival. Efforts to isolate populations according to race were influenced by an uncertain labor market and by competition for scarce resources. In this case, the remote conditions of the Far West helped produce an environment within which the labor anxieties of white working-class males informed a brand of whiteness that was marked by performances of exclusion. As such, whiteness as a cultural practice embodied attitudes toward nonwhites that depicted them as a threat to the survival and comfort of white male laborers. These anxieties were further stoked by the Far West’s dependence on federal government and elite corporate outsiders who leveraged the threat of nonwhite labor as a way to increase profit margins. In the Far West, then, exclusion and local control became sources of cultural coherence. As metonym, the Far West came to represent the entwinement of anti-authoritarian, anti-federal government sentiment and xenophobic predispositions. The residues of these practices and beliefs, I will argue, are also apparent during the 2014 board of education deliberations in Jefferson County.

The dominant practices that helped shape attitudes and knowledge about race in El Norte and the Far West afford us insight into the contingent and geographically specific ways that whiteness was constituted and articulated as a cultural practice. Uncovering these practices illuminates the hidden borderlands between two dominant cultures (El Norte and the Far West) that continue to resonate, ignoring today’s state boundaries and retaining their potential to influence the agendas explored within current community deliberations. As Delgado (2000) notes, borderlands are a “physical and symbolic space of tension and blending where social worlds confront one another” (p. 389). By understanding these “nations” as having birthed different registers of white dominance, we create new opportunities to understand how whiteness does not express the cultural practices of a particular white population writ large. Instead, El Norte and the Far West permit a glimpse into how whiteness operates “as an ongoing and fluctuating process of cultural identification” that is specific to place and social space.
(Hartigan, 1997, p. 502). Teasing out these complexities helps us avoid committing to genealogies that are directed at characterizing whiteness as the rhetorical establishment of some consistent cultural order, but to instead view constructions of white dominance “as resonant but distinctive structures” (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000, p. 499).

Although not always referred to by name (e.g. El Norte and the Deep South), the borders between American nations are referenced in public sphere discussions. For instance, at a school board meeting in Colorado a speaker might tell the board: “This is not Texas!” In this case, the speaker’s reference to Texas taps into powerful discourses that move beyond current differences in the education policies of Colorado and Texas. Instead, one could argue that the speaker’s assertion that Colorado is not Texas derives its rhetorical force by recalling the hidden borders between El Norte’s mestizo culture and the white aristocratic societies of the Deep South. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note that “the social reality defined by a culture affects its conception of physical reality,” and they suggest that, “what is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his [or her] social reality and of the way in which that shapes his [or her] experience of the physical world” (p. 146). If we take seriously, Leda Cook’s (2013) assertion that “Borders and borderlands are complex spaces where bodies overlap and cultures and identities are never pure or easy,” then it becomes imperative to uncover how identities exist and have always existed in multiplicities (p. 115). One way to do so is by analyzing interactions in which community members participate in deliberations that involve questions of fairness, equity, and morality, and where “material and symbolic issues may be deeply intertwined” (Tracy & Durfy, 2007, p. 226).

The Public Sphere & Ordinary Democracy

The public sphere includes social spaces where people come together and deliberate on pressing issues (Habermas, 2004). The public sphere is a communicative space where public opinion is both generated and marshaled as a political force (Fraser, 2007, p. 7). Public spheres, Hauser (1999a)
notes, are deliberative arenas within which “citizens can engage freely in communication about matters of mutual interest, invent their common sense of what appears before them, and assert their common views in ways that identify them as a public” (p. 18). In the public sphere “civil judgement captures the experience of a shared world… [and] expresses a genuinely public opinion” (Hauser, 1999b, p. 80). The public sphere, then, provides a venue for community members to advance their cultural perspectives as they weigh on the qualities that make for a “good” citizen.

Many scholars have criticized Habermas’s conception of the public sphere. In doing so, they have acknowledged it as an oversimplified formulation that favors a bourgeoisie perspective and argued that it is overly reliant on normative ideals for persuasion (Fraser, 1990; Asen, 2015; Schudson, 1994). Still, the idea of a public sphere has retained its spatially descriptive value as a communication concept, and scholars have worked to refine and nuance its explanatory capabilities. Some have used the concept of strong and weak publics to emphasize the notion that not all social actors carry the same rhetorical force when they attempt to influence public opinion (Warner, 2002; Asen, 2015; Fraser, 1990). Other scholars have enriched the concept of the public sphere by discussing outside and interconnected forces that shape the deliberative possibilities within the public sphere. For instance, Hauser (1999a) argues that deliberation in the public sphere is informed by epideictic speech performances wherein people create narratives that “constitute and validate their tradition” and thereby set the conditions for the public sphere (Hauser, p. 18). As noted earlier in this chapter, Deluca and Peeples (2002) opine that mass media supplements the public sphere through an interconnected public screen that supplies a “constant current of images and words, abetted by the technologies of television, film, photography, and the Internet,” which both distracts people and beckons their political engagement (p. 134). In light of all of this, however, the key function of the public sphere remains its descriptive insight into how community members engage one another in a democratic society that “requires the translation and transformation of private trouble into public issues” (Biesta, 2011, p.
Public sphere theorizations allow critics to highlight the deliberation that occurs when citizens participate in democracy. Democracy is a vision, Gastil (2000) suggests, not a routinized practice (p. 10). Democracy is a process of settling and unsettling governing actions.

Deliberation, as Bessette (1997) observes, “is a reasoning process in which the participants seriously consider substantive information and seek to decide individually and to persuade each other as to what constitutes good public policy” (p. 46). In an optimistic sense, deliberation is about debating, negotiating and weighing the meaning of proposed actions in order to arrive at a consensus about how best to move forward (Mendelberg, 2002). Critics, however, have questioned whether or not such acts of consensus actually capture deliberation as it unfolds in the communities across the U.S. For instance, feminist scholarship on deliberation has shed light on “the ways in which social inequalities can infect deliberation, even in the absence of any formal exclusions” (Fraser, 1990, p. 64). As Mansbridge argues, deliberation can work to conceal domination that silences citizens based on their gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, and race (Fraser citing Mansbridge, p. 64). Motions toward a happy (or unhappy) consensus actually rarely seem to be operating when opposing groups deliberate.

Scholars, therefore, have paved other avenues to understand the processes of deliberation that unfold within the public sphere. Mouffe (1999) prefers the term “conflictual consensus” or as a “consensus on the [existing] ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, [but] dissent about their interpretation” (p. 756). Hauser (1999) moves even further from notions of consensus and argues that “deliberation discourse are definitively factional, with the engaged parties each attempting to appropriate historicity” (p. 18). In this same vein, political philosopher Jacques Ranciere (2003) argues that the public sphere divides along two distinct bodies: (1) the police order and (2) politics. The police order “is all-inclusive in that everyone is included [and] has a particular place, role, position, or identity in it…no one is excluded from the order” (Biesta, 2011, p. 144). Politics, on the other hand,
describes “the mode of acting that perturbs this arrangement” (Ranciere, 2003, p. 226). Put another way, politics arise when people disagree with their positions within the existing police order (read hierarchy). Their dissensus compels them to take up political activity and attempt to “reconfigure” the existing policing order via their claims of inequality, marginalization, or unfair censorship (p. 144).

School board meetings provide unique locations to observe dissensus since they offer a forum for citizens to exercise their democratic rights to influence the education policies and practices that affect their community (Tracy & Drufy 2007; Asen, 2015; Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000). Tracy and Drufy (2007) argue that:

School board meetings can be dull affairs, but they also are regular sites for the playing out of especially heated conflict. Because of obvious and immediate consequences for citizens’ own children and grandchildren, talk often gets emotional. Particular conflicts may be about money and which groups of students get what; they may be about symbolic issues related to fairness and equity, academic excellence, or what is moral and right; or, as is often the case, the material and symbolic issues may be deeply intertwined (p. 226).

School board meetings expressly involve interactions between the community and its elected officials and provide citizens a venue with which to exact noticeable change through participatory democracy (Zarefsky, 1986). Citizens, then, publicly engage in attempts to influence governing. Howell (2005) argues the significance of school boards is far-reaching since they represent “the only political institution that enables a community to impart its history, values, and identity to its children” (p. 12). As Collins (2009) notes “democracy is a process, a way of building community and getting business done—it is typically something that is not bestowed upon us by people at the top, but rather something that bubbles up from below” (p. 12). Asen (2015) highlights the ties between deliberation, democracy, and education when he opines that “local participation in the formulation of education policy enacts both democracy and education as processes of meaning-making” (p. 184). Asen adds that “policies
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partially made by members of a community help construct ways of living” (p. 184). The ways of living in a democracy that Asen alludes to are in part historically embedded in the cultural practices of a given community and in part fluid, contested, and mediated through dissensus about those same practices, all of which takes place within an ever-changing milieu of social hierarchies.

To account for this specialized form of deliberative democracy, Tracy, McDaniel, and Gronbeck (2007) coined the term ordinary democracy, which includes the talk in regular public meetings, particularly school board meetings, “where officials listen, or at least act like they are listening, to citizens [as well as] how officials vote and how they justify their votes” (pp. 7-8). Tracy (2011) notes that “ordinary democracy is shaped by a host of individual and group-level purposes. It reflects the routine concerns of those who plan meetings, of citizens who attend and speak, and of members of the public who read the news and watch the cable broadcast” (p. 3). Ordinary democracy differs from many other conceptualizations of democracy, Tracy argues, in that it “begins with existing institutions and describes what is occurring in them. School boards are one site of ordinary democracy” (p. 4). As a whole, she notes, “Ordinary democracy includes communicative actions that uphold the ideal of democracy, and it includes actions that challenge, appeal to, and subvert that ideal” (p. 3).

Because school boards are actively involved in interpreting everything from the civil rights movement to theories of evolution, school board meetings can reveal the cultural practices of a given community and more. Asen (2015) suggests that school board meetings, which are inherently linked to a community’s chosen processes for socialization, can become sites of identification and/or differentiation. “Board policies,” Asen writes, “may express shared values and goals, or, when community members perceive a conflict between their values and goals and the board, controversy may erupt” (p. 5). Ordinary democracy is the sometime messy, extemporaneous speech everyday citizens engage in, and it allows rhetorical critics to shed light on how community members, engaged in the public sphere, appropriate discourses to make claims about education policy in relation to their
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communities (Tracy, McDaniel, & Gronbeck, 2007, Asen, 2105). These appropriations and claims reveal how community members understand (or misunderstand) the implications of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and able-bodiness within the interrelated contexts of communal values, cultural practices, and public education systems. They also permit critics access to the rationale applied by citizen policymakers as they decide what is best for the community (Tracy et al., 2007).

In advocating studies in ordinary democracy, Tracy and Durfy (2007) argue that “we need an understanding of what participation looks like when many citizens are attending public meetings and speaking out if we are to render a grounded judgment about civic life’s well-being or decline” (p. 224). In order to help make sense of how citizens participate during moments of ordinary democracy that are particularly charged, Tracy and Drufy coined the phrase *reasonable hostility*, which is “a type of angry expression directed at officials that is essential in a well-functioning, democratic body” (p. 224). Tracy and Drufy elaborate on this definition and note that reasonable hostility involves “expressions of disagreement, criticism, and outrage” that energize community discussion without “tearing the relational fabric that is needed to sustain democracy” (p. 245). They offer six strategies that citizens use to express their disagreement, criticism, and outrage in moments of ordinary democracy (p. 236), listed below:

1. *Feeling-limned description* occurs when a community member characterizes the environment the board has created in order to remind the board that the community good is at stake.
2. *An avowal of feelings* occurs when a community member affirms negative feelings about the board’s actions such as disbelief, surprise, shock, and concern.
3. *Rhetorical questions* are used by community members to make hostile assertion that encourage audience engagement. Rhetorical questions also enable “speakers to protect face, while (somewhat) lessening the degree of face-attack on the other” (p. 239).
4. *Reported Speech* “is packaged as just saying what another said and it is left up to the listener to draw conclusions about what It means” (p. 240). These efforts are often qualified by introductory phrases such as “and I quote” or “According to…”.
5. *The use of ‘god’ and ‘devil’ terms* (Weaver, 1953), such as “the children” and “politicize”.
6. *Meeting rules as weapons* occur when community members directly reference civility or respectfulness, or even the time limits that constrain their speech.

The six strategies speaker use to express reasonable hostility point to speech conventions of ordinary democracy that help community members create sites of identification and/or differentiation. They do not get at the heart of the way speakers use symbols to shape reality, but they do call attention to the ways that speakers garner attention at contentious school board meetings. In this way, they afford me an inroad to discuss what I believe are the deeper rhetorical appeals made by speakers at a school board meeting in Golden, Colorado on October 2, 2014.

In this chapter, I attempt to understand the cultural practices, rhetorical constitutions and rhetorical trajectories informing whiteness and its performances that took place as community members in Jefferson County, Colorado met in the public sphere to discuss education policy. The moments of ordinary democracy that unfolded are describes the moments and rhetorical rituals that happen when community members—utilizing their democratic freedom—address citizen-policymakers at public meetings, particularly at local school board meetings.

**Procedures**

I first learned about the AP U.S. History (APUSH) debate Jefferson County, Colorado in 2014 from an Associated Press article as I scrolled through Twitter on my phone. At the time, I had been reading Ali Behdad’s (2005) book: *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States*. Behdad’s text attempts to recover voices that, otherwise, have been suppressed and marginalized by dominant historical narratives that depict the U.S. as a welcoming nation. So, I was attuned to thinking about U.S. history as a site of contestation and the supposed battle over APUSH taking place in Jefferson County, Colorado piqued my interest. My research here is, in part, informed by observations of videos that were posted to Jeffco Public Schools’ (JPS) website. Jeffco live streams its board of education meetings and provides a publicly available archive of those videos.
To familiarize myself with the rhetorical context and ongoing disputes between community members and the school board in Jefferson County (Colorado), I keyed the search terms such as “Colorado AND AP U.S. History AND debates” into ProQuest database. I also utilized the basic Google search engine to locate information on the College Board, Common Core State Standards, and the politicizing of U.S. History. The media artifacts I selected from these searches are represented in the “Reference” section of this paper. I attempted to select media outlets that provided different perspectives, some more conservative others more liberal leaning, as well as traditionally trusted news sources known for their accurate reporting. Where it concerns artifacts, I also visited the Jefferson County (Jeffco) Public Schools website, downloaded its October 2, 2014 meeting agenda, and listened to the streaming audio of the meeting that the site provides, much of which I transcribed. These artifacts are my informational foundation for the meeting and the media’s coverage surrounding it. For demographic information, I consulted the U.S. Census Bureau, the College Board’s website, as well as the Jeffco schools own annual reports available on its website.

Colorado in an Era of Late Capitalism

In this era of late capitalism, which has produced greater income equalities between the wealthiest one percent of the U.S. and the rest of its citizens (Harvey, 2005), Colorado has not been a stranger to calls for economic solutions that promote privatizing public institutions as a way to generate more capital and to increase the quality of public institutions by making them compete with privately-run doppelgangers.

In 1992, Colorado became the only state to ratify a Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR). Conservatives and libertarians managed to push through TABOR in the classically purple state by promising greater taxpayer freedom and less government waste. The measure handcuffs state spending power by limiting the amount of tax revenue allocated to the state for its public service programs. It does this by calculating the current year’s inflation and population growth and comparing it with the
previous year’s revenue limit. For instance, a 1% climb in inflation with a 2% population growth would allow the state to allocate 3% more for its police, firefighters, schools, and other services than had in the previous year. Any other increases in state revenue becomes a TABOR surplus, or a refund to taxpayers (Buchanan, 2015). TABOR prioritizes the market ideological position that “collective benefits [are] produced by harnessing the power of self-interested action through the power of market mechanisms” (Smith, 2004, p. 6). In the early 1990s when TABOR was implemented, Colorado had seen consistent growth for more than a decade, but by the end of the ‘90s that growth had decelerated, and a recession in the early 2000s meant less state dollars for public services. According to TABOR, taxpayers can vote to change the amount allocated to the state, but these votes often fail.

In 2000, however, Colorado voters passed Amendment 23. The amendment was a reaction to the state’s decade-long underfunding of its K-12 schools. It limited TABOR’s grip on the General Fund by permitting state spending exemptions on transportation, English language proficiency, at-risk student, and special education programs. In 2005, voters supported Referendum C, a measure that suspended TABOR for five years and allowed the state to avoid “a looming fiscal crisis and the inability to pay for essential services” (Johnson, 2005, para. 5). Conservatives framed the suspension as an attack on taxpayers. Liberals framed it as a victory for middle- and working-class families over tax cuts that benefit the wealthy. In 2013, Amendment 66, a proposed $950 million tax hike devised to pump money back into the K-12 education system by setting up a two-tiered tax system that would expect a higher tax rate from the wealthy, was soundly defeated by voters. That same year, voters legalized the recreational use of marijuana. Many supporters backing the legalization effort pitched it as a way to help fund the state’s public education services. Each of these amendments illuminates the constant tension between a communal ideological position that values state welfare programs and a market-driven ideological position that favors privatization. The dialogic tension between these value centers plays out at the local level.
Questions about how best to teach history, sex education, English literature and even science in K-12 schools often spark community debates. These sorts of debates usually include topics such as the adoption of textbooks, curriculum frameworks, and what is “acceptable” for the community youth to be taught in local schools. Even though the information age (i.e. digital age) has complicated the ways in which young people can access information on just about any subject, community members still count on their schools to help students process that information in ways that promote morality and citizenship.

Colorado is “one of six states where local school boards, as opposed to the State Board of Education, can change a district’s curriculum” (Rose & Werner, 2014). The local power to make decisions about curriculum makes Colorado a particularly interesting site for explorations into ordinary democracy. In this chapter, I am interested in community-level deliberation directed at deciding on how best to teach Advanced Placement U.S. History courses offered to high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors in Jefferson County, Colorado. These debates unfold at a school board meeting (i.e. in ordinary democracy), where community members test ideas, negotiate meaning, and create zones of identification as they mediate interrelated conflicts about history courses, teacher compensation, and the privatizing of public schools.

The Jeffco community consists of a predominately-white population and includes a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. In 2010, 92% of its nearly 535,000 residents identified as white alone, and 80% identified as white alone, non-Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Jeffco’s population is largely middle to upper middle class. According to data from the 2010 U.S. Census, Jeffco’s median income at $66,075 is eighth among the 64 counties in Colorado and about $15,000 greater than the U.S. median income reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics in August of 2011. In 2009,
the county reported a medium single-family home value of about $260,000, which is $24,000 more than the state of Colorado’s double the national average for that same year.

The Jefferson County Board of Education is made up of five unpaid citizen policymakers, and it meets in Golden, Colorado, a well-to-do, predominantly white, suburb on the western outskirts of Denver. More than 85,500 students attend Jeffco schools making it Colorado’s largest school district. The JBOE oversees curriculum and budgets for Jeffco’s 17 high schools as well as its elementary, middle and charter schools. At 67% of the total student population, students who self-identify as white alone (non-Hispanic) still represent the majority of Jeffco’s student population. Students who self-identify as Hispanic (any race) represent 24% of the student population. The remainder of the student population consists of 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Multiple Race, 1% black, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (2012-2013 Jeffco Annual Report). These numbers reflect a growing Hispanic population in the county and suggest that Jeffco schools are more diverse than is the Jeffco community as a whole.

In 2013, Jefferson County voters elected three conservative candidates, who had run on the same fiscally responsible slate as WNW. Ken Witt became board president, John Newkirk board treasurer, and Julie Williams, board vice president. Americans For Prosperity, backed by Libertarians Charles and David Koch, produced commercials supporting Witt, Newkirk, and Williams during their election run and throughout their time as board members (Lane, 2014). Witt, Newkirk, and Williams, were joined by minority board members Jill Fellman and former board president Lesley Dahlkemper. The group formed what would become a contentious five-person Jeffco BOE.

Internal tensions between the newly elected board members and the board minority holdovers were made public in February of 2013 when 12-year Jeffco superintendent, Cindy Stevenson, resigned after accusing the board majority of consistently refusing to work with her (Deam, 2014). At a volatile
Jeffco BOE meeting on February 8, 2013, some community members cheered on Stevenson while others screamed, “Go witch!” as she blamed the board for her sudden resignation. Stevenson said:

This board approved nearly half a million dollars on charter schools whose student achievement is nothing to rave about…This district is moving in the wrong direction with this decision. I don’t support it. (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014, Feb. 8)

After a sustained applause, board member Jill Fellman responded:

I just want to say to be part of this board that is doing this makes me sick. I have nothing but admiration and respect for Dr. Stevenson… She has led this district to an excellence across this country and I apologize on behalf of the entire board.

In May of 2014, the board again disagreed, this time on the appointment of Dan McMinimee, from neighboring Douglas County, to replace Stevenson as superintendent. That same month, McMinimee’s compensation package—$75,000 more than what Stevenson had been paid—also became a point of contention. Some community members argued that the package was inconsistent with the fiscally responsible platform that the board had run on (Torres, 2014). Soon thereafter, the board and McMinimee found themselves locked in contract negotiations with Jeffco teachers represented by local, state, and national unions. McMinimee proposed a new pay-for-performance structure to evaluate teacher performance and offered new and incoming teachers a proportionally larger raise than was offered to Jeffco’s veteran teachers. The pay-for-performance proposal “did not sit well” with the teachers union and prompted the NEA to encourage a teacher “sick out” on September 19, 2014 (Lane, 2014). As Lane (2014) notes, the union argued that the evaluation processes were unclear and included proposed evaluators who were inexperienced either in education or in the course subjects they would be asked to evaluate.

On the eve of the planned “sick out”, Jeffco board vice president Julie Williams, who believed the College Board’s new AP U.S. History (APUSH) framework painted a negative image of America,
proposed a curriculum review committee to review the adoption of the framework for objectionable materials. Her proposal echoed the sentiments of the Republican National Committee (RNC) and Americans Principled in Action (APA). One month earlier, the RNC had denounced the College Board’s APUSH framework as a radical revisionist view of America and its history (MacNeal, 2014). In addition, the APA sent an open letter to the College Board that stated:

Instead of striving to build a 'City upon a Hill,' as generations of students have been taught, the colonists are portrayed as bigots who developed 'a rigid racial hierarchy' that was in turn derived from 'a strong belief in British racial and cultural superiority… The new Framework continues its theme of oppression and conflict by reinterpreting Manifest Destiny from a belief that America had a mission to spread democracy and new technologies across the continent to something that was built on a belief in white racial superiority and a sense of American cultural superiority (MacNeal, 2014).

In this same vein, Williams’s review committee proposal requested that nine members be selected to ensure Jeffco’s curriculum choices promoted “patriotism”, “respect for authority”, and “the benefits of the free-market system” rather than “encourage or condone civil disorder, social strife or disregard of the law” (Canedo, 2014). Williams’s proposed nine-member panel would be “appointed by the board and report directly to them on an ongoing basis. The committee would most likely be comprised of lay citizens — not necessarily education and curriculum specialists” (Garcia, 2014). The full proposal is listed below:

The committee’s initial projects will be a review of the AP US History curriculum and elementary health curriculum. Review criteria shall include the following: instructional materials should present the most current factual information accurately and objectively. Theories should be distinguished from fact. Materials should promote citizenship, patriotism, essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system, respect for authority and respect for individual rights. Materials should not encourage or condone civil disorder, social strife or disregard of the law. Instructional materials should present positive aspects of the United States and its heritage. Content pertaining to political and social movements in history should present balanced and factual treatment of the positions (Jeffco Public Schools).
Williams’s proposal embodies the ritual of disavowal in that it attempts to “cover up records and memories of the past” (Behdad, 2005). In addition, the proposal promotes a “collective forgetting” about the realities of a national past marked by oppression and conflict. Many in the community understood the proposal as a way for the board to politicize APUSH content by bypassing the recommendations of two existing committees charged with reviewing course content and curriculum for the district.

On September 19, 2014, Jeffco teachers held their union-suggested ‘sick out,’ which effectively shut down two Jeffco high schools (Slevin & Banda, 2014). Two days later—organized by both word of mouth and through social media—nearly a thousand Jeffco students from six of the county’s high schools walked out of their classrooms to support the teachers and what they perceived as a board effort to censor history classes (Slevin & Banda, 2014). Many students lined up along highways throughout the county and held signs with slogans such as “Education Without Limitations” and “Teach Us the Truth!”

On September 24, less than a week after the first student walkout, Williams told Denver FOX 31 that she had briefly skimmed parts of the College Board’s new APUSH framework and that it “reject[ed] the history that has been taught in our country for generations” omitting figures such as Thomas Jefferson, John Addams, Ben Franklin, even Martin Luther King Jr (Erdahl, 2014). Williams said these omissions had prompted her to call for the curriculum review committee. When FOX 31 reporter Kent Erdahl pressed Williams by showing her evidence that all 10 of the leading textbooks approved for use with the new APUSH framework included ample discussion of each figure, Williams said: “even if they are in the textbooks, it doesn’t mean the teachers teach it. And this isn’t about teachers. This really goes back to the union bosses being upset about not having control over the process of our budget and the teachers’ pay” (Erdahl, 2014).
On September 25, still in the wake of recent teacher ‘sickout’ demonstrations and the subsequent student walkouts that generated national media attention, Witt told Channel 9 News reporters that teachers were just angry about the pay-for-performance compensation plan and were only “supporting the demonstrations as a pretext for union demands” (Slevin, 2014). Witt also accused the students of being duped by union operatives who had marked Jefferson County as a union battleground earlier that summer. “‘It’s never OK,’” Witt told reporters, “to use kids as pawns” (Slevin, 2014). Williams, who also interviewed with reporters, said that she didn’t think the community should be encouraging its “kids to be little rebels.” (Slevin, 2014). Their comments worked to further incense many of Jeffco’s parents and students. Witt would later say his accusations were aimed at the union’s antagonistic policies and not at students, but the damage was done.

Media outlets around the country framed the protests as the latest evidence of an ongoing culture war between progressives and conservatives concerning which historical accounts of the U.S. should be popularized in its public schools. (Deam, 2014; Canedo, 2014; Kurtz, 2014; Lane, 2014; Slevin & Banda, 2014). Journalists and political pundits alike weighed in on the controversy from a number of perspectives. The *Washington Post* called the debate a “tale of two countries” (Pitts, 2014) and portrayed Jeffco as “ground zero for a new culture fight” over how to teach U.S. history (Tumulty & Layton, 2014). Ed Schultz, host of *MSNBC*’s “The Ed Show”, remarked that “a conservative school board in suburban Denver wants to rewrite history.” *Fox News* host Gretchen Carlson criticized the Jeffco students and asked: “What’s up with these punks?” She added that if the students had a problem with America, they could leave (Deam, 2014). Then presidential candidate-to-be, Ben Carson told reporters: “I think most people, when they finish that course, they’d be ready to sign up for ISIS” (Deam, 2014). *PBS* would later feature the Jeffco APUSH debate in a special called “Million-Dollar School Board” as part of its series *Postcards from the Great Divide* and remark the school board
meetings demonstrated how “national groups exploit local conflicts to advance their agendas, leaving a divided electorate in their wake” (Alvarez, Kolker, & Stekler, 2016).

On October 2, a day in which a JBOE meeting would become a national spectacle, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado, joined by seven other groups, described the board’s proposal as “deeply problematic” (MacNeal, 2014). The ACLU argued that asking teachers to remove civil disorder from curricula was “tantamount to telling them to abandon the teaching of history” (MacNeal, 2014).

*Jeffco BOE: October 2, 2014 Meeting*

The agenda for the October 2 meeting included the presentation of an award, decisions about administrative appointments, discussion about a grant, among a few other items. However, it was the first item on the agenda that brought hundreds of community members as well as national and local journalists: public comment on the board’s proposal to establish its own Curriculum Review Committee, a nine-member group that would the board hoped would help it oversee Jeffco’s existing content and resource review committees and more specifically the district’s implementation of the *College Board’s* new APUSH framework.

At the meeting, community members addressed the board, which sat at U-shaped table. From the public’s perspective, superintendent McMinimee was seated on the far left. Seated next to McMinimee from left to right were board members Newkirk, Williams, Witt, Dalhkemper, and Fellman. Following the pledge of allegiance, Williams was given a brief opportunity to defend her proposal, which had become a lightning rod for debate within the community. Williams attempted to assuage concerns about censorship and encourage her audience to identify the committee as a way to promote transparency. Williams said:

We all know I put forth a proposal for the board to have a committee, which reports directly to the board to review Jeffco curriculum. It is clear to me that everyone in this room, all of us,
want to be sure that there is no censorship in our courses… My proposal was aimed to increase
community engagement [laughter from the crowd] and transparency, so people do know what
is being taught to their children… So, I offer this hope to you: I hope that this is a defining
moment for this board, that there is not one member up here that would support censorship.
Clearly our community is saying ‘let’s assure there’s no censorship and I agree with that…. We
want increased transparency, increased accountability, and increased community engagement.
(Jeffco Public Schools, 2014, Oct. 2)

Dalhkemper responded to Williams and called for a motion to kill the proposed curriculum
review committee before public comment even began, which led to an antagonistic exchange between
Witt and Dalhkemper. Witt quickly opposed the measure as a premature action, and said that he
wanted to hear from the community first. Dalhkemper’s motion was, then, defeated in a 3-2 vote with
Witt, Newkirk, and Williams voting down the measure and Fellman and Dalhkemper supporting it.
The vote was typical of the board’s voting patterns since its reshuffling following the 2013 election.

After the vote, Witt announced that students would be given deference to speak first, since they
might have homework or other responsibilities. He then explained the rules of order for each individual
or group who wished to speak and the times designated for either presentation type: one minute for
individuals, three minutes for groups. Times were loosely kept, seemingly at Witt’s whim, although
groups regularly were permitted to go over on time. The final rule announced by the board president
was that audience members should refrain from clapping or cheering since the noise might disrupt the
meeting or make it difficult to hear speakers. Public comment began. Speakers would address
everything from full-day kindergarten programs and free-lunch programs to funding for charter schools
with some speakers of the more than 60 speakers addressing multiple issues over the course of what
became nearly 3 hours of public comment time. For the purposes of this analysis, however, I have
chosen speeches and actions that either directly or indirectly reference the proposed curriculum committee and issues of history or censorship.

*Rituals of Self-Renewal & Rituals of Disavowal*

The debates about APUSH during the October 2 meeting reflect a dialectic between rituals of self-renewal and rituals of disavowal. As the meeting unfolds, speakers make persuasive appeals, attempt to shape knowledge, and build community. In doing so, speech at the meeting oscillates between positions that promote discursive amnesty through rituals of renewal and positions that advocate discursive amnesia through rituals of disavowal. As community members attempted to persuade their audiences (including the board), they often utilized one or more of the strategies for expressing *reasonable hostility* in order to intensify their messages. (Tracy & Durfy, 2007). Again, these strategies include: (1) Feeling-limned description, (2) An avowal of feelings, (3) Rhetorical questions, (4) Reported Speech, (5) The use of ‘god’ and ‘devil’ terms, and (6) Meeting rules as weapons. Rituals of self-renewal are directed at producing new forms of understanding about the past (Behdad, 2005). They draw rhetorical force by tapping into desires for discursive amnesty, which involve revisiting past narratives of marginalized communities that have been suppressed or forgotten (Lee and Wander, 1998).

Public comment opened with a speech from Casey Elizabeth McAndrew, a senior at Ralston Valley High School and a former APUSH student. McAndrew, who is white, said:

I took APUSH history last year. And, this course challenged me and challenged my critical thinking skills and it taught me that democracy is strong enough to withstand examination. And, in fact, it’s that its future depends upon it. On her profile, Mrs. Williams writes that she wants, wants, to ensure our children have access to a great education, and that will equip them with necessary skills to thrive later in life. And, I agree with you completely, and we find common ground here. But how can we, like, simplify our difficult pasts to see if we want to
seek a better future. So, with this in mind, I ask you not to form this committee. You already have two in place that put these curriculums up to review. And, I ask that you spend your valuable energy and important time and passion adding to the curriculum, instead of subtracting from it. And, I ask you not to water down the education that we as students receive. And I ask you not to deny the motivated students that you serve. Let’s keep Jefferson County great. Let’s keep America great. Our education is depending on you. Thank you. (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014, Oct. 2)

McAndrew, who is white, used her status as a recent student of Jeffco’s APUSH course to lend her speech a sense of authority. She uses this authority as a basis to advocate the new framework as consistent with the rituals of self-renewal that can help sustain the community. This is evident when McAndrew says that the course taught her “that democracy is strong enough to withstand examination…in fact its future depends upon it” (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014). McAndrew invites the community to understand the new APUSH framework as a promotion of democracy. In doing so, she aligns the framework and democracy with acts of remembering that inspire inclusion and thereby fulfil the ritual of self-renewal necessary for community and individual growth.

McAndrew’s persuasive effort uses devil terms (e.g. subtracting, water down, deny) to characterize the board’s current actions and asks for the board to abandon its rituals of disavowal and instead remember what makes America great. A deeper reading of McAndrew’s speech might suggest that she has become a white ally for the reclamation project of El Norte in that she is fighting for the inclusion of narratives that entail the racial animus of the past. From this deeper reading, one might also wonder if the environment at the meeting merely reflects Derrick Bell’s (2004) theory of interest convergence wherein whites will support the causes of nonwhites if and when they benefit from it (p. 70). In such cases, on the one hand, nonwhites become the fortuitous beneficiaries of the convergence. On the other hand, however, “interest convergence is abandoned once it seems to challenge white
dominance” (p. 70). This speculation perhaps goes beyond McAndrew or any one individual speaker, but not the suburban locale where the meeting unfolded, which reflects white flight. It can be argued that former practices of white flight have created a space where it is easy to advocate for nonwhites, who tend to live somewhere else.

At just over 23 minutes into public comment time, Serena Phu spoke. Phu, a Jeffco student, is the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants. At the podium, Phu addressed the board and said:

As a student born and raised in Colorado in the Jeffco Public School system since kindergarten. I am appalled by the recent actions and comments of this school board, especially in regards to the proposed AP U.S. history committee. First off, Ms. Williams proposed that APUSH contained too many negative aspects of U.S. history. That too much of an emphasis on race, gender, and ethnicity within the curriculum and in the original proposal said that material should not condone civil disorder, social strife, or disregard of the law. You believe in teaching the importance of American exceptionalism, but the very foundation of this idea is that the United States is the only place where a conglomeration of cultures, religions, genders, and ethnicities all strive to exist in tolerance and mutual respect. To Mr. Witt, I am equally, if not more, insulted by your accusation that the students protesting the committee are pawns. Time and time again you have proven you do not have the Jeffco teachers’, community’s best interests at heart. You’ve lost the trust of this community and no amount of recuse-ment will fix this damage. (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014, Oct. 2)

Phu begins by establishing her sense of belonging in the community, and then positions the board as attempting to disrupt that sense of belonging. Throughout her speech, Phu uses a strategy that avowals the negative feelings many community members hold about the board’s actions. For instance, she says that she is “appalled” and “insulted” by the board’s comments. Phu uses this language to emphasize what she sees as unjust actions by the board, and she challenges their proposed curriculum review
committee as a thinly veiled assertion of whiteness. In order to disrupt this assertion, Phu invites audiences to understand America “as the only place where a conglomeration of cultures, religions, genders, and ethnicities all strive to exist in tolerance and mutual respect” (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014).

By adopting a perspective of American exceptionalism that promotes inclusion, Phu participates in a ritual of renewal. In decrying the actions of the board, she also implies that the community should rid itself of the board in order to give the community new life. This is evident when Phu tells the board “You’ve lost the trust of this community and no amount of recuse-ment will fix this damage” (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014). Unlike many who spoke at the meeting, Phu directly referenced the racial implications of the board’s proposed review committee. Phu’s speech pushed back against “the disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large” (DiAngelo, p. 60).

In speaking for a group of eight, Michele Patterson, president of the Jefferson County Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), told the board that “civil protest is one of the highest forms of patriotism… Yet, our board majority refers to our children as lawbreakers, ignorant pawns, insulting and denigrating them. You should be ashamed of yourselves” (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014). She, then, informed the board that, in the days leading up to the meeting, she had received hundreds of emails within which parents had expressed outrage at the board’s actions. Patterson also said:

While Williams asks, what harm there is in looking, we see the danger of a committee with the power to invade any teacher’s classroom at a whim to review any learning materials they want, and they can present to the board what they find objectionable, a committee with literally the power to terrorize teachers and to recommend censoring materials they don’t like to the board. And I haven’t even begun addressing their religious issues. Ms. Williams wants us to follow Texas’s lead. *Will we be teaching that Moses helped write the Constitution, Ms. Williams?* It
seems a fair question to ask. You say there’s no harm in looking. We say we’ve seen you say in one breath suggest just a discussion and in the next force your agenda through. Your agenda with this committee is obvious to all of us. Don’t think for one second that you are fooling anyone. (Jeffco Public Schools, 2014, Oct. 2).

Patterson’s speech and its delivery embodies Tracy and Drufy’s (2007) notion of reasonable hostility. First, she uses feeling-limned description to depict a toxic environment created by the board. As Patterson differentiates the community from the board and attacks the board proposal as a proposed license to “terrorize” teachers, she makes use of devil terms to create a sense of urgency within her audience. In doing so, she also taps into the anti-authoritarian discourses that have historically helped shape knowledge and attitudes in the Far West. Patterson, then, uses the devil term “Texas” to depict the board as outsiders whose values have no place in Colorado. Patterson even incorporates a rhetorical question that specifically mocks Williams’s lack of sound judgement. In Patterson’s polemic performance of the ritual of renewal, she creates a sense of authority and invites identification by evoking a hidden border between El Norte and the Deep South.

_Illuminated Borders of American Nations: El Norte & The Far West_

Ken Witt’s comments in late September 2014, after the teacher sick out and student walk out, reveal the residues of bordering American nations. For instance, when Witt appeared on _Channel 9 News_ and accused the students of being duped by union operatives, he said: “It’s never OK to use kids as pawns” (Slevin, 2014). Witt’s accusations against the union reflected the anti-authoritarian spirit of the Far West, but his dismissal of the god-term “kids” as incompetent failed to align his constituents against the teachers union; instead, many community members viewed his comments as an attack on Jeffco families and the future of the community. Witt would later say his accusations were aimed at the union’s antagonistic policies and not at students, but the damage was done. His comments had incensed many of Jeffco’s parents and students.
Julie Williams, who also interviewed with reporters, said that she did not think the community should be encouraging its “kids to be little rebels.” (Slevin, 2014). Williams told the press that the new APUSH framework “has an emphasis on race, gender, ethnicity, grievance and American-bashing while simultaneously omitting the most basic structural and philosophical elements considered essential to the understanding of American History for generations” (“Democracy Now!”, 2014). In criticizing the APUSH framework, Williams attempted to align patriotism with notions of assimilation and obedience. Williams’s comments reveal a post-racial desire to understand identity politics as un-American. As such, Williams depicts the *College Board* framework as placing unwarranted “emphasis” on identity markers, including race and gender. In doing so, she creates a subtext in which identity politics are a nonwhite, non-masculine form of politics that are divorced from morality and that divide communities. This notion is supported by her claim that the framework is an attack on “the most basic and structural philosophical elements” that have been taught for generations. Williams advocates the teaching of continuous history, which requires participation in a ritual of disavowal. Her support of the history that has been taught for generations at the same time encourages a denial of whatever marginalized narratives might also be advanced in the APUSH framework. This denial of revisionist history, then, becomes a way of maintaining harmony and tradition (and by proxy whiteness).

Williams’s statement to the press illuminates the hidden borders between El Norte and the Far West whose residues still influence public discussion and deliberation about what America means. For instance, Williams’s criticism of the APUSH framework expresses the xenophobic tendencies and distrust of outside influence that characterize whiteness as a cultural practice in the Far West. Jeffco’s place in the Far West in this sense is not only threatened by a growing norteño population and its mestizo culture but also by the popularization of narratives that support its reclamation of Jefferson County. In 2014, however, this fear does not materialize itself in overt acts of exclusion like “running
the Chinese out of town” instead it materializes in efforts to exclude the narratives of nonwhites from history courses. Williams’s statement invited audiences to participate in a ritual of disavowal. This ritual involves the concealment of painful memories of the past and proposes that forgetting them serves the good of the community as a whole. Such acts of forgetting, promote a colorblind society within which a community ignores historical evidence that U.S. citizenship is racialized, gendered, and clouded over in contradictory narratives where race is not all that important and where the Founding Fathers actually meant to include everyone but times were just different then. In this colorblind society, President Andrew Jackson can be reimagined as an advocate for race relations and as someone capable of preventing the Civil War (Bondarenko, 2017). As Behdad (2005) notes, the project of democratic founding encourages forgetful narratives that produce “the retrospective illusion that freedom and equality, not brutality and conquest, were the principles upon which the nation was founded, principles whose repetitive invocation in the official discourse of founding continues to support the imaginary singularity of national culture in the United States” (p. 8).

In November 2015, more than 60% of Jeffco voters checked "yes" to recall election questions about Witt, Newkirk, and Williams (The Denver Channel.com Team, 2015). Newly elected board member Ali Lasell told reporters at Denver’s Channel 7 ABC News that the community had had enough and needed to "restore respect back in [its] boardroom” (The Denver Channel.com Team, 2015).

Clark and McKerrow (1998) note: “history emerges from the ephemera of recollection and establishes some order to memory. It becomes not only what is remembered but how it is remembered.” (p. 19). In 2014, the Jeffco community found itself mired in a debate about how to remember its past and whose interests that remembering should serve. Deliberations of the like that take place at school board meetings have much to reveal concerning what Patricia Hill Collins (2001) calls the “fundamental paradox of national identity” (p. 5). This paradox, Collins argues, calls attention
to how nonwhites can be U.S. citizens, yet not share all the privileges of citizenship nor be included in the myths of a homogenous racial national identity (Collins, 2001). Nation-states, after all, depend on homogeneity for both transnational identity formation and default socioeconomic statuses (Roediger, 1999; Buck, 2012). In this vein, Buck (2012) suggests, “the modern nation-state is inherently racial and cannot exist without race” (p. 107). His sentiments align well with Nakayama and Krizek’s (1995) notion that xenophobic myths are constructed to “retain and guard the boundaries of nationality with whiteness” (p. 301). “Historical legacy,” they continue, “has staked out the boundaries of citizenship that have been contested ever since” (p. 301). Critics, therefore must continue to call attention to and work to demystify xenophobic myths. One way to challenge such myths, I argue, is to uncover the negations that advance them. This requires critics to reveal the role that race plays in normalizing the U.S. national identity as white. I suggest examining the rituals of disavowal that are sui generis to whiteness as a cultural practice. By deconstructing the negations inherent in rituals of disavowal, critics could create opportunities to shed light on strategies and languages that would empower social actors to transcend xenophobic myths. According to Burke, “transcendence is a rhetorical strategy that allows the rhetor to symbolically endow a person, place, object, event, or set of circumstances with ‘a new identity’” (Burke as cited in Goldzwig, 2003, p. 41). To achieve transcendence, Goldzwig argues, “a rhetor must find a means of negating [a] negation” (p. 41). Critics, then, have a responsibility to locate negations within the rituals of disavowal that are specific to a given locale and to conceive ways of refuting these disavowals.

*Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom*—George Washington Carver

This chapter explores the growing breakaway movement reshaping K-12 school landscapes across the U.S. In doing so, I particularly focus on the East Baton Rouge Public School System (EBR) and the efforts of city of St. George organizers to break away from the EBR. The chapter begins with a discussion of relationships between symbolic and material worlds. I then attempt to assemble discursive fragments into a text that reveals whiteness as a cultural practice in New France and in the Deep South and argue that community discussions about the breakaway movement reflect Baton Rouge’s position within the borderlands between those historic cultural hearths. The chapter also examines the role that late capitalism has played in discourses related to neighborhood schools. Finally, I analyze the persuasive appeals employed by leaders of the St. George movement through the lens of Ian Haney López’s dog whistle politics, which propose that the ultimate goal of most implicit racial appeals is “not racial terror for its own sake,” but “instead money, control, and prestige,” all of which matter when it comes to K-12 public schooling (p. 49). Dog whistling describes the implicit ways that speakers can reference what Bormann (1972) calls *rhetorical visions*. When speakers dog whistle, they invoke a specific fantasy theme that reinforces what their anticipated audiences (i.e. base) already know to be true. In doing so, speakers motivate supporters to participate in an established symbolic truth, or rhetorical vision, that emboldens their identification as it eludes the purview of broader audiences (p. 398).

*Critical Rhetoric & Material Effects*

Moving away from the discursive remnants of hidden borders between El Norte and the Far West, this chapter attempts to assemble discursive fragments that highlight whiteness as a cultural practice in American Nations that Woodard (2011) and other scholars identify as New France and the
Deep South. In doing so, I hope to again highlight the heterogeneous and fluid nature of whiteness as a cultural practice, and point to its geographic and ethnocultural ties as support for this claim. Admittedly, in positioning New France and the Deep South metonymically, I essentialize the diverse characteristics that I am confident exist within the community level practices of these cultural hearths. Greene (1998) points to the danger of such essentialization when he notes that an essentialist view of people figures them as “possessing a substance outside of history, as a substance that is always already present no matter the contingent rhythms of political, cultural and economic history” (p. 23). However, as Lacy and Ono (2011) argue, critics must inevitably engage in forms of strategic essentialism, or “an essentialism that is eternally displaceable,” but necessary in order to understand and tell stories about “how and why race works” as an organizing factor (p.8). They note that, at times, critics must essentialize the intersecting and multiple cultural identities of individuals in order to evaluate power relations related to race, but in doing so, critics should practice self-reflexivity and retain a self-critical awareness (p. 8). This notion of strategic essentialism is supported by Greene (1998) when he discusses the value of McGee’s (1990) theory of discursive fragments and their implications for refining connections between critical rhetoric and materialist rhetoric. Green notes that:

An articulation of a governing apparatus requires that particular behaviors and populations become visible so that a program of action can intervene to improve the happiness, longevity, and material welfare of a population. Thus the ‘fragments’ that do not seem to stand still due to their mediated form, function on the terrain of a governing apparatus to make a whole way of life stand still so that a series of institutions might be able to govern a population. (p. 31)

In this sense, when I assemble fragments that essentialize the Deep South or New France as cultural hearths, I do so in order to make clear the role governing plays in supporting the dominant cultural practices that work to reinforce particular visions about an ideal life. I do this understanding
that any core assumptions about a fundamental ethos of a region evaporate as one zeroes in on analyses at the family or individual levels. This strategic essentialism, then, promotes investigations into how everyday symbolic constructions of social space are mediated by communication that contributes to a “panopticism” that works as a technology in the maintenance of white dominance (Greene, 1998, p. 31). Such investigations follow Greene’s suggestion that critical rhetoricians should “search for the specific ways in which the techniques of rhetoric and the techniques of power intersect to regulate a population” (p. 32). According to Greene, those intersections will shed light on the material implications of discursive actions. In short, the governing of space and the rhetorical appeals that rationalize it produce material effects.

Critical geographer Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) observes that “geography is about power. Although often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space” (p. 1). Woodard’s (2011) American Nations offers us a window into how differing Euro-Atlantic colonizers attempted to administer space including the race relations that evolved within that space. Thus, understanding the U.S. as consisting of a group of nations that grew up together and merged while retaining some sense of solidarity provides critics a means to observe differing articulations of whiteness as a cultural practice. By describing and analyzing these practices, critics can illuminate what Greene calls the “materiality of rhetorical practices,” or how rhetorical practices “occupy a position in different institutional structures historicizing those institutions at the same time as those institutions put rhetoric to work for the purpose of governing” (Greene, 1998, p. 35).

This chapter will indeed explore how rhetoric is “put to work” as I analyze how a community in the East Baton Rouge Parish establishes and contests the boundaries of its K-12 schools while it negotiates the socioeconomic and racial implications those boundaries might hold for its youth. First,
however, I will point to some key characteristics in the development of whiteness as a cultural practice in both New France and the Deep South.

New France

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, French colonizers led by French nobleman Pierre Dugua, the sieur de Mons, and Samuel de Champlain, adviser to King Henri IV, crossed the Atlantic and settled in what is now the easternmost fringe of Maine (i.e. Acadia). According to Woodard (2011) both men envisioned “a tolerant, utopian society in the wilds of North America” with Champlain particularly championing notions of “interracial marriage” and the tolerance of the habits and cultures of Indigenous people (p. 39). Champlain, Woodard notes, “hoped to bring Christianity and other aspects of French civilization to the Native populations, but he wished to accomplish this by persuasion and example… and thought cross-cultural marriages between two peoples was not only tolerable but desirable” (p. 35). Unlike English and Spanish colonizers, the French, while still believing in their aura of superiority, lived among the Indians and embraced their hunting, lodging, and cooking practices. By the end of the seventeenth century, French colonizers had softened on their attempts to assimilate Indigenous people and began to promote notions of egalitarianism, self-reliance, and tolerance, while refuting the power of the monarchy (p. 42). During the mid-seventeenth century, hundreds of Acadian (i.e. Cajun) refugees, who were fleeing British soldiers, settled near the foot of the Mississippi River around the southernmost region of what is now the state of Louisiana. This portion of New France had at one time been colonized by Spain and was surrounded by the English aristocrats of the Deep South. Many of the Acadian refugees, eventually, made their livings as hunters, trappers, merchants, and sugar planters. While Acadians held slaves, according to Greer (1997), during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, “black slavery never completely overwhelmed Louisiana society… [Instead,] the slave regime of eighteenth-century Louisiana had a degree of
fluidity” that contrasted the more rigid and brutal structure of slavery practiced in the Deep South (p. 107).

Greer (1997) notes that intercultural interactions characterized life in Louisiana where “Aboriginals, Africans, and Europeans of all classes routinely came in close contact with one another. Sexual encounters and the resulting emergence of mixed-blood populations are only one aspect of this intermixing” (p. 108). Usner (1992) adds that the colony’s food also display evidence of the cultural hybridity that occurred. “The origins of Louisiana’s legendary cuisine,” Usner notes, “lie in the syncretic process of cultural change” (p. 204). Woodard notes that even as the Creole culture established in New France was “absorbed into the United States, and surrounded by the Deep South… New Orleans and the sugar-planting parishes of the lower Mississippi still retained their own identity; they voted Republican and opposed Southern secession” (p. 205). In New France whiteness as a cultural practice was marked by contradictory notions of white superiority and an openness to interracial relationships, cultural hybridity, and egalitarianism.

The Deep South

Woodard (2011) argues that Deep Southerners were repulsed by New France, the Creoles, and particularly New Orleans where he notes that:

a more lenient French and Spanish form of slavery and race relations had produced a far less rigid slave society. Since the Spanish had given all slaves the right to buy their freedom, 45 percent of the city’s black population was free. Whites and blacks were not allowed to marry one another, but liaisons, affairs, and unsanctioned marriages were carried out in the open, in violation of Deep Southern mores. [Plus] many free blacks ranked higher up on the social scale than most Irish and other immigrants who were crowded into the city’s poorer quarters (p. 204).
The Deep South borders Tidewater in what is now South Carolina, comprises all but the southernmost tip of Florida, and also includes northern Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, most of Arkansas, and eastern Texas. It was founded in the seventeenth century by wealthy planters from the Barbados, Britain’s most densely populated New World colony. Woodard notes that: “The Barbadian planters’ wealth was built on a slave system whose brutality shocked contemporaries... they had first manned their plantations with indentured servants but had treated them so hellishly that the English poor began actively avoiding the place” (p. 82). The shortage of cheap labor motivated the Barbadians to kidnap and enslave shiploads of Africans, “whom they treated like their tools or cattle, thereby introducing chattel slavery to the English world” (p. 83). As the Barbadians ran out of land to bequeath to their children they looked to expand by colonizing areas with similar climates. Starting in what is now South Carolina, Barbadian planters expanded into the southeastern portion of the United States, “importing Barbado’s brutal slave code...their 1698 law declared Africans to have ‘barbarous, wild, savage natures’ that made them ‘naturally prone’ to ‘inhumanity,’ therefore requiring tight control and draconian punishments” (p. 86). These vicious practices led to an enormous slave mortality rate and for the better part of three centuries from 1670 to 1970 the Deep South was a caste society within which Woodard explains no amount of hard work or tragedy could supplant; instead, social positions were assigned at birth, racialized, and permanent (p. 88). In the Deep South, whiteness as a cultural practice evolved from the more ruthless practices of chattel slavery and the subsequent post-Civil War, Jim Crow era and into a more coded brand of white paternalism. Whiteness as a cultural practice in the Deep South is also marked by an openness to corporate power but a deep distrust of the invasive powers of federal government and its ability to tax the wealthy and invoke environmental and labor regulations. Federal government was, at first, understood as a threat to the gentry class and to its caste traditions, and later as a threat to “state’s rights” and regional commerce.
CONTESTING THE KEYS TO FREEDOM

New France & the Deep South: Revealing the Hidden Borderlands

[1]n borderlands... firm conclusions about status or experience or belonging become fuzzier.

(Reynolds, 2004, p. 129)

Baton Rouge is located on a border between two American cultural hearths within which whiteness as a cultural practice emerges from strikingly different dominant cultures. In New France, hybridity became a means of self-improvement and thus a point of cultural coherence whose residues, I will argue, are apparent in Better Together’s effort to challenge the city of St. George’s breakaway movement. New France came to embody a Creole culture that accepted difference, promoted self-reliance, and resisted being absorbed into other dominant cultures. Conversely, in the Deep South, pedigree and status became a means with which to consolidate power and thus a point of cultural coherence. The Deep South came to represent a culture of separatism along socioeconomic and racial lines. While that representation is in flux in the twenty-first century, it still resonates as powerful part of that American nation’s history.

Baton Rouge is complicated. It lies within the borderlands between what were New France and the Deep South in a blurrier space where multicultural agendas collide with Confederate War memorials and where multi-racial jazz ensembles perform on the same streets known for racially motivated violence. It is the place of the first civil rights bus boycott in 1953, and the place where David Duke formed the White Youth Alliance in the early 1980s. As Ashley and Walker (1990) suggest:

In these sites... identity is never sure, community is always uncertain, meaning is always in doubt. Instead, people here confront arbitrary cultural practices that work to discipline ambiguity and impose effects of identity and meaning by erecting exclusionary boundaries that separate the nature and necessary domicile of certain being from the contingencies and chance
events that the self must know as problems, difficulties, and dangers to be exteriorized and
brought under control. (p. 261)

This chapter will explore how a grassroots movement that emerged in the East Baton Rouge Parish
exteriorized its dissatisfaction with its public school system by proposing a new border, a new city, and
a new school district. Such movements to break away from established public school systems—for a
number of reasons—have become more pervasive over the past decade.

Neoliberalism & the Neighborhood Schools

As the U.S. has moved away from Keynesian agreements that promote social welfare programs
as a means to temper the self-devouring, profit-maximization tendencies of capitalism, its legislators
have supported policies directed at deregulating markets and privatizing traditionally public
institutions such as prisons and schools (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010; Larner, 2000). This policymaking
has been largely shaped by Libertarian and neoconservative political advocates and supported by many
liberal politicians as the nation-state has moved from a manufacturing economy and to a service and
information-based economy over the last half of the twentieth century and into the first quarter of the
twenty-first century. The market-minded governing practices embraced in the West that took hold
during the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism in the 1980s have trickled-down from the federal level
and into the everyday policy decisions made by local officials and influential community members
(Aune, 2001).

This market-driven ideology has created a political economic environment within which
government and taxes are perceived as the enemy of the free-market and within which public
institutions are deemed stagnant due to their monopolies on services that could otherwise be provided
by investors with the capital and the will to improve their outcomes. For many, the push back against
social welfare programs and the tax dollars that support them has empowered business communities
across the U.S. to undertake entrepreneurial efforts to profit from (and in theory correct) the problems
of public institutions. These efforts, however, have not completely escaped criticism. Instead, the supporters of deregulation and privatization have been challenged by citizens who favor the communal control and traditions associated with public institutions. In the U.S., this environment has reshaped public education as a battleground between community members operating out of opposing value centers. Those who support a market-driven ideological position vie for control of the future of K-12 schooling with others in the community who support a communal ideological position that favors state welfare programs. While these values may be somewhat stable, attitudes and beliefs about education as an area of governance are not. They are dynamic. As Tracy (2010) observes, “‘education’ is not an easily delimited issue; it is best conceived as a gloss for a messy tangle of concerns about children, schools, learning, civic conduct, money, and moral issues” (p. 7).

Over the past decade, debates about public schools have been further complicated as supporters of the communal ideological position have fractured into camps. On the one hand are those who believe failing K-12 schools can be improved with more federal funding and community engagement. On the other hand are those who promote solutions in which successful schools leave their failing districts and form their own new school districts. This situation is embodied by a breakaway (i.e. secession) movement that has been working its way around school districts in the U.S. for the past few years. Although breakaway movement leaders say they are motivated by issues of local control and restoring the community, they are often accused of attempting to redraw boundaries that divide school districts by class and race. In matters of education, Apple (2001) notes that “class and race intersect and interact in complex ways,” and in an era of privatization, “more affluent parents are more likely to have the information, knowledge and skill… to be able to decode and use marketized forms to their own benefit” (p. 415). As a continuous marker of class—and in the case of being nonwhite often a derogatory one—race plays a pivotal role in where parents choose to live and to send their children. As Lipman (2009) argues:
The cultural politics of race are the ideological soil for racially coded neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility and the reduction of ‘dependency’ on the state. This provides the rationale to restructure or eliminate government funded social programs and to develop a culture that normalizes individual responsibility. The result is intensified economic and social inequality and marketization of the public sphere—education is a prime case. (p. 220)

As the public sphere has increasingly relented to a private sphere, then, it has become “but a shadow of what it once was, but on the surface, it is more dynamic and shimmering, as it now is all spectacle” (McLaren as cited by Orelus, 2011. p. 102). The breakaway movement—and the attention it draws locally and nationally—embodies that spectacle.

The K-12 Breakaway Movement

Over the past few years, a number of communities have attempted to break away from their school districts and reform their own districts. The phenomenon has been given several names including the community school movement, the breakaway movement, the secession movement, the separatist movement, and the neighborhood school movement. Whatever the name, for the grassroots organizers supporting them, the movements come as a reaction to failing schools, school board corruption, and a sense that taxpayer money is being wasted on ineffective policymaking. In some communities, break away movements have often encountered massive resistance because, as Sarah Eaton of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice notes “they take away students on which tax dollar distributions to schools are based. In most cases, newly created districts capture all taxable property within tighter boundary lines, cutting off the larger district from revenue that had been shared” (Eaton, 2014).

Not specific to any a particular region, breakaway movements have emerged in school districts in Georgia, Tennessee, California, Pennsylvania, California, Georgia, Utah, Texas, Iowa, Louisiana, and Alabama among other places. Amy Stuart Wells, sociology scholar at Columbia University
Teachers’ College argues that economic stress has motivated middle-class families to participate and organize these breakaway movements (Eaton, 2014). “Her recent study on schools in the New York City suburbs found that even as those areas have gotten more diverse, their schools have remained heavily segregated” (Eaton, 2014). Proponents of breakaway movements tend to deemphasize the class and race implications their secessions might have, and instead they direct attention to issues related to local control, which include curriculum control, property values, housing markets, and education quality.

For instance, in Malibu, California in 2014, parents organized and attempted to break away from a district that included a large working-class community in Santa Monica. The parents told press members that they wanted more control of the curriculum, and the ability to implement more arts programs and renovate their schools without having to answer to the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified school board, which predominantly consisted of Santa Monica community members (Spencer, 2014, Nov. 2).

In 2012, Memphis, Tennessee, a group of middle-class parents also attempted a break away from Shelby County Schools (Garland, 2012). The parents said they wanted more advanced technology in their elementary schools, college preparation courses in their high schools, and more rigorous standards (Spencer, 2014, Jul. 15). In 2013, efforts to secede from school districts in Tennessee were made possible when Tennessee lawmakers passed a bill that lifted a ban on creating new school districts. Soon thereafter, suburbs across the county created their own school districts, leaving out students in poorer inner city areas (Eaton, 2014). In addition, since 2006, upper- and middle-class parents in the Salt Lake City area have sought secession efforts motivated in part by the positive impact the split would have on property values within the newly-formed districts (McFarland, 2006; Spencer, 2014, Jul. 15).
Although the secession movement spans school districts across the U.S., it tends to be centered in the South “because the region’s districts tend to be larger, often enrolling students who live in cities and towns throughout an entire county as opposed to a small municipality” (Eaton, 2014). In a 2013 school break away movement in Gardendale, Alabama, middle-class parents were willing to “raise taxes on themselves to finance” their separation from Jefferson County Schools (Eaton, 2014). Their separation proposal led to a legal battle that was resolved in April of 2017, when a federal judge ruled in favor of Gardendale City Schools’ proposed breakaway from the county. As noted in a previous chapter, Gardendale parents who supported the breakaway listed local control as their motivating factor. Attorneys representing those opposed to the breakaway, however, argued that the separation proposal was racially motivated. Even though the judge concurred with them, she found no legal grounds to stop the Gardendale breakaway and thus permitted it (Brown, 2017).

Eaton notes how the segregation of public schools has remained but taken a different form since the Court deemed “separate but equal” schools unconstitutional. She argues that in the 1950s and 1960s “the vast majority of segregation was internal to individual school districts, meaning black and white students attended different schools within the same boundaries. Today, research has shown that most segregation in this part of Alabama—and nationwide—is manifested in white and nonwhite students being enrolled in separate school districts” (Eaton, 2014, n.pag).

Stephen Nowling describes the secession movement as “a form of branding… The idea is that more affluent school districts can attract businesses, increase property values, bring in a certain type of resident who can lend economic stability and enhance a particular image. I can respect the interest in that and their right to do this. I just worry that we’ve gotten away from thinking about the larger community” (Eaton, 2014, n. pag.). Of the race-class implications of the breakaway movements, Eaton argues that:
white people’s presumptions about “good schools” are driven by “status ideologies” formed by race and class biases. Secessionism makes it even easier to act on such prejudices because it creates school districts that are starkly identified by the race and social class of students. Home values, tied to a school district’s reputation, will likely go up or go down accordingly, further aiding a community’s ascension or decline. (Eaton, 2014)

The challenge for those who support breakaway movements becomes the creation of messages that either elude discussion about race and class or deny them as motivating factors. In this chapter, I particularly focus on a grassroots breakaway movement in the East Baton Rouge Parish (EBR), where members of the more affluent southern side of the Parish attempted to incorporate as a municipality in order to form a new city and school district.

East Baton Rouge Parish Schools

Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana, is contiguous with East Baton Rouge Parish. Together they form Greater Baton Rouge, which has a population of more than 830,000. Greater Baton Rouge is governed by a combined city-parish government, with its mayor-president in charge of setting policy agendas and managing day-to-day governing activities, which include the oversight of its parish schools. According to Gogola (2014), “As both a city and a parish, greater Baton Rouge is hobbled by lots of internecine turf wars—mostly over education and public safety—a layer of civil chaos that the city’s political leaders say they can ill afford as they, like municipalities throughout the rest of the country, continue to dig out from the 2008 economic meltdown” (p. 76).

In 1965, the EBR’s student population was 61% white, a number that currently hovers at around 11% as black and Latinx students now make up a majority of the student body. In 1977, the EBR had a student population of more than 70,000. Since then, that number has dwindled to about 43,000 a decrease of more than 40%. (PAR, 2005; NCTQ, 2014). In 2013 alone, there were 61 arrests at Woodlawn High, an EBR school (Robertson, 2014). These numbers, combined with the realities of
poor student achievement and that 4 out of 5 EBR students qualified for free- or reduce-lunches in 2014, speak to the practical problems facing EBR community members as they deliberate on how best to improve their K-12 educational system (PAR, 2005; NCTQ, 2014).

Like many Deep South communities EBR has a long history of local and state resistance to integration plans. It is one of many examples that led to a *Brown II* and to the Court’s clarification on *Brown I’s* call for schools to desegregate with “all deliberate speed” (Bell, 2004). In 1956, two years after the *Brown* ruling the EBR became embroiled in a 47-year long desegregation case. *Davis, et al., v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board et al.* was the longest desegregation battle in U.S. history (PAR, 2005). The Cowen Institute reported that the litigation processes in East Baton Rouge “can be characterized by a resistance to meaningful desegregation” (as cited in Calmes, 2016, p. 21). In 1981, when the Department of Justice (DOJ) instituted mandatory bussing “large numbers of white families either moved to other school districts or enrolled their children in private schools” (p. 21).

In 2003, the case ended with a Final Settlement Agreement (FSA), a ruling that called for the EBR to ensure its magnet schools, which are public schools with specialized curricula, consisted of a diverse mix of students (55% nonwhite, 45% white). However, by that time, Calmes argues, the public schools had been “severely weakened after decades of infighting, white flight, diminishing resources, and persistent segregation” (p. 21) That same year, the cities of Baker and Zachary, the former consisting of a predominately black population and the latter white, seceded from the EBR school system. Later, Central city, whose population is mostly white, would also secede (Samuels, 2013). East Baton Rouge Parish has also faced the challenge of absorbing more than 200,000 people, who were displaced after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and other coastal municipalities in 2005. This difficulty has continued as many of those displaced persons chose to remain in the parish. In a 2005 report, the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (PAR) commented on the 2003 secessions. It wrote:
Left in the wake of the desegregation case is a poorly performing, racially imbalanced school district. Once a majority-white school system, EBR nearly 50 years later has evolved into what experts predict, given current student enrollment trends, will eventually be an all-black system.

(PAR, p. 2, 2005)

Debates between state and federal officials about how to resolve the problems of Baton Rouge’s segregated schools have continued into the current decade. In 2012, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal signed a voucher program into law so that “low-income parents (which in Louisiana means, overwhelmingly, black parents) can redeem vouchers to a broader range of private and public schools” (p. 82). The law prompted a law suit by Eric Holder, then head of the Justice Department, who claimed it worked against federal oversight of school desegregation efforts in Louisiana.

City of St. George Breakaway Movement

Baton Rouge’s North and South sides are divided along class lines. The city’s predominantly working-class North Side is less prosperous than the middle class suburban sections of its south. According to a 2014 study by Smart Growth America, Baton Rouge is one of the most-sprawling mid-sized metro regions. Calmes (2016) notes that: “Baton Rouge’s sprawl mimics the same pattern seen in so many metropolitan regions: the center, or downtown, is predominantly African-American and low-income, and outer suburbs are predominantly white, upper-middle and upper-class, reinforcing an already-apparent race and class divide” (p. 21).

In 2013, a group of grassroots organizers—calling themselves the Committee for the Incorporation of St. George—announced that they had begun a campaign to incorporate the suburbs of Baton Rouge’s South Side into its own municipality. The incorporation effort came after attempts in the previous year to get state legislators to endorse a new school district. The group was founded by Norman Browning, who owns a real estate company in Baton Rouge, and co-owns another medical supply company called Genesis Medical Products. Their plan drew a set of boundaries that became
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hotly debated by community members. St. George would separate a host of revenue generating areas from Baton Rouge including the Mall of Louisiana, L’Auberge Casino, as well as Perkins Rowe, an upscale shopping center. According to Calmes (2016) the proposed city of St. George would encompass a sprawling 84.6-square mile suburb of Baton Rouge that “accounts for nearly the entire southern half of the city-parish,” and Calmes notes although the proposed border “contains only about a quarter of the city-parish population, [it] produces 40% of the tax revenue” (p. 22).

In November of 2013, Gogola (2014) notes that: “St. George boosters went into high gear to publicize the benefits of incorporation (itself a much more palatable term than secession)” (p. 76). Promoting St. George as a new model for small-scale, community-controlled self-governance, organizers told the press it was a way to “bring community back” (Robertson, 2014, Calmes, 2016). Lionel Rainey, spokesperson for the incorporation effort, told reporters “We believe that we can set a model, not only for the state of Louisiana… We can set a model of governance for the United States of America that many other cities can follow” (Rainey as cited in Calmes, p. 23).

In reaction to the proposal city leaders at the Baton Rouge Area Chamber’s (BRAC) commissioned an independent economic impact statement to project the effects of a successful St. George incorporation effort. The study was headed by Louisiana State University Business School director Jim Richardson, and it painted a grim picture of a post-St. George Baton Rouge (Calmes, p. 23). According to Richardson’s findings, “the successful secession of St. George from the city-parish would cause an annual $53 million deficit in the Baton Rouge general fund, which could force the city to raise taxes on the remaining residents and cut some police and fire services” (p. 23). Richardson also predicted that the remaining schools in EBR would have a higher population of poor, black, and at-risk students and see the city’s per-student spending power shrunk by about two thousand dollars. St. George, on the other hand, would have a student population that was 70% white, 23% black and largely middle to upper-middle class compared with a largely working-class EBR student population
that was 55% black and 40% white. In addition, the plan could displace more than 8,300 students that were currently in EBR schools. In short, he concluded, “the new City of St. George would deal a stunning blow to an already-flailing system” (Calmes citing Richardson, p. 23).

For the City of St. George to become a reality. Its leaders would have to take advantage of the state’s Lawrason Act which regulates city incorporations. That meant, St. George would have to secure signatures from 25% of citizens (i.e. 17,859) who lived and were registered to vote within its proposed city limits. Woody Jenkins, another supporter of St. George, launched an online publication called the *St. George Leader*, other leaders created a Facebook page, and a dedicated webpage for the movement. As break away movement leaders promoted their cause, they were careful to avoid and deny any role that race might play in their decision to incorporate or the racial problems a successful corporation might leave in its wake. Instead, as Gogola (2014) suggests, the leaders presented “themselves in public as concerned parents, seeking to ensure better performance standards for the schools their children attend, and they [made] sure to promise a slew of trickle-down economic gains for the parish as a whole” (p. 76).

Many of those supporting the St. George incorporation movement, cited their distrust in Baton Rouge’s centralized form of government, which they argued does not reflect their values (Samuels, 2013). Instead, they felt that the imposed bussing practices took away the neighborhood-feel of their schools. Diane Samuels (2013), education reporter for the *The Times-Picayune*, noted that St. George backers also rallied “around the cry that two-thirds of the parish’s tax dollars are generated in the St. George area, but only one-third is invested back into the community there” (Samuels, 2013).

According to St. George supporters, smaller districts with neighborhood schools would allow for less administrative bureaucracy. They argued that this environment would allow them to recreate the successes of Zachary and Central, which became two of the top 10 districts after they left the EBR (Samuels, 2013).
As the St. George breakaway movement gained momentum, it drew the attention of national media outlets such as the Huffington Post and PBS Frontline. The Post ran an article titled “Richer White People in Greater Baton Rouge Seek to Secede from Poorer Black Neighbors” (Ashtari, 2013). Frontline produced a documentary that heightened tensions with the community and helped to fuel a grassroots movement, Better Together, which vowed to resist St. George’s efforts at incorporation.

**The Breakaway Movement & Media Spectacle**

In July of 2014, PBS Frontline aired “Separate and Unequal,” a documentary about St. George’s breakaway attempt. The nearly 30-minute film, produced and directed by Mary Robertson, asks viewers to ponder whether integration still matters in public schools, and it originally ran as part of an hour-long PBS Frontline presentation that included “Omarina’s Story”, which was a continuation of Robertson’s 2012 Frontline documentary entitled “Middle School Movement”. Robertson, a co-executive producer at Left/Right TV, has contributed several films to Frontline, most of which revolve around the social and economic challenges facing public schools particularly in metropolitan environments. “Separate and Unequal,” and its play on the Plessy v. Ferguson Jim Crow ruling, is a continuation of this work. The film deserves a closer look because popular media, as Stuart Hall (1981) suggests, is one place where ideas about race “are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated” (p. 35). By making a spectacle of the East Baton Rouge community, the documentary served as a text through which community members could perceive themselves as Others whose culture and disputes were being represented by a national media outlet. Community members who viewed the film could then discuss its merit, accuracy, reductionism as well as its use of tropes and binaries. The film argues for a truth about the Greater Baton Rouge community, a truth that uses powerful images and sounds to connect race, education, and everyday interactions to broader national concerns about K-12 education. In doing so, it functions as a text readily available to EBR community members who might challenge or advocate the authority of that truth. In short, the film provides community members a resource for
public and private sphere deliberations. For those outside the community, the film highlights issues in K-12 education and provides an evaluation of a community as it encounters the influence that race and class have in local policymaking. While these viewers may agree, disagree, or be ambivalent toward the film’s evaluation of the community and proposed “truth” about its education deliberation, the film offers access to a representation of a locale that can be experienced and discussed.

The documentary opens with a brooding musical score that backgrounds a shot of the Horace Wilkinson Bridge, which straddles the Mississippi River in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Robertson uses the bridge as a symbolic foreshadowing for the film’s discussion of division. The film then cuts to a line of streetlights dimly penetrating through fog to illuminate a Baton Rouge neighborhood. Again, a menacing synthesizer reverb accompanies the shot, and 5:20 a.m. flashes across a title strip at the bottom of the screen. With these two establishing shots, the film effectively creates a serious tone as well as a sense of uneasiness. As the opening scene continues, the film cuts to the apartment of Nikki Dangerfield, and the narrator identifies her as a FedEx manager and single parent of four. The film depicts Dangerfield and her children as emblematic of ‘everyday’ working-class nonwhite families who, each year, weigh how best to use the state’s education vouchers and who would be most affected if East Baton Rouge Parrish Schools were to be divided.

After a couple brief shots of her children preparing for school, Dangerfield tells an off-screen interviewer that she cannot afford to pay for their educations, so she wants to ensure that area public schools offer her children a high-quality education. As more shots of Dangerfield interacting with her children roll, the narrator says:

Half a century ago, her children’s educational options would have been limited by their skin color. Baton Rouge, like most of the South, had a segregated school system. But after a hard fought Civil Rights battle, her children now have alternatives to the struggling schools in their own neighborhood. (Robertson, 2014)
Here the narrator refers generally to the time since 1954’s *Brown* ruling, and perhaps more specifically to the 47-year-long desegregation battle in Baton Rouge. The film encourages viewers to personify the St. George movement as an expression of a post-racial value system that wishes to ignore historical contexts in favor of personal gain. In doing so, it includes scenes directed at inspiring an emotional reaction. For instance, the film features images of nonwhite children walking to a bus stop in the predawn half-light, as a narrator emphasizes that these children will be bussed to “integrated schools” throughout the city. The narrator’s enunciation of the word “integrated” helps to reinforce the filmmaker’s purpose, which is directed at highlighting the racial tensions existent within community deliberations about how best to improve EBR schools. As the film continues, Dangerfield says that overall public schools have served her well, adding that she wants her children to attend schools with people from different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds because, she says, “they can say, ‘OK, what can I do to have a better life?’ They can dream bigger” (Robertson, 2014).

Robertson also uses a match on shape visual technique, which symbolically blends the incandescent yellow-globed residue of a bus stop streetlight with a panoramic shot of a Baton Rouge sunrise. At this point, the film shifts its focus to the burgeoning effort of some community members to secede from the EBR. In the background, viewers can hear Lionel Rainey, spokesperson for City of St. George, say the EBR schools “are some of the worse schools in the country. They’re some of the most violent schools in the country. Nobody’s getting educated in these schools” (Robertson, 2014). As he speaks, the film cuts to a small innocuous white building. Hung from its roof is a gold and blue banner that reads “City of St. George: Sign Petition Here”. The narrator then explains that the City of St. George is a “new movement to form an entirely new city out of a large area of suburban neighborhoods,” which would take part of the EBR school system with it.

The film, then, cuts to a scene with Rainey, an unidentified man, and Norman Browning. The three of them sit in a room set up for an audience, on the wall behind them is a framed American flag.
hung between two poster-sized maps of the city of St. George. In the next scene, the meeting has begun and Browning is passionately telling an audience, which appears to be exclusively white, that they are here to better the mismanaged schools of their children, who the EBR has failed for “30 plus years.” He, then, calls for the people to sign the petition. The film quickly cuts to a shot of Browning standing in front of a map of the city of St. George holding an infant. The shot is accompanied by the recurring eerie musical score that Robertson uses repetitively as a tool to argue against Browning’s proposal. As the scene ends, Rainey says, “The fight hasn’t even started yet. The powers that be will do everything that they can do to make this not happen,” and 30 signatures flashes across the top of the screen. In the film and in media interviews, Rainey consistently employs this David v. Goliath rhetorical tactic to rally support for the group’s cause (Samuels, 2013; Allen, 2014, Jun. 26; Robertson, 2014).

The remainder of the documentary introduces a number of people both for and against the city of St. George’s secession effort, including lawyers, community organizations, educators, scholars and even a state senator. Robertson juxtaposes their viewpoints in a way that encourages viewers to understand the secession as immoral. For instance, after the narrator mentions that the St. George movement has reenergized the deep divisions within the city, the film cuts to an interview of Browning defending his character. Browning tells an off-camera interviewer:

When I read headlines such as the fact that this is nothing but a secession to get away from the low-income citizens, as well as making it a race issue, it’s extremely disturbing to me. This is nothing more than a middle-class community incorporating a city. Yes, I’ve been called a racist in no uncertain terms. I’m not a racist. I can’t—you know, I’m not going to try to attempt to defend it. What I do is I let my actions speak, and how I conduct myself and how I treat people speak. (Robertson, 2014)
Browning’s defense is followed almost immediately by an interview with Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project at UC LA, during which Orfield says:

People who do things that have racial implications always say that race has nothing to do with it. I mean, I’m not judging what their [city of St. George’s] personal motivations are. But nobody ever says, “We intentionally just want to discriminate” when they do something that will have the effect of deepening inequality. (Robertson, 2014)

The proximity of Browning’s interview with Orfield’s suggests to viewers that Orfield statement is a refutation of Browning’s post-racial agenda. This same technique—directed at exposing and questioning post-racial viewpoints—is used in the film’s closing minutes when an interview with Senator Mack “Bodi” White (R-Central, Louisiana) is juxtaposed with State Representative Patricia Hayes Smith (D-District 67). In this segment, Miller expresses a viewpoint that is for all practical purposes the textbook definition of a post-racial perspective (Ono, 2013; Griffin, 2015). He asks a *Frontline* interviewer:

Do you think that you have to bus children all over, bus children long distances so you can say you sit in a seat next to someone diverse, different from yourself? The Justice Department, you know, they achieved their goal. Who can say we’re not desegregated? We have an African-American president. We have an African-American mayor here in Baton Rouge, with a majority white in the parish. We’ve been through all that. We need to let us go back and rebuild our schools now. (Robertson, 2014)

White’s interview cuts to a head and shoulders shot of Smith providing a rebuttal to White’s reference to a post-racial society. Smith says:

I believe that folks are beginning to get in their heads—many conservatives are saying we have a black president, so we don’t have to worry about anything else dealing with black folk across
the country. That is not true. We’re now beginning to realize that you can never stop the fight for racial equality. You can never stop that fight. (Robertson, 2014)

The way Robertson edits the film with White’s comments immediately followed by Smith’s insights reveals the filmmaker’s desire to disqualify White’s post-racial perspective. Simultaneously, the juxtaposition of these interviews invites viewers to understand the St. George movement as a thinly-veiled attempt to return East Baton Rouge to a racially segregated school system. In addition, the recurring graphic that displays an increasing number of signatures as the film advances creates a sense that resegregation in Baton Rouge is inevitable.

The documentary ends with Browning—joined by Senator White—speaking to a room full of St. George supporters, all of whom appear to be white. Browning says, “We’ve got a wonderful opportunity here. The State Capitol can’t stop this. The city council can’t stop this. Mayor Holden can’t stop this as long as we want it” (Robertson, 2014). As the crowd applauds, the film cuts to a symbolic, wide angle shot of the sun setting over the Mississippi River with the Horace Wilkinson Bridge and the Baton Rouge skyline painted across a distant multi-hued horizon. Taken as a whole the film attempts to historicize the secession movement by constructing its meaning as a novel way for predominantly white communities to segregate along lines of race and class.

Locally, the film drew as much criticism as it did praise. Browning said he was “disappointed” with the documentary and told WAFB News the city of St. George “is nothing more than a community of parents, black, white, rich, poor that wanted to take control of their school system and bring quality of education back to the school system” (Samuels, 2015). St. George organizers prepared statement concerning the Frontline documentary and released it a day after the program aired on PBS. The statement read:

Making this movement about class and race is simply lazy…We look forward to the day when people stop focusing on the color of someone’s skin or how much money they make and focus
on the character or the individual. But then again, that probably wouldn’t be nearly as entertaining, wouldn’t sell nearly as many papers or generate nearly as many viewers. (Allen, 2014, Jul. 17)

Rainey joined Browning and accused Frontline’s crew of misleading members of the St. George movement and vilifying Browning and its cause (Samuel, 2013). Browning and Rainey’s reactions to the film attempted to transform St. George supporters into the victims of a liberal media ambush that was bent on pushing identity politics and conflict in order to draw viewers to its website.

Others in the community, commented on the film’s simplification of the real challenges and palpable ineptitude of the EBR, lambasting the film for saying what it wanted to say rather than addressing the violence and disruptiveness that plagues many EBR classrooms. Many community members were appreciative of the attention and hoped it would wake up the EBR and simultaneously mitigate the city of St. George’s momentum. Still others claimed, quite rationally, the film downplayed the simple practicality, the idea that few people want their children or family members to attend a dysfunctional and violent public school system without a means of local control. Indeed, the appraisal that EBR’s lack of leadership and vision contributed to the radical calls for secession—like the one proposed by Browning—holds merit. In its epilogue, the film alludes to the shuffling of principals and administrators. That instability continued throughout 2014 as the EBR board found itself locked in a tense relationship with then EBR Superintendent Bernard Taylor, who was not renewed after less than a year of service (Samuels, 2014). Community members opposed to the film say it glossed over these sorts of administrative factors.

The Better Together Coalition vs. City of St. George

Although the signature-tallying graphic in “Separate and Unequal” induces an attitude of inevitability about the City of St. George incorporation, it has yet to materialize. It faced several setbacks. First, the Baton Rouge city council successfully annexed the area of Greater Baton Rouge
where the Mall of Louisiana is located, stripping at least a portion of the economic benefits away from the incorporation movement. Second, another grassroots movement, Better Together Coalition (BTC) organized and challenged St. George. The coalition started as opponents of St. George met in their living rooms to discuss the breakaway and its potential effects. According to Calmes (2016), BTC organizers identified the Lawrason Act as a possible way to stop the St. George movement. She notes that BTC “the Lawrason Act was the key to St. George’s Liberation from the parish; it was also the linchpin of the anti-incorporation movement. The group found that signers of incorporation petitions are able to withdraw their names at any time” (p. 23).

BTC leader and data analyst, M.E. Cormier said that her group found “the laws that allowed [St. George] to do what they were doing, and we figured out a way to legally stop them” (p. 24). Once St. George submitted their petition with 18,353 names, it became part of public record, and BTC immediately requested the list of signatures (Allen, 2015). When it acquired the list, the coalition created a database of the names and dedicated part of its time to reviewing for duplicate signatures and people, who were outside of the proposed incorporation limits. In addition, the coalition helped create a withdrawal form “with simplified language specific to the St. George incorporation. The group then sent forms to each address from the database asking voters to remove their names from the petition. 16% of the total withdrawals came from these mailers” (p. 24).

The remaining 84% of the BTC’s signature withdrawals came at its public education meetings held at various local churches and via a targeted door-to-door canvasing strategy. According to Cormier, a team of about 50 BTC volunteers visited homes closest to where the Baton Rouge/St. George border would be (Calmes, p. 24). The canvassers “developed elevator speeches to communicate the devastating effect the incorporation would visit upon the rest of the metropolitan area, and encourage St. George residents to engage in the existing metropolitan governing structure rather than fragment it” (p. 24). All told, Cormier said, the volunteers knocked on about 8,000 doors
and were able to submit 1,150 withdrawal forms before the petition process was closed on May 28, 2015 (Allen, 2015). After the city evaluated the withdrawal forms, it found that the petition for incorporation was 71 names short with 17,788 valid signatures (Allen, 2015). After the results were announced, EBR Parish Councilman John Delgado—who had been highly critical of the St. George movement—told reporters “This has been a very emotionally trying issue for a lot of people in this community… At least for now, we can sit back, take a deep breath and hope that tomorrow comes up better than today” (Allen, 2015). As Calmes (2016) notes: “The struggle between St. George and the Better Together Coalition was a struggle between two groups with different values around self-governance. In this case, a more regional and inclusive form of self-governance prevailed” (p. 24).

What is important to examine more deeply, however, is how St. George was able to gain support for its message while avoiding making any overtly racist comments. I argue that its leaders engage in what Ian Haney López (2014) calls dog whistle politics to garner support for its movement without referring to the obvious socioeconomic and racial implications it might have for those left outside of the fantasized borders of the city of St. George.

*Whiteness, Rhetorical Visions, & Dog Whistle Politics*

*Making whiteness visible is often aiming to make not only its history visible but also, more importantly, its political functionality…* (Alcoff, 2015)

Whiteness as a cultural practice is reproduced through an everyday normativity that works to disguise white as a racial category (Frankenberg, 1993). Shome (1996) notes that:

this dailiness is the set of cultural rules, procedures, tacit assumptions about the way things should be that have acquired a social normalcy as a result of white people controlling dominant cultural, social, and political institutions for generations whether it be the academy, the media, or seats of political power. This dailiness tends to be so all pervasive that it is often (and
sometimes deliberately) not seen by the dominant culture in ways that blackness, asianess,
‘histpanic’-ness and all ‘others’ are seen. (p. 503)

Accordingly, the dailiness of whiteness and its dominance as cultural practice can mystify its
embeddedness in the governing of populations, particularly when the discipline and punishment
associated with overt acts of racism seem absent. In such cases, speakers can use persuasive appeals
that drain racial categories of their connections to power and hierarchy and transform them into empty
containers that simply mark visual differences that do not really matter (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). In
its effort to break away from the EBR, I argue that St. George deliberately avoids seeing white and
instead promotes a colorblind, post-racial perspective that divorces the support for its movement from
the breakaway’s potential to harm the Greater Baton Rouge community. This separation—whether
committed to wittingly or unwittingly—allows St. George to avoid considering how the maintenance
of white dominance is inherently intertwined with its proposed borders. As Russell Ferguson (1990)
argues, “in our society dominant discourse tries never to speak its own name. Its authority is based on
absence. The absence is not just that of the various groups classified as ‘other,’… It is the lack of any
overt acknowledgement of the specificity of the dominant culture… This is the basis of [its] power” (p.
11).

Colorblindness, then, is one of many ways to encourage interlocutors to be power blind, since
acknowledging power might mean acknowledging a position of advantage and thereby induce feelings
of guilt or contempt that can distract from efforts to maintain or reinstate a beneficial status quo.
According to Gogola (2014), what makes the St. George effort particularly interesting when compared
with attempts by other organizers around the country to break away from their given school districts is
that “it furnishes a detailed case study in how the unvarnished rhetoric of white reaction has been
repackaged as a sunny faith in the mystical healing powers of school choice. And it has drawn a corps
of politically prominent supporters who are long-standing entrepreneurs of far-right reaction” (p. 76).
Ian Haney López’s (2014) work offers critics a way to understand (1) how leaders of the movement are able to garner support as they publicly divorce their cause from any racial implications, and (2) how those leaders, as Gogola suggests, can take advantage of school choice as a mystical cure-all. López (2014) locates the subtexts that political opportunists use to dog whistle support for causes that are racially motivated and that advance whiteness. López takes the term dog whistle, which “could encompass clandestine solicitations on any number of bases,” and focuses on how political opportunist use hidden messages to appeal for “racial solidarity among whites” (p. 4). López argues that notions of race “come from a shared culture steeped in racial stereotypes, as well as from material arrangements like segregated cities that make race a supremely salient social category” (p. 45). This everyday environment fosters what he calls strategic racism, a term that refers to “purposeful efforts to use racial animus as leverage to gain material wealth, political power, or heightened social standing” (p. 46). López argues that what is different about strategic racism is that it is “not fundamentally about race. The driving force behind strategic racism is not racial animus for its own sake or brutalizing nonwhites out of hate; it is the pursuit of power, money, and/or status” (emphasis his, p. 48). The coded talk of dog whistle politics, accordingly, is the “how” of strategic racism. As Jamieson (1992) notes, “in politics as in life, what is known is not necessarily what is believed, what is shown is not necessarily what is seen, and what is said is not necessarily what is heard” (p. 16).

In order to decode what is being said and heard when speakers use coded appeals to stoke the sort of racial animus that will win them favor with whites, López suggests that racial dog whistling has three basic steps. He maps them as involving (1) “a punch that jabs race into the conversation through thinly veiled references’ such as ‘welfare cheats and illegal aliens’; (2) “a parry that slaps away charges of racial pandering, often by emphasizing the lack of any direct reference to a racial group”; and, (3) “a kick that savages the critic for opportunistically alleging racial victimization” (2015, p. 4). For it to be effective, López notes, whites must not only hear the implicit messages of dog whistle
politics but understand them as truth. “To these whites,” López argues, “the use of coded messages demonstrating minorities as predatory hoodlums—or welfare cheats, illegal aliens, or terrorists—may seem less like deceitful manipulation, and more like the legitimate recognition of objective societal problems” (p. 36). Mendelberg’s research on the evocation of the race card by whites supports López’s notion that the messages are most effective if coded. Mendelberg (2001) observes that “keeping the message implicit was important to its ability to achieve its intended result of mobilizing whites’ racial fears, stereotypes, and resentments. When the racial nature of the message was explicitly pointed out, it lost much of its racial power” (p. 178). In a similar vein, one might imagine that a Bormann (1972) rhetorical fantasy theme might lose its unique ability to connect people if its meaning was too obvious.

Throughout Dog Whistle Politics, López (2014) includes numerous examples of dog whistle politics as well as interviews with political strategies who explain how they work. For instance, in a 1981 interview on the Southern Strategy, with Alexander Lamis, a political scientist at Case Western University, Lee Atwater, who would become the director of Reagan’s 1984 presidential campaign and later George H. Bush’s said:

> You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘nigger’—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, state’s rights and all that stuff. You’re so abstract now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites… saying ‘We want to cut taxes and we want to cut this,’ is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than ‘Nigger, nigger.’ So anyway, you look at it, race is coming on the back burner. (Perlstein, 2012)

López (2014) includes another famous example of dog whistle politics employed by then presidential candidate Ronald Reagan during the 1980 election. At a stump speech, Reagan elicited the support of middle class white voters by “criticizing the food stamp and welfare programs as helping
‘some young fellow ahead of you to buy a T-bone steak’ while ‘you were waiting in line to buy a hamburger’” (p. 59). López also points out that this was the toned-down, dog whistle version of the anecdote. In speeches across the South, Reagan used ‘‘strapping young buck’ instead of ‘some young fellow’,’ which referenced a historically understood image of a menacing and aggressive black male who might—given the chance—rape a white woman (p. 59). In this instance, members of the media heard Reagan’s whistle and reported on it. That explicitness curved its persuasive power. In turn, Reagan used the more abstract “Strapping young fellow” to invite the identification of white voters.

López (2014) suggests that the dog whistle politics of Reagan, Donald Trump, and others “wreck the middle class by helping convince the middle class that government—and not concentrated wealth—is the greatest threat in their lives” (p. 56). Dog whistle politics do so by inviting white solidarity and by stoking commonsense views, which López argues, are fostered in a society within which race has historically been a qualifying factor for why certain groups get certain privileges while others do not (p. 59). Although dog whistle politics do not condition those who identify their underlying messages as if a Pavlovian experiment gone awry, they do encourage participation in a racialized echo chamber and advocate for the transformation of pre judgements into stereotypes. These commonsense views operate on racial beliefs that promote “obvious” truths about nonwhites, which include notions that black people are lazy, that Latinx people are dirty, and that Muslims are inherently violent. Politicians and organizers who seek the support of a large white base manipulate these commonsense views of race in order to garner greater backing for whatever cause they seek to achieve. This, again, is often accomplished through phrases that do not sound racial, phrases like “law and order” which Nixon used to stir white fear and resentment toward nonwhites living in city centers (Mendelberg and Oleske, 2000, p. 173).

I argue that members of St. George’s incorporation effort engaged in a dog whistle politics that invited their supporters to participate in a colorblind, post-racial, white solidarity where the problems
of segregated public schools had already been resolved and where property values and commercial investment could be improved via the absence of nonwhites. In this case, St. George leaders attempted to tap into the racial animus associated with historic cultural practices of whiteness in the Deep South in order to secure petition signatures that would improve the status of their neighborhoods, the prestige of their schools, and attract investment in the south side of the Greater Baton Rouge area.

For instance, when Senator Bodi White interviewed with PBS Frontline, he first asked: “Do you think that you have to bus children all over, bus children long distances so you can say you sit in a seat next to someone diverse, different from yourself?” White begins by delivering “a punch that jabs race into the conversation” (p. 4). First, he uses the thinly veiled reference “bussing children,” which, as Atwater notes, is a way of referencing displeasure with racial integration without mentioning race. Next, White moves the conversation in a direction that points to an established post-civil rights society in which equality was established years ago. White says: “The Justice Department, you know, they achieved their goal. Who can say we’re not desegregated? We have an African-American president. We have an African-American mayor here in Baton Rouge, with a majority white in the parish” As López suggests, White performs “a parry that slaps away charges of racial pandering” before they can be made (p. 4). He invites as sense of identification with a post-racial society by noting that the DOJ accomplished its goals, which implies the achievement of an integrated school system. At the same time, White dog whistles white supporters to identify with a sense of white victimization by implying that desegregation was “the DOJs” goal and not the goal of the people. The implicit message is that, the interfering government (as usual) got its way by bullying the everyday citizen and forcing its agenda. In this case, White encourages a narrative that transforms the DOJ into a social actor who performs the all-to-familiar overreaches of federal power that have hurt the community and its schools.

White, then, reminds the Frontline interviewer that “We have an African-American president. We have an African-American mayor here in Baton Rouge, with a majority white in the parish.” White
reinforces his evocation of a postracial society. He does so through an appeal to colorblindness. This appeal invites viewers to understand the election of a black president as obvious evidence that the sought after cultural ideal—a society in which racial categories no longer limit people—has been achieved (Crenshaw, 1998, p. 244). As White continues, however, he again dog whistles white voters by suggesting “enough is enough” when it comes to race talk. White says: “We’ve been through all that. We need to let us go back and rebuild our schools now.” White’s statement works as “a kick that savages the critic for opportunistically alleging racial victimization” (López, 2014, p. 4). White addresses possible critics of the St. George movement when he suggests that establishing civil rights is a thing of the past and so are the desegregation battles in Baton Rouge. White encourages incorporation supporters to see racial tensions as part of the past, and he promotes a sense of St. George as the “little guy” being picked on by an interfering parish government that is using racial politics to camouflage its hand in the broken school system. White also makes a more implicit appeal. When he says, “let us go back and rebuild our schools,” White is dog whistling supporters who understand the desegregation ruling as the beginning of the problems with public schooling. White’s statement is problematic. On one hand, it invites his audiences to take for granted a post-racial society, and on the other hand, it has a more insidious message that reaches for support by stirring white anxiety and the scapegoating of nonwhites.

A 2015, interview between St. George’s Lionel Rainey and The Guardian provides another less audible example of how dog whistle politics shaped the breakaway movement. When accusations about whether St. George’s actions were racially motivated came up, Rainey responded:

Playing the race card, it’s an intellectually dishonest point of view… It’s a lazy point of view. We get it. It plays well, it’s sensational. But there’s nothing any of us can do about what happened 20 or 30 years ago. I don’t carry that burden because there’s nothing I can do about
that, but what I can do is affect what’s going to happen today and what’s going to happen tomorrow. Race has unequivocally nothing to do with what we’re looking at. (Barlow, 2015)

Rainey immediately positions St. George as the victim of identity politics. He induces supporters to understand that the “race card”—which embodies the unwarranted excuses nonwhites use to justify their lack of success—is being used by the media to drum up ratings and sell newspapers. With race made explicit and activated as part of the conversation, Rainey is also able to induce supporters to associate “dishonest” and “lazy” with black people while also evoking the stereotype that white people, conversely, are trustworthy, decent, and hardworking. Rainey’s next comments “it plays well” and “it’s sensational” allow him to distract attention from his dog whistling and pivot to questions of media credibility. This process of identifying the “media” as the common enemy is part of a growing strategy, particularly on the part of conservatives, in which speakers can pivot away from addressing whatever issue is at hand. The strategy encourages a zone of identification where the “media” is transformed into a shared adversary that abstracts issues and promotes discord. The deflection protects those engaged in dog whistle politics since it creates an atmosphere where journalists are “being reactionary” if they defend their reporting or their questions.

Rainey continues, “there’s nothing any of us can do about what happened 20 or 30 years ago. I don’t carry that burden because there’s nothing I can do about that, but what I can do is affect what’s going to happen today and what’s going to happen tomorrow.” In this instance, Rainey draws from a narrative that constructs the problems of the past as divorced from the problems of the present, and in turn insignificant in considering the future. The narrative is directed at absolving his supporters of whatever guilt they might hold about the incorporation’s possible socioeconomic or racial implications. Instead, he entices them to participate in a post-civil rights, post-racial fantasy, where school segregation is a thing of the past in Baton Rouge. The combination of Rainey’s dog whistling strategies promote a realignment in which the incorporation movement is under attack by outsiders,
who would rather focus on past problems than work toward solutions. Finally, Rainey says, “race has unequivocally nothing to do with what we’re looking at.” His parting kick admonishes critics “for opportunistically alleging racial victimization” (López, 2014, p. 4). Rainey engages in power evasive appeals that attempt to direct attention away from issues of race and class, and he instead draws attention to his identity-based claims of being victimized for his efforts to promote positive change.

St. George’s leaders employ a dog whistle politics that directed at securing local and national support for their incorporation model. In doing so, they support a public persona that works to erase the racial animus in Baton Rouge by placing it in the distance past as some a bygone cultural practice that no longer shapes knowledge about the community. Ironically, St. George backers also draw on the distant past in order to promote the incorporation as a cleansing effort, or Gresson (1996) notes, as a means to rewrite the past by erasing its racial tensions and highlighting it as a site for “the public mourning of the ‘victimized white male’” (p. 13). In this site where nonwhites are absent, the neighborhoods are safe, the schools are better, and the community is thriving. Browning evokes this vision when he tells a *Frontline* reporter:

I can look back to my school years, the neighborhood schools, and being sent to the principal’s office, and the principal saying, Boy, you want me to call your daddy? You know, because you know what? I knew he knew my father. It’s about bringing community back. It’s about bringing schools back to our community. (Robertson, 2014)

Browning’s anecdote induces an attitude of nostalgia for a past that was taken by outsiders in the federal government, a place where, I infer, whites and nonwhites stayed in their own communities and had their own separate spaces. Browning’s anecdote appeals to supporters who understand bussing and integration as an unfair deterritorialization of private space (e.g. of home). As Dickinson (2006) notes, “nostalgia is marked by an often bittersweet emotion of longing for a lost, better, simpler, and securer past, and is a memory that is often deeply connected to comforting spaces—in particular home” (p.
Browning’s story symbolically equates the incorporation effort with a homecoming, a return to a treasured past that was lost during the trauma of forced bussing and desegregation.

*Illuminated Borders of American Nations: New France & The Deep South*

Greene (1998) argues that in order to advance the critical rhetoric project, critical rhetoricians must continue to uncover and illuminate connections between discursive practices and material effects. In this vein, he suggests that critics focus on governmentality as a possible bridge between persuasive appeals that invite identification and the material effects produced when that identification becomes a source of action (pp. 35). The city of St. George incorporation effort provides an interesting case to test that notion. At this site, some in the community would like to establish a border that protects their interests and allows them to govern their own K-12 schools. These folks invite participation in that project through a number of persuasive acts. However, others in the community understand the proposed border as an attack on communal values, one that promotes segregation based on race and class. The proposed border allows community members from both sides to refer to the buildings, places, and spaces that would affect the future of the community. Their deliberations about governing create a discursive space that relies on material objects and calculations of the possible material effects of planned action.

In addition, I argue that the St. George breakaway movement provides a rich site to explore the tensions that resonate around hidden borders where historically whiteness emerged differently as a cultural practice. The East Baton Rouge Parish lies on a border between two dominant cultural hearths that continue to inform the practices and attitudes of those within their borders. In New France, for instance, whiteness as a cultural practice was marked by contradictions between notions of white superiority and the promotion of cultural hybridity. These tensions inspired the interracial relationships, egalitarianism, self-reliance, and tolerance that embody its lasting Creole culture. In the Deep South, whiteness as a cultural practice developed from a caste society—divided along race and
class lines—that promoted the acceptance of inequality as part of a natural order. Racial animosity and oppression based on race were supported by the dominant white culture. As whiteness as a cultural practice developed racial animus settled into a coded brand of white paternalism, and the Deep South became characterized by its openness to corporate power, and its deep distrust of government (particularly the federal government) with its ability to tax the wealthy and invoke environmental and labor regulations (Woodard, 2011, p. 88). During the iteration of the city of St. George incorporation movement discussed in this chapter, the complicated and muddy borderlands between New France and the Deep South are apparent in the persuasive efforts undertaken by St. George and its political opponents Better Together as each side made their cases for how best to govern Greater Baton Rouge’s public school system. Better Together drew from discourses that promoted tolerance; whereas, St. George drew from discourses that disparaged government oversight in order to appeal to its supporters.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The two overarching research questions that this dissertation pushes against are: (1) what can critics learn about the connections between place, whiteness and cultural practices by analyzing deliberation about K-12 education at different locales within the U.S.? and (2) How does whiteness intersect, influence, and mediate boundaries of civic identity and national belonging? In addressing them, this dissertation attempts to broaden previously explored concepts about the nature of whiteness as a cultural practice (Frankenberg, 1993; Shome, 1996; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). It does so within the context of K-12 education policymaking and the debates that surrounds these proposals of planned action. From an orientation of critical rhetoric, I attempt to advance the critical intercultural communication project. In doing so, I take seriously Kent Ono’s (2013) assertion that assumptions about nation-states as homogeneous entities provide a shortsighted perspective on how nations and the people who embody them actually work. Ono’s (2013) calls for critics to interrogate nationing, or how power produces relationships that aim advance a particular worldview (p. 88). To complicate the idea of a unified and homogenous nation-state, my project makes use of Colin Woodard’s (2011) mapping of 11 American nations. These nations, or dominant cultural hearths, as Woodard argues, reflect the embedded attitudes, deep seated preferences, and governing practices of the various EuroAtlantic colonizers who controlled them (p. 2).

I assemble discursive fragments (McGee, 1990; McKerrow, 1989) into a text directed at demystifying how—with each of these colonized lands—whiteness operates uniquely as a cultural practice. In doing so, I jump through sedimented layers of time collecting historical bits of discourse and related material practices that continue to inform present day education policy discussions involving race and power. For instance, I argue that whiteness as a cultural practice operates differently in what is now Colorado than it does in what is now Louisiana and that those differences are historically embedded within colonial practices of governing. Taking education as a form of
governmentality, as Foucault suggests (Lemke, 2002), I analyze deliberation on K-12 education that takes place where the borders of whiteness as a cultural practice meet. For example, I analyze the types of rituals that inform whiteness as cultural practice on the borderlands of what was once El Norte and the Far West. I use Burke’s (1966) trope of metonymy to characterize whiteness as a cultural practice that produces the products of place and space that exist with contested historicities of culture. I, then, point to what analysis of metonymic borders between “formerly” colonized regions such as the Deep South and New France can teach critics about current racial and socioeconomic issues that enter into discussions of K-12 education policy.

My hope is that by making the idea of nation-state strange this dissertation offers to a window into a broader discussion directed at addressing how critics might go about making whiteness visible. (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Alcoff, 2015). As Alcoff (2015) suggests “making whiteness visible is often aiming to make not only its history visible but also, [and] more importantly, its political functionality (p. 102). In considering the political functionality of whiteness, I offer a wide array of examples that call attention to the governing of education as a governing of public space. Within those public spaces, poor and nonwhite people tend to be monitored and patrolled as targets of both surveillance and discipline (O’Farrell, 2005). This surveillance is dedicated to maintenance of established power relations of race.

My analysis in Chapter Three assembles discursive fragments into a text directed at showing connections between education, public space, and the patrolling of nonwhite bodies in that space. Through this newly constructed text, I evaluate the ways in which federal government develops education policies within a political environment that oscillates between two ideological value centers: (1) a market-driven perspective based on competition and merit, and (2) a communal perspective that promotes diversity and social equity. Each of these ideologies invite those who support them as “truth” to participate in the creation and recreation of the messages and actions that maintain and reinforce
them. I complicate the market-driven perspective and the communal perspective by noting that they facilitate contrasting forms of governmentality. With regards to K-12 education policy, the former promotes the articulation of a discourse of “standards and accountability” and the latter a discourse of “opportunity” (Asen, 2015). By a discourse of opportunity, I mean governing that: (1) promotes domestic social welfare programs; (2) enacts policies directed at redressing past subjugation; (3) favors policy decisions that risk alienating large pockets of white constituents; and (4), supports the perspective that civil rights remain an ongoing struggle. This way of understanding governing is in tension with a discourse of standards and accountability, which is suspicious of social welfare programs as wasteful and operates under the assumption that the U.S. exists in a post-civil rights era. More specifically, by a discourse of standards and accountability, I mean governing that: (1) promotes standardized testing and competition for funds; (2) enacts policies directed at de facto privatization of the education marketplace; (3) favors policies that risk alienating large pockets of nonwhite constituents; and (4), supports the perspective that civil rights have (for the most part) been achieved and that maintaining an established equality is what matters.

In highlighting rhetorical shifts from opportunity to standards and accountability, I suggest that each is supported by opposing presumptions about equity. The discourse of opportunity operates out of a civil rights frame directed at substantive equality. Conversely, the discourse of standards and accountability operates out of a post-civil rights frame that assumes equality (for the most part) has been realized and now must be enforced (Castagno, 2014; Crenshaw, 1997). I note that the consequence of the acceptance of one frame is the partial or full rejection of the other frame. With Omi and Winant (2014), I argue that the shift from opportunity to standards and accountability reflects the rise of an inherently racist laissez-faire economic perspective that embodies a movement away from policy measures directed toward substantive equality and toward policy measures that work to maintain and enforce the boundaries of whiteness within educational settings.
My case studies move away from broad explorations of federal-level K-12 education policy and offer examples of how deliberation about education unfolds at the community level. The case studies interrogate how unique forms of whiteness as cultural practice inform agendas. In doing so, they attempt to expose “how dominance is rationalized, legitimized, and made ostensibly normal and natural” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 3). In each case study, I play the part of a hermeneutic Indiana Jones who assembles fragments into texts directed at naming whiteness. Since my time in public school, the discourse surrounding K-12 education policy has changed rather drastically. Efforts to privatize public education and efforts to form neighborhood schools that are whiter and more affluent have produced a K-12 school environment in which schools are less integrated than they were in 1968. As critical scholars it is essential to promote conversations that invite efforts at inclusion into K-12 education policymaking.

In Chapter Two, I discussed my first bus ride to public school. That bus ride was a lesson in difference and its powerful connection with race. I remember my first two weeks of school. I fought with my mom every morning. I did not want to go but not because I disliked school. I did not want to confront my own difference or better said the feeling of being different. Those feelings, however, faded as I became more comfortable with the others around me, as we became friends. Although there were rough patches along the way, for the most part, my K-12 school experience was a fortunate one. My privilege as a child of caring, middle class parents doubtlessly facilitated that.

As a critic, my work in this manuscript represents a personal step toward what Sundstrom (2001) calls a mixed race consciousness that “challenges America’s racial vision of itself, by pointing out America’s long history of cultural hybridity—intermixture via sex and culture” (p. 307). While my work here attempts to advance the Critical ICC project, I recognize that it is limited by my distance from the communities I explore. The next step in my project, then, is to move closer, to move in from
my position as the faraway critic, to move from Buber’s notion I/it and to conduct research that integrates dialogue and focuses on I/Thou relationships (Yoshikawa, 1987).

To advance this project, I plan to be present as community members deliberate on education policy and race, listen to them, discuss their perspectives with them, and eventually use insights from those discussions to begin building a useful language directed at inclusion, a language that promotes engaging knowledge of others as border crossers. Developing rhetorical strategies of this sort, Giroux (1992) argues, could invite people (1) to engage knowledge of power and difference in productive ways and (2) to interrogate the existence of borders as both unnatural and natural expressions of human invention (p. 136). As Rowe (2013) notes:

To engage an/other is to reach across the power lines that would separate us; it is to place ourselves vulnerably in the hands of an/other. Of course, such a placing will always elude us as we are constrained by the limitations of experience, empathy, and the sedimented histories of benevolence that might animate such a gesture. Thus to engage in intercultural communication is to tread within the abyss of the inter. (p. 4)

In order to offer more ways for everyday people to tread into that abyss, critical scholars must begin by pointing to inclusive languages and productive communication strategies. Currently, whiteness is limited in its explanatory power in two important and interconnected ways. One problem with whiteness is that in naming an actor it becomes too reductive and implies that whiteness is like a disease that could be cured if we could only root out the evil hearts who continue to perform it. Such actions, however, only perpetuate narrow legal definitions of racism as malice and a culture where a collective guilt over racism can be relieved through shaming and shunning racist actors. Yet even when those actors are silenced, race and racism remain as organizing societal factors. Another problem with whiteness is the tendency to position it as such an abstraction, such an unconscious predisposition of race relations that little can be done other than to describe its face. This pushes against the institutional
and structural factors that promote white dominance, but does not provide a language to reimagine those structures. In this case, the term whiteness (and its inherent slipperiness) becomes an academic game of truth that fails to resonate with the very audiences who might most benefit from its message. For instance, terms such as white fragility, white solipsism, white victimization, do not inspire bridgework. While they do describe what I believe are legitimate phenomena, they do so in a way that reinforces the very divisiveness they aim to critique. We need to develop not only language and communication strategies that encourage accountability for historical and structural oppression and dominance but also to suggest the possibilities that such a recognition could create moving forward. We need a language with the potential to open up both ourselves and others to new understandings about race and cultural differences.

In viewing whiteness as heterogeneous, as informed by the dominant cultural practices particular to a given locale, critics can recover spaces where hybridity was possible and still is. In these sites, as Ashley and Walker (1990) note:

identity is never sure, community is always uncertain, [and] meaning is always in doubt. Instead, people… confront arbitrary cultural practices that work to discipline ambiguity and impose effects of identity and meaning by erecting exclusionary boundaries that separate the natural and necessary domicile of certain being from the contingencies and change events that the self must know as problems, difficulties, and dangers to be exteriorized and brought under control. (p. 262)

We can take for granted that our society will always have people who cling tightly to bigoted ways. But, as communication scholars we have not done enough to build bridges for people who desire a new language to engage difficult topics that involve contested relations of power as both race and racism are. If we seek to change institutions and restructure society in ways that further decenter whiteness, then the continual uncovering rhetorical strategies that encourage alliances and
introspection is crucial. When Rowe (2013) discusses entering the powerlines of intercultural communication, she suggests some ways of developing such a language. Rowe argues that alliances or bridge work happens as we locate our shared identities with others and acknowledge our different relations to power. She encourages critics to learn the histories of others with the goal of better understanding their locations within the complicated intersections of place, space, and power. “To sit at the table,” Rowe notes, “requires some effort to become fluent in the histories of those who are different from us and in the conditions of privilege and marginality that constitute our own. It entails ‘deep talking,’ vulnerable sharing, and honest, un-defensive listening” (p. 224). Rowe’s notion of un-defensive listening pairs well with Krista Radcliffe’s notion of rhetorical listening, which offers thoughtful insight into the “how” of developing meaningful and productive techniques to uncover language that addresses whiteness in ways that encourage interaction rather than alienation. Radcliff (1999) argues that “listening with the intent to receive, not master, discourses is not a quick fix or a happy-ever-after solution; rather, it is an on-going process… rhetorical listening,” she adds, “is another way of helping us continually negotiate our always evolving standpoints, our identities, with the always evolving standpoints of others. It is also another way of helping us recognize that our standpoints are not autonomous points of static stases but rather complex webs of dynamically intermingled cultural structures and subjective agency” (p. 209). A willingness to listen in this way, Radcliffe instructs:

offers us the possibility of getting past the guilt/blame tropes of accusation, denial, and defensiveness—all of which are associated with authorial intent and all of which usually result in a stalemate that preserves the status quo. By championing a responsibility logic, rhetorical listening asks us, first to judge not simply the person’s intent but the historically situated discourses that are (un)consciously swirling around and through the person and, second,
evaluate politically and ethically how these discourses function and how we want to act upon them. (p. 208)

Recently, scholars have promoted a new direction for critical rhetoric to play a driving force in the development of this “new” language for talking about race and racism that makes critics into, what Rowe (2013) calls bridge-builders. Rowe suggests that “Bridging entails creating openings, passageways, connecting with others to transform power relations” (p. 218). To do so my project will move in the direction advanced by Middleton, Hess, and Endress (2015) who argue that participatory critical rhetoric “offers a critical orientation that encourages critics to engage local communities and their rhetorical practices with deliberate attention to those rhetorical efforts whose (embodied, fragmented, ephemeral) form fails to rise to the standard of typical texts suitable for criticism, and especially those practices whose substance challenges dominant cultural logics” (p. 38). In situ explorations offer critics access to the claims and cultural logic of a given locate, and thus an opportunity to listen, to learn, and to invent new languages that work to displace whiteness by opening up communication about it.
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