5-17-2006

Whiteness and Resistance: Investigating Student Concepts of White Privilege in the Writing Classroom

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WHITENESS AND RESISTANCE: INVESTIGATING STUDENT CONCEPTS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2006

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Of the many identity issues that students face as they enter university writing courses—those of gender, class, age, and race—the issue of white privilege is one that is seldom addressed. In the predominately white Southern university where I teach, African American students make up 26% of the incoming freshman population, reflecting the racial demographics of the state. Although the visible majority, white students benefit from racial privilege that seems invisible, at least to them. I am interested in studying Southern white students' perspectives on constructions of whiteness and white privilege—how they live it and how they write it.

Recent research shows a need for the questioning of whiteness, both as a social position of privilege and as a dominant discourse, especially in college classrooms.

My research questions include:

1. How does identification with the dominant race impact white student responses to writing assignments and class discussion that involve issues of social justice?

2. To what degree do white students feel "othered" in a classroom climate that is likely to question their socially privileged position?

3. How can writing affect white students' attitudes toward social change?

Qualitative methods include classroom observation, student interviews, and examination of student writing. By conducting this study, I hope to contribute to an understanding of why some white students resist critical pedagogy and its commitment to social change, and whether exposing whiteness in student writing might alter that resistance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For all the support I have received from the many caring people who have been involved with this dissertation project, I am deeply grateful. I wish to thank my advisor Claude Mark Hurlbert for his attentive and timely readings of my drafts, as well as for believing that this study was a worthy one. I also wish to acknowledge the two readers on my committee, Nancy Hayward and Don McAndrew, who have graciously given their time and expertise to offer valuable insights into this dissertation. These three faculty members have treated me with the kindness and professionalism that mark the excellent quality of the IUP summer graduate experience.

I am also greatly indebted to three Georgia Southern University writing professors, who opened up their classrooms and their minds to me. Lori Amy, Marge McLaughlin, and Patricia Price welcomed me into their teaching lives as together we explored racism as a serious social and educational issue.

For their intellectual and emotional support, I am most profoundly grateful to four of my colleagues and friends who have been on this graduate school journey with me. The camaraderie and generous spirit of Laura Milner, Nan LoBue, Kathy Albertson, and Ellen Hendrix literally sustained me through the program.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank my family: my mother, who encouraged me to return to graduate school; and my children Lawrence, Melanie, Kelly, who endured my long absences while I studied, and especially my daughter Renee, who sacrificed two summers of her life to watch after her brother and sister while I was away in school. Without her help my participation in this program would not have been possible. I lovingly dedicate this dissertation to her, Lucy Renee Dessommes.

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Preface: Confessions of a Racist Childhood

"When he was silent . . . it was for the reason that people are always silent; because it is in their best interest to be silent."

-- Philip Roth, The Human Stain

In conducting this inquiry of college writing students' notions of white privilege--how they live it and how they write it-- I bring with me, as a researcher, not only twenty-five years of being a Southern white teacher of predominately white college students, but a host of experiences of growing up white in the South during the 1960s.

My teenage years were marked by the desegregation of public schools in Atlanta and the ensuing "white flight" that put "my" neighborhood and church into a period of racial transition, or more accurately, of racial trauma. Even though these were post-Jim Crow years, I well remember who sat at which ends of the city bus, who were served sodas in shiny glasses at the corner drug store and who were handed paper cups to drink from. I remember cheering for the Atlanta Crackers with my daddy in the stands of the old Ponce de Leon ball park, completely unaware of who was sitting in the level above us and out of sight. Not until I was almost forty did I see in a historic picture displayed in *Atlanta Magazine* the "White Only" sign posted at the gate of this section I once occupied in 1962, the year the photograph was labeled.

Although I was oblivious to the injustices evident around me in all of these situations, I was no less complicit in the oppression of black people[i] at that time, than I was the day the first small group of black teenaged boys showed up at "our" local hangout, the neighborhood public swimming pool. These dark, athletic bodies in swimming trunks were a sight I'd ever seen or imagined before, black people existing generally outside my consciousness. My experiences with "the Negroes," as they were

politely referred to, had been limited to a few glimpses of poor black children in the grocery store, children that I perceived were "staring at me" from the edges of the aisles. But *these* young men were invading our space, strolling confidently along the hot pavement and acting as though they had as much right to swim as we had; and now *we* were staring at *them*. As the black boys lined up for a turn on the high dive, every swimmer – all whites of course—made for the sides of the pool. I sat there with the rest of my friends, legs dangling in the water (probably a Salem dangling from my mouth) and gawked with the others as the boys took several dives into the empty deep end, then grabbed their towels and headed out the gate. Only after their departure did the white kids go back in the pool, ending the stillness and silence that accompanied the previous performance. Much murmuring commenced in the next few minutes: "What were those Niggers doing coming here and putting on that show?" "Don't they know where their nasty bodies belong?" "Well, this pool will never be the same again." "I'm going to go home and tell my parents they have to do something about whatever the shit is happening here."

Whether I participated in this chatter I've chosen not to remember, but the question of what was happening to "our lives" in white suburban Atlanta came into focus the night of April 4, 1968, when the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. caused fear on neighborhood streets not felt since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Race was clearly an issue then; it was not a good time to be black . . . or white. When I think of the racial injustices I've witnessed and the inhuman, explosive answer to the call for non-violent change, I feel the discomfort of wearing a white skin. To this day, I do not like to admit that my parents didn't stick it out as the only white family left in Beecher Hills. When I

became the only white rider on the school bus and came home with stories of being threatened by a noisy group of black boys who apparently resented my presence, my parents sold our house, at considerable economic loss, to a black family we never met and fled beyond the edges of the metro area to a country town where I suspected that my new all-white classmates would be riding their fathers' tractors to the high school. Although my parents knew that as a high school senior, I was unsettled about leaving behind my coming-of-age memories, they never regretted leaving our home, which to them had become a foreign territory inhabited by families not like us.

Such was my first experience with racism and with what I would much later come to know as white privilege. After all, my frugal, depression-generation parents had the financial and social ability (privilege) to move into a new suburban development without risking non-acceptance by the neighbors. They also had the ability (privilege) of retiring early from their white collar, white populated office jobs in downtown Atlanta and enjoy the benefits of once again attending a white middle-class church and sending me to a white public high school. Looking back, I find it hard to believe that we considered ourselves the victims of racism, black people being the invaders of our way of life, not to mention the cause of the economic collapse of our real estate. White privilege was invisible to us, and had the notion been introduced, we would have vehemently denied being complicit in the racist act of "white flight."

As my black writing students have pointed out, white people don't know much about the culture of African Americans--and don't want to know. Whites, according to these students, want to keep themselves personally insulated, as well as keep institutions (and neighborhoods) of whiteness, white. My story seems to validate their point.

Naturally, I prefer not to relate my own coming-of-racial-age experiences to my writing students because race is, after all, a delicate subject, one that we "don't like to talk about." But if I expect student writers—especially white student writers—to "come clean" before they can critically assess their own positionality in the context of race relations, then I must be willing to take that risk myself.

After thirty years of avoiding telling people which area of Atlanta I grew up in, I have finally broken my silence. This past spring, when I opened up to my students about my racist past, yes, I received stunned looks. But I had to let our writing community know that I have had my own experiences with racial identity issues and have only recently begun to examine my own whiteness. How else could I ask them to question theirs?

[i] Since the literature on race so often uses both terms *African American* and *black people* interchangeably, I will do the same throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

WHY BRING WHITENESS INTO THE WRITING CLASSROOM?

Just what is Whiteness Studies, anyway?

"Whiteness has the ability to create an elaborate social subterfuge, leading both whites and nonwhites to believe that the representations in terms of which they live their lives and understand the world and themselves are naturally given, unchangeable ways of being."

-- George Yancy, What White Looks Like, 11

My year-long reluctance to divulge my dissertation topic stems from my fear of having to define Whiteness. When I cannot avoid the innocent, cocktail party-type question, "So, what is your dissertation about?" I mentally squirm as I try to come up with another answer to disarm the quizzical looks I know I will get, sometimes even from fellow academics. My answers range from the academically encased, "It's about the examination of whiteness as a component of the critical writing classroom, how college writing stands to change some provincial social attitudes of white, middle-class students," to the globally obscure, "I'm studying white students' responses to multiculturalism in the writing classroom."

Regardless of my phrasing, the word *white* or *whiteness* has to come in there somewhere. My audience's reaction, of course, depends upon the audience's own attitudes. There's the dreaded racist remark, "Yeah, it's about time we started studying white people again; multiculturalism has gone too far." The guarded, more subtly racist, "Discussions of race just make racism worse," puts me on the defensive, as well. What I long for is the comment, always from an academic, "I agree that white students need to look at themselves as raced and not just as simply the norm. I think it's a good idea to introduce students to whiteness and its undeserved, often unrecognized power." Indeed, I

have met college professors, even in fields other than composition, who incorporate some study of whiteness in their courses.

These personal responses to the idea of whiteness roughly parallel popular and academic strands of the conversation on the value of teaching Whiteness. A glance at websites from a Google search on "whiteness studies" will reveal some serious efforts by anti-racist voices to define white studies as legitimate inquiry. To set the audience straight, the web authors' first order of business is often to assure the audience that Whiteness Studies is not advocating white supremacy. Such sites as Tolerance.com and WhitePrivilege.com are anti-racist websites that represent organizations dedicated to exposing whiteness as a constructed, historical concept to be recognized and dealt with, especially by those identified as "white." Site founder Kendall Clark writes, "I started WhitePrivilege.com in order to make the structures of white privilege—its causes and effects—less socially invisible, primarily by pointing out instances in U.S. society where it is or seems to be at work." Clark explains that the power of whiteness is the least evident to white people: "Th[e] pattern of assertion and denial is itself racialized: for the most part, people of color say that white people enjoy white privilege, while white people for the most part deny not only that they have it, but that such a thing even exists. I have been assured countless times by white people that there is no such thing as white privilege and that the very idea is nonsensical." He asserts that by defining the term (which he does by reworking the OED definition of *privilege* to refer to white people instead of people in general), "[we can] make it a problem for white people [and] show that it is an unjust, historical creation." Similarly, Gregory Jay, an apologist for whiteness studies, identifies its focus as

> an attempt to trace the economic and political history behind the invention of 'whiteness,' to attack the privileges given to so-called 'whites,' and to analyze the cultural practices (in art, music, literature, and popular media) that create and perpetuate the fiction of 'whiteness.' . . . 'Whiteness Studies' is an attempt to think critically about how white skin preference has operated systematically, structurally, and sometimes unconsciously as a dominant force in American—and indeed in global—society and culture.

According to Jay, "The purpose of Whiteness Studies is to expose this fiction [of whiteness], to make visible the history and practices of white supremacy." And teachers of social justice would agree with him that "Whiteness Studies [is] a part of the general effort to eradicate prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, and racism. Such a liberation project can be strengthened by deconstructing the notion of a 'white race' and criticizing the cultural preference given to images of whiteness" (www.uwm.edu/People/gjay/Whiteness). Defining whiteness studies in terms of antiracism, with the accompanying commitment to critiquing images of whiteness that pervade our culture, is central to a writing pedagogy that promotes writing as a cultural text.

Naming It: The Ensuing Controversy

Even though many a positive definition of whiteness studies is available on the web, other voices interpret this fairly new area of study as erosive to the healing of racial conflict. Chris Weinkopf, Los Angeles Daily News editorial-page editor, calls whiteness studies "the latest academic fad," one concocted by liberal multiculturalists who have run out of ethnic groups to focus on: "There are no more –isms to define; no more ethnic

groups to balkanize; no more victims to patronize. That leaves academics looking for the next Big Thing, and they think they've found it in WS." According to this conservative columnist and web author, "The essence of the discipline can be summed up in two words: Hating Whitey." The demonization of white people has long been an anticipated risk for proponents of whiteness studies, and indeed critics of the field have cited David Horowitz' suspicion that whiteness studies promotes hatred: "Black studies celebrates blackness, Chicano studies celebrates Chicanos, women's studies celebrates women, and white studies attacks white people as evil" (qtd. in Weinkopf; Fears). Such negative interpretations of the concept cast whiteness studies as destructive to race relations; however, being aware that such sentiments exist can help teachers anticipate some difficult moments they might encounter when introducing the notion to students.

In a Washington Post article, staff writer Darryl Fears relates "The Hue and Cry on 'Whiteness Studies'" as he observes the classroom discussions and activities in "The Social Construction of Whiteness and Women" at The University of Massachusetts, one of "at least 30 institutions—from Princeton University to the University of California at Los Angeles—[that] teach courses in whiteness studies." Fears describes the often-discussed "privilege walk" that disturbed one white student who finished the exercise far ahead of the class. The participants lined up side by side in the beginning, and "when the moderator read a statement that applied to you, you stepped forward; if it didn't, you stepped back." This student said, "You looked behind you and became really uncomfortable." Fears notes that the "Asian and black students she admired were near the back. 'We all started together,' she said, 'and now were so separated.'"

Fears goes on to explain the backlash that is commonly felt by white students in such a course that studies race as an invention with the purpose of facilitating control of a society though oppression. When students learn that in America, whiteness was designated as a requirement for voting rights in 1807, when, according to historian James O. Horton of George Washington University, "property laws were struck down, allowing white people at the bottom of society to vote based on race," the white students feel singled out. One white sophomore told Fears, "The course was really, really hard . . . both personally and as a white person, because you really want to take the focus off you and your whiteness." Fears does believe, however, that the students, regardless of race, took away from the course a commitment to looking beyond their homogeneous social groups, as they consider the origins and meanings of whiteness.

Despite the misunderstanding, discomfort, and negative spin that often accompany the topic of whiteness studies, the growing body of scholarship, as well as commentaries by popular writer-enthusiasts, indicates that readers want to learn what the study is all about. Solid sources of information are not difficult to find – if one is inclined to search for them. In Lifting the White Veil, Jeff Hitchcock, co-founder and Executive Director of the Center for the Study of White American Culture, perceives the "need for a manual that well-meaning white people could use to explore their relationship as racial (and racialized) beings in a multiracial society." Hitchcock, describing himself as "a self-aware white person struggling with his own whiteness," seeks to "demonstrate to the average educated audience of white people that whiteness, white culture, white identity and white experience comprise a reality they can no longer ignore" (www.liftingthewhiteveil.com/Author.asp). Published and sold widely in 2002, the book

contains his personal history as a white man married to a black woman, but focuses on the social and economic history of white racial identity as a social construction. His research is presented to an audience he assumes will be skeptical of such messages as "white awareness" being the first step to antiracist thinking among white people; and "color-blindness" being actually harmful to race relations.

Such ideas, however, are a given in circles of critical race scholars, but as public reaction to the 1997 Conference on The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness at the University of California, Berkeley attests, even academics are sometimes criticized for studying a field that "has expanded over the past decade in part as a result of suggestions by intellectuals like Toni Morrison, who have long suggested that race studies must include a critical, self-reflexive body of work about whites, which is both anti-racist and progressive" (Conference Report). According to the Conference Report, when the large group of scholars assembled at UC Berkeley for the one-day conference — one that turned into a lively three-day program—the local press turned out in full force, expecting a "white-pride, white backlash" gathering: "When we patiently explained to journalists that this was an anti-racist, multi-racial event, many of them dropped the story, apparently not interested in something as boring as anti-racism. Those who did continue calling and interviewing us, consistently sought to position the conference as the work of guilty white liberals." The conference participants, however, were among the most distinguished writers in a field that considers white guilt an unproductive response to the need for social change: Michelle Fine, Ruth Frankenberg, Cheryl Harris, Noel Ignatiev, Eric Lott, Michael Omi, David Roediger, David Wellman, Lois Weis, Howard Winant – names that appear frequently in the index of many a book on race—had studied concepts

of whiteness since the 1970s, and yet the unwelcoming reception indicated this idea was still too new—even for Berkeley—not to be looked on with suspicion.

What's Taken "Us" So Long?

To note that the Conference took place several years ago, and *after* the wave of interest in whiteness had been building for some time, makes even more curious the fact that so few white people, academics among them, have been introduced to the idea of whiteness studies and the accompanying notion of invisible white privilege.

Although these veterans have been at work for years, relative newcomers to whiteness research abound, especially in composition studies. In a 1999 CCC article, Krista Ratcliffe, who has presented several papers on whiteness at CCCC, recalls her own introduction to the complex workings of whiteness in a racist society: "Nothing in my education, academic or otherwise, had prepared me to recognize (see) or articulate (say) whiteness in myself or others, and certainly nothing in my education had provided me with strategies for resisting certain versions of my whiteness that may privilege me but not others" (211). Ratcliffe learned about white privilege, the historical grounding of whiteness, and the multiple, ever-changing cultural category of whiteness from the work of Frankenberg, Keating, and Dyer, but she still wonders, "if or how I ever participate in white discourses in ways that might unknowingly erase the desires and material existence of others" (215)? Critically aware white teachers will doubtless face similar self-reflections as they introduce students to whiteness in the writing classroom, perhaps suspecting that they themselves are living in contradiction to the principles of antiracist thinking they are trying to promote.

Tim Wise, popular spokesperson for challenging institutional racism of whiteness, remembers having to deal with white privilege once he was shown that it exists: “When I finally sat down to take stock – something I felt I had to do now that the veil was snatched from my eyes – I was stunned by how many things began to come back to me; how many examples of privilege flooded my consciousness; how many times I could remember collaborating with racism” (229). In his narrative contribution to the collection, When Race Becomes Real: Black and White Writers Confront Their Personal Histories, Wise goes on to recount numerous advantages his white heritage afforded him, privileges bestowed on him even before he was born: his family having been educated in the best schools, welcomed into the most prestigious neighborhoods, employed by institutions that would offer the best career advancement. In his own life he was placed (undeservedly) onto the highest academic track, disciplined leniently for behavioral infractions as a student, and recruited actively (over black students from a neighboring school) for admission to Tulane. He was even awarded top credit for social activist work, when scores of equally involved black students went unacknowledged. His list of privileges goes on and on (229-231). He admits that during the time in his education when he thought himself most liberal, “my ‘color-blindness,’ if you will, had rendered me, in a strange and fascinating way, blind to the consequences of color, especially my own” (233). The uncovering of one’s own white privilege, according to numerous accounts in this edited volume, often requires serious digging into the personal past in order to become visible enough to recognize.

For white people to come to terms with their own whiteness doubtless takes much time and consideration. Since “whiteness is a privileged norm split from other cultural

categories in ways that render it invisible, hiding its violence behind parlor manners and polite language" (Ratcliffe 214), it is little wonder that white people resist acknowledging that modes of avoidance can be as damaging as acts of prejudice. To come to terms with whiteness requires that "well-intentioned" and "polite" white people take careful notice of their personal assumptions and behaviors in everyday life. And the initiation is, of course, just the beginning of a long process of self-examination.

And now, convinced as I am of the existence of white privilege and the need to address issues in the writing classroom, I have to remind myself that my students have not read and thought about what I have for as long a period of time as I have, and I should not expect them immediately to embrace an ideology that rubs against the principles many of them were taught at home. Their white narratives, after all, would run something like Wise's, but, unlike Wise, the starting point for most of these white, middle-class students would be as Southern conservatives, not liberal educated elite. After all, only two short years ago, I was just as puzzled as my students when they thought about white privilege for the first time.

Introducing white students to whiteness studies might not make them regular readers of Race Traitor, a popular antiracist journal, but, like the black students who have readily written their opinions on whiteness, these students will want to tell their race stories, once they know there's a story to tell.

When Issues of Diversity Come, Can Whiteness Be Far Behind?

"The ultimate white privilege is to ignore both the statistics and the stories, to hold onto a belief in the fiction of a level playing field, a fair and equitable economy, a color-blind world."

-- Robert Jensen, "Black and White," 149

White students come to university writing courses having been exposed to multiculturalism like never before. Unlike previous generations, most students from all income levels and regions bring with them both the respect for the accomplishments of people of color they have studied and the expectation of furthering the foray into multiculturalism during their college years. Many have read at least snippets from W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, and maybe even a novel by Toni Morrison; they know about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X; some have studied such contributors to science as Dr. Charles Richard Drew. Not surprisingly, they have come to believe the picture of social inclusion in America that their education has presented, one that erroneously suggests that racism is over. Although some white students' world experiences might have left them with serious concerns about racial prejudice and inequality, most would fit the innocent, middle-class profile drawn by C.H. Knoblauch of his own students from the "dominant culture": "My students accept the stories about freedom and self-actualization, fair play and altruism, progress and prosperity that their history books have composed to portray the American experience . . . They believe that Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King together emancipated black people, so that any disparity between black and white today results from causes other than the merely historical evil of racial prejudice" (13).

The belief that Americans are all free and none oppressed certainly describes the tenor of many of my white students' conversations; sometimes I even imagine that they

whisper together in the hallways that teachers like me, the children of the sixties, just need to "get over it." Racial oppression is a thing of the past, and liberal professors just won't let it die.

Often, if they detect prejudice in their lives, they name themselves as the victims, and they usually blame equal opportunity, that "liberal euphemism for reverse discrimination" (Knoblauch 13). Like the white working class men that Lois Weis, et al. studied, many white students, especially males, frequently attribute their loss of privilege to "undeserving" minorities whose presence threatens the power that has previously been guaranteed to whites. In another study, Sally Robinson looks at the portrayal of white men as psychologically and physically "wounded" in popular literature and film, noting that such images of suffering help perpetuate the narrative of the disenfranchised white male, a narrative that students readily pick up on. For instance, in class discussions, white male students identify heavily with the beleaguered Michael Douglas character of Falling Down, citing white male discrimination in the workplace as a source of frustration that can result in rage against a new and unwelcome system that devalues whiteness as ordinary and unremarkable.

Although echoes of such a "white backlash" do surface in the writing classroom, for the most part, white students seem oblivious to systematic racial inequalities and show few signs of an awareness of white privilege. Peggy McIntosh writes about the "invisible knapsack" that white people carry around with them, the contents of which they can unpack at any time. These are "special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (77) that give lie to the "myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all" (80-1). Her main point is that

white people, being from the dominant and unquestioned culture, seldom make note of the privileged existence they live every day. This kind of unconscious denial of white privilege seems to be what drives white students—who would *never* characterize themselves as racist—to maintain in their writing such sentiments as a college education being available to any American who has the will to succeed. One of my white female students recently responded to readings by hooks and Ehrenreich on social class:

> If you are born into a lower-class family, do you have the ability and resources to better your standard of living? Yes, you do. We live in the United States of America where every child born on this soil has the opportunity to obtain a free education. . . . I personally received an $80,000 scholarship recently, not because of financial need, race, or sex, but because of my hard work, academic standing, and leadership. No one could look me in the eye and tell me that the money isn't there.

This student from my writing class in a Southern regional university could have been plucked from the middle of Knoblauch's class of equally privileged and comfortable students. The student's voice is full of power but she has likely not considered the source of that power nor the dominant discourse community she was born into.

The notion of unconscious racism is the focus of a book-length study by David Wellman carried out in the late 1960s. Wellman argues that white racism is seldom a matter of prejudice, as has been previously thought by sociologists. In this two-year study of over 200 black and white respondents, Wellman finds that most white people are sensitive to racial inequality and want minorities to rise socially and economically *but not at the expense of the erosion of white privilege.* Rather than being prejudiced individuals

who hold "a combination of *hostility* toward and *faulty generalizations* about racial groups" (4; emphasis original), most whites are unable to recognize their own complicity in institutional structures that in subtle ways maintain a society oppressive to minorities.

Wellman's uncovering of unconscious racism has every bearing on what has come to be known as White Studies, that area of inquiry that puts at the heart of institutional racism the failure of whiteness to examine itself as "raced," rather than as the norm against which all "other" races are measured. Since the time of Omi and Winant's Racial Formation in the United States, the concept of "race" no longer fits any definition that posits it as either an essence or a construction. According to Omi and Winant, "*Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies"* (55; emphasis original). Seeing whiteness as having a dominant role in social conflicts and interests is where white awareness and true antiracist thinking begins.

Such a questioning of whiteness as a negotiated, constructed, changing, and self-critical concept of identity (like other issues of identity politics: class, gender, and races of color) is the goal of Richard Dyer, who explores historical Western world representations of whiteness expressed by whites in popular culture, especially in art and film. His interest is in showing how whiteness – because it is equated with the human, the normative, and the universal—actively dehumanizes races of color by naming them and refusing to be itself named. Dyer believes that "as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and inhabits it" (9). Like others who call for the problematizing of whiteness (Fine; Frankenburg; McIntyre; Morrison)

Dyer hopes to dislodge whiteness from a position of unquestioned and unearned privilege.

In education, particularly in English studies, the call for the examination of whiteness has been no less urgent. Alice McIntyre reveals the unconscious racism of student teachers as she listens to and interacts with scenes of "white talk." She is concerned that, as future educators, her students need to be made aware of how "white ways of thinking and knowing" dominate education in America, and how they, as figures shaping classroom discourse, can develop antiracist teaching practices that can disrupt, if not help dismantle, the oppressive social structures that so many whites are just now coming to recognize. One such self-reflective teacher, Amy Goodburn, scrutinized her own white ways of thinking and knowing as she analyzed her own racial positioning as a researcher. In reviewing her analysis of a classroom observation, Goodburn was surprised to find that constructions of whiteness markedly informed her discussion of the classroom events. Her self-analysis revealed unconscious assumptions of "objectivity" and "authority," "assumptions that 'whited out' [her] presence in the text and that call for further examination of the authority [she] assumed in writing about this classroom scene" (76).

Taking on whiteness in the writing classroom has been the subject of many scholarly articles in recent years. Several commentaries on the necessity for – and difficulty of—addressing issues of whiteness (and race in general) have emerged in composition studies. Catherine Prendergast believes that by keeping race absent from the writing classroom, teachers are reinforcing institutionalized racism as they align themselves with "insider" institutional discourses. AnnLouise Keating recommends that

whiteness be treated not as racialized in the biological , simplistic sense, but as a complex consciousness that eludes definition due to its ever-changing nature and variety of constructions. Keating believes that "at the very least, we should complicate existing conceptions of 'race'—both by exploring the many changes that have occurred in all apparently fixed racial categories and by informing students of the political, economic, and historical factors shaping the continual reinvention of 'race'" (91). Similarly, Keith Gilyard sees value in composition teachers' presenting whiteness as a concept that imposes on everyone "a default identity relative to whiteness formation, which was in itself a carefully calculated social maneuver" (51). Further emphasizing the value of exposing white discourse as a constructed system, Timothy Barnett notes that white students need to "see that 'whiteness' exists and privileges some in ever-shifting ways [and] that the power of 'whiteness' is a deceptive one that, finally, limits all of us" (33).

Did You Say the Power of Whiteness Limits Us All?

"To act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same."

-- Lisa Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue," 292

To find out whether my students thought of whiteness as a positionality in the same way that blackness is usually assumed to be, I assigned my two composition classes to read and respond to the much-discussed essay of Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." During my absence at the time of CCCCs and in anticipation of our next writing subject area of race and ethnicity, students were to find the piece on the internet, read it by themselves, and write a one or two- page response to her assertions. Predictably, black students wrote about specific instances in which white privilege is all too evident in their lives, while white students mostly generalized about

their various views on racial tolerance, usually proclaiming themselves not to be racist in the least. Interestingly, the white students' responses fell neatly into categories identified by Frances Rains as the typical "'benign' reactions and responses white academics and students frequently give when issues of race or racism are brought close to home": 1) the sense-of-entitlement reaction; 2) the citation-of-exception response; 3) the well-I-can't speak for (fill in the blank w/ color) response; 4) the sense-of-guilt reaction; and 5) the color-blind and racial neutrality responses (84). Despite the fine intentions of these responses, Rains finds all of them essentially racist, pointing out that such attitudes, in subtle ways, simply reinforce the status quo of white dominance.

Although several white students agreed with McIntosh's suggestion that white people unwittingly carry around "an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks," with the resistant white writers, the sense-of-entitlement reaction topped the list of typical benign responses. Holding firm to the myth of meritocracy, one student made a summary statement representative of the many in our class: "Through hard work and determination, any race can succeed and prosper in the U.S." Like most of my white students, this one fully expects to succeed by competing skill for skill on the job market, without any "undeserving" applicants getting in her way. Similarly, another student, in a citation-of-exception response, pointed out that even in her small South Georgia town, her uncle of mixed descent had friends both black and white, and

> nothing was ever just handed to him. He worked for everything he got. He graduated in the top ten percent of a class of three hundred and went on to attend Oglethorpe College in Atlanta and is currently attending one of the best dental

> schools in the country, which is in Baltimore . . . . Where I am from the color of your skin doesn't matter. What matters is how hard you are willing to work to earn the things you want.

Yet another white student agreed that certain black people with a strong work ethic can and do succeed: "People think that whites get everything in media today, like the lead roles in movies, but just look at Halley Berry and Denzel Washington!" In this version of the "bootstraps" mentality, both of these white students used the exceptions to deny the social and economic hardships that so many black Americans face despite their efforts to improve quality of life.

Although the white students did not reveal much of the willful ignorance or white guilt of numbers 4 and 5 on Rains' list, the color blind and racial neutrality responses resounded. That they did not " think of their black friends as black" suggested that white students acknowledge racial differences selectively, a notion that particularly rankled the black students in the class. Ruth Frankenberg maintains that so-called color blindness is an assault on the identity of black people, a denial of the historic disadvantage that people of color have endured, implying the erroneous assumption that racial inequities are a thing of the past. And to the black students in the class, the racial neutrality that their white associates claim to bestow on them by "not thinking of their black friends as black" simply translated into "I know you are black, but unlike other black people, you are white enough to be my friend."

Indeed the written responses of the black students were, not surprisingly, much different from those of the white students. Incensed that whites are often dishonest about their own ignorance and indifference to the struggles of minorities, one African American

student wrote: “I just wish that instead of saying, ‘I have a group of black friends,’ or ‘We have problems just like you’ that they would say ‘I don’t know where you are coming from and I am probably never going to know or try to know.’” Embedded in her interpretation of the subtext of her white acquaintances’ comments is her recognition of Rains’ response #3, the well-I-can’t speak for black people response. She knows that white people don’t understand her and don’t want to.

Unlike the white students, black students recognized white privilege as clearly visible. Black student responses supported an observation of Noel Ignatiev, co-founder of Race Traitor: “In the interests of survival, African Americans have always studied whiteness. There is a long tradition among them that the white race is a peculiar sort of social formation, one that depends on its members’ willingness to conform to the institutions and behavior patterns that reproduce it” (294). One student summed up the two observations that nearly every black student made: “Although it [white privilege] seems like a big unknown thing to the white race, to me these points aren’t very BIG. These are everyday things that my race faces. It is good to know that some people [McIntosh] are willing to point out the wrongness in our society, but will it change things? Probably not!” Black students were not surprised that whites don’t realize what charmed lives they lead compared to their minority counterparts, and that even the recognition of their privilege will likely not bring about social justice.

Scattered generously among the black student responses were examples of racial injustices and violence perpetrated on the writers themselves or on people they knew. From being followed in department stores to being shot by the police, the experiences of the flip side of white privilege were gripping and concrete. Still, most disheartening was

hearing the sense of hopelessness in the black students' voices: "The fact is this article isn't news to anyone, and no one's going to do anything about it because it's been brushed under the rug for so long and no one wants to admit they have dirt." Clearly, according to these student papers, the power of whiteness *does* limit us all.

The Challenge of Change

Of the many identity issues that we invite into the composition classroom, whiteness seems the least examined but the most obviously pertinent in the Southern, predominantly white university where I teach. Prompted by the many signs of scholarly interest in examining whiteness in the writing classroom, as well as by my experiences as a Southern white teacher, I believe that this study of my university's white, middle-class writing students and their apparent resistance to seeing themselves as privileged will help enrich a conversation already underway but not particularly inclusive of a region of the country that is so often labeled as racist. This study includes an examination of the ways their various identifications with the dominant race impact both their responses to assignments that embrace critical pedagogy, as well as their participation in a classroom discourse that is increasingly centered on critical social issues that they may or may not believe are relevant to their lives. More specifically, this study explores the extent to which white students see themselves (and the teacher) as constructions; how much of what students write is simply accommodating what they assume to be the teacher's point of view; and whether white students perceive themselves as being "othered" in a classroom climate that is prone to question their socially privileged position.

As a writing teacher, I see value in allowing students to discover through writing and peer discussion that their identity is shaped largely by cultural forces that they are

often unaware of. Such a social constructivist stance is privileged in the textbook I often use in writing courses, McCormick's Reading Our Histories, Understanding Our Cultures. McCormick's approach emphasizes that personal expression is possible even as the writer is aware that his or her voice is at least partially socially constructed. Through reading and writing about those forces (especially of race, class, and gender) that influence us all, students come to know themselves as individuals living in, and in some ways constructed by, the society that surrounds them.

I see an incorporation of the study of whiteness as a rich addition to the mix, one that will offer yet another lens for writers to look through as they consider their situatedness in terms of audience and discourse community. Like Elbow, who "tr[ies] quietly to find moments where [he] can invite students to be more aware of the positions from which they write—as men or women—as members of a race or class, or as having a sexual orientation" (qtd. in Villanueva 496), McCormick sees critical literacy as a primary objective of her approach: "To be critically literate, students need to be able to situate texts, beliefs, and practices within larger social and historical contexts; explore the antecedents and implications of these tests, beliefs, and practices; and recognize and analyze the situatedness—the cultural embeddedness—of their own perspectives" (12). I believe that by examining the cultural embeddedness of whiteness in their thinking and in their writing, white students will move away from resistant positions and become better able to engage in the culturally diverse experience of life.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL STUDIES: A CONTEXT FOR WHITENESS

Lad and Me: Personal Journeys

As I read Lad Tobin's "Process Pedagogy" in a graduate class in composition studies, I had the eerie thought that I was reliving my own journey from student to teacher. Tobin traces his own evolution (and mine) from closeted process teacher among current-traditionalists during the 1980s, to his "current incarnation" as a teacher resistant to giving himself over to any of the particular camps that have arisen over the years-- be they preprocess, process, or postprocess. Although he and I were a thousand miles apart geographically, our journey into the teaching of writing covers the same territory.

As a "child" of the process/expressivist movement, I was to wait a decade before becoming acquainted with identity politics and social constructivism in the composition classroom. In 1975, when I began teaching as a graduate teaching assistant in the M.A. in English program at Auburn University, Peter Elbow and Donald Murray were the staples of the Introduction to Graduate Studies course that included a segment on the teaching of freshman composition. Newsweek's "Why Johnny Can't Write" had just been published, and process writing was seen as the answer to this newest embodiment of "literacy crisis."

Even while questioning the teaching of the modes of discourse as being a narrow, artificial approach to freshman composition, the department distributed a syllabus that remained stuck in modally arranged textbooks of the day. Such standards as Subject and Structure and The Borzoi Reader never mentioned the writing process, let alone advocated it, so my attention to Murray's "Seven Steps of the Writer" was strictly

supplemental. (In those days, in my naiveté, I actually had my students memorize, discuss, and apply the steps on the final exam!) I understood "the" process as a reworking of Classical Rhetoric's *inventio/dispositio/elocutio*; however, as a product of the McCrimmon rhetoric—a classic in itself—I was not taught to write by any process, save for "start at the beginning."

Both Tobin and I were freshman composition students in the same year, 1971, and were apparently kindred survivors of core writing classes that seemed only marginally about writing. As we both remember, the discussions of literary selections were lively at times (Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby," perhaps) and at other times deathly dull (Oedipus Rex, for sure). By the time we began teaching composition full time in the 1980s, the process movement had taken hold, and Tobin and I were hopeful that writing class would be, after all, about writing—and not the kind of "Engfish" students and teachers had traditionally suffered but fresh, voiced, personal, and meaningful writing. Expressivism was "in," and students were invited to freewrite, to invent in ways that privileged brainstorming and charting over formal outlining, and to revise and revise, postponing editing as long as possible. As Donald Murray taught us, "A piece of writing is never finished; it is delivered to a deadline" (57).

Teaching the process certainly made sense to me, and I continued dutifully listing Murray's steps on the chalkboard during my first decade of teaching, even though I seemed to be the only English faculty member doing so, the rest of my colleagues holding tenaciously to current-traditional pedagogy, defined by Christopher Burnham as "emphasiz[ing] academic writing in standard forms and 'correct' grammar. It [current-traditional teaching] reinforced middle-class values, such as social stability and cultural

homogeneity, and supported the meritocracy associated with the military-industrial complex" (22). Worse still, the policy of my department was to teach grammar in isolation so as to prepare students for the ominous "exit" test of skills that loomed at the end of every term. Teachers typically gave up writing time to give grammar and spelling instruction, complete with practice testing, knowing that their performance as teachers would be measured by exit rates of the students. Such an approach to writing instruction plays into the hands of what Charles Schuster – invoking Berlin – describes as the general assumption made by the academy: that writing "is the mere transcription of thought, a basic activity like riding a bicycle that once learned is never forgotten" and that "the teaching of writing is essentially a skills-based, form-based, error-based, handbook-based activity" (89).

Like Tobin, I also noted that the more attention textbooks awarded the composing process, the more the approach seemed to lose its energetic edge. As process teaching became the classroom standard, I began to wonder if the bloom was fading from my teaching practice that had been so influenced by Elbow and Murray. Besides, as Tobin points out, process itself was being critiqued by theorists who believed that the foregrounding of expressivism was leaving writing classes anemic of content, that the teaching of "steps" in the process was having a stagnating effect on student writing, and that process failed to take into account the social context of the writing act.

Finally, in 1988, I joined an English Department at a state university in South Georgia, one that was eventually to spawn a dedicated writing department. No longer the "handmaidens" to literature, to use Susan Miller's term, the Department of Writing and Linguistics attracted Ph.D.'s in composition and rhetoric, thus bringing in a diverse set of

voices, many of whom adhere to critical and cultural studies pedagogies. Far from being current-traditionalists, these new theory-based faculty assume that "language can no longer be seen as the transparent conduit of transcendental truths" (Berlin 68). As Berlin asserts, "Language is instead a pluralistic and complex system of signification that constructs realities rather than simply presenting or reflecting them. Our conceptions of material and social phenomena, then, are fabrications of signification, the products of culturally coded signs" (58).

Tobin would agree that studying social construction can be an important part of the writing classroom picture, but he does not wish to forego process teaching. In fact, he sees, as I do, a great deal of overlapping among what Faigley categorizes as four theories of process: "expressive, cognitive, social, and Marxist" (Tobin 10). Tobin explains,

> In my own case, I remained committed to an expressivist approach [. . .] but I still found many classroom strategies to borrow from cognitive scholars (such as Flower's explanation of how students move from writer-based to reader-based prose), from social constructivists (such as collaborative writing assignments recommended by Gere or Bruffee), and from cultural studies (such as the use of advertisements and popular culture as a way to alert students to the ways in which language manipulates and sustains power). (10)

I like to think that I have become one of those "practitioners [who have] usually found something to borrow from each approach" (10). I also like to think that my reluctance to settle on one set way to approach the teaching of writing (and my suspicions of those who claim they have "found it") indicates an acknowledgement of the complexity of the task,

as well as a willingness to watch and participate in the evolution of writing as a discipline.

Our writing department today reflects the "social turn" of the 1980s, witnessed by the proliferation of cultural studies textbooks that stack the shelves in the university bookstore, as well as the popularity of writing assignments that address identity issues. In fact, the composition studies area of our new writing major is named "Writing and Culture." The area description states, "Faculty research interests and classroom curricula address such issues as writing and social justice, identity and literacy, ecocomposition, globalization and writing, race, class, and gender theories" (proposed description of Writing and Culture area of the major in Writing and Linguistics). The preponderance of writing assignments involving identity issues of the writer suggests that faculty value helping students understand that the culturally situated perspectives from which they write are important to contextualizing the knowledge they construct for themselves. By having student writers consider the cultural situatedness of themselves as writers, as well as of the texts they produce and consume in our classes, we support a statement Patty Strong directs to student readers of a cultural studies based writing textbook, The World is a Text*:* "You must see that writing is not a duty, obligation, and regurgitation, but opportunity, exploration, and discovery . . . The successful college writer understands that he or she writes not just for the teacher, not just to prove something to the teacher in order to get a grade, but to uncover unarticulated pathways to knowledge and understanding" (23). Writing to discover who we are, what we think and why is an essential part of a life-long education, and what better place for college students to begin taking seriously their development as critical thinkers than in the college writing

classroom? There students can learn to read and write in ways that will help them understand how they construct the world as raced, classed, and gendered individuals. They can learn that language, far from being value free, is value laden; that texts are not static but dynamic and socially situated; and that writing is, as Berlin asserts, "discovery and invention, not mere reproduction and transmission" (81).

In my own latest "incarnation" as a social constructivist-leaning writing coach, I have been increasingly interested in having students explore how realities are constructed but without denying the notion of self, the writing self being a developing, often disunified voice engaged in a life-long quest for agency. In exploring this complex interplay between expressivist and constructivist notions of writing, I want entering college students to write not just what they think but why they think it. Like Berlin, I want to encourage them to question the positions they take and acknowledge that they probably haven't decided upon, or even thought through, some social, commercial, family, and religious issues in their lives. I want to help students understand that through writing they can become more aware of their current and future roles as participants in public discourse and potential advocates for social change. But first they must confront the forces of the cultural codes they live with every day, the ones that stand to "influence their positioning as subjects of experience." As educators, we must "encourage students to negotiate and resist these codes—these hegemonic discourses—to bring about more democratic and personally humane economic, social, and political arrangements. . . . Only in this way can students become genuinely competent writers and readers" (Berlin 116). This kind of thinking certainly describes one of my chief goals as a writing teacher: to have students think of themselves first as writers . . . as meaning makers,

rather than reproducers of knowledge, transmitters of information, or worse still, students writing to please teachers.

Identity Issues and the Question of the Writing Self

Distinguishing the true writing self (and whether it's even possible or desirable to do so) has long been a theoretical concern of postmodernist composition. As Lester Faigley has pointed out, the modernist notion of an authentic self has been called into question by compositionists since the 1980s, when attention turned from inner-directed theory of the cognativists to outer-directed theory of the contstructivists (Faigley 31).

According to Faigley, the current emphasis on the situatedness of the writer is a result of compositionists' efforts to "challenge the lingering conception of the writer as ungendered, classless, and living outside history" (72). As students consider issues of identity, power, and social change, usually in the context of popular media, they are often looking at texts of mass culture in a new way: "A cultural studies approach in a writing classroom aims at asking students to consider the histories of meanings that they take as evident" (Faigley 72).

Berlin's proposal for a cultural studies based writing curriculum invites writing students to examine texts of popular culture and to determine the student's positionality within conflicting discourses: "Thus, a person's subject positions at any one moment are interacting with the subject positions of others" (70). The idea of having student writers formulate a subject position, "a shaping of consciousness in lived experience" (105), is central to Berlin's advocacy of a cultural studies curriculum. Berlin explains that "the subject is not the sovereign and free agent of traditional literary studies. Instead, the subject is the point of convergence of conflicted discourses—the product of discourse

rather than the unencumbered initiator of it . . . The response of the agent to these signifying practices [cultural codes of a society] is at least partly unpredictable, involving a process of accommodation, negotiation, and resistance. The individual is neither altogether determined nor altogether free" (105), a dilemma at least as old as Oedipus Rex, I would add.

Berlin shares with Alan Kennedy, former chair of Carnegie Mellon, the belief that understanding positionality is a primary goal of English studies curriculum: "We want our students to be able to understand the idea of position . . . We want them to be capable of occupying responsible and demanding positions. We want them to understand competing positions in world affairs. We want them to recognize their own positions, and be able to compare their positioning to that of others perhaps more or less fortunate" (qtd. In Berlin 152). Studying whiteness stands to provide a useful way for students to assess and compare their positionality in the world. The students in this study examine the position of whiteness from which they view and write the world while they consider how that position affects their attitudes toward social responsibility.

By having students examine their own situatedness with an eye toward becoming critically aware participants in a democratic society, we lead students to see the political nature of language, that all discourse is loaded with value judgments. As Berlin reminds us,

> We [teachers] must take as our province the production and reception of semiotic codes, providing students with the heuristics to penetrate these codes and their ideological designs on our formations as subjects. Students must come to see that the languages they are expected to speak, write, and embrace as ways of thinking

> and acting are never disinterested, always bringing with them strictures on the existent, the good, the possible, and the resulting regimes of power. (93)

Likewise, "Teachers must also be keenly aware of their own positions in the social relations of the classroom" (Berlin 104). Far from being license to indoctrinate, the privilege of teaching carries with it the responsibility of being honest about one's own social and political identities. As a middle-aged, white, mother of four, I have a perspective different from the vast majority of my students, who are traditionally aged, financially privileged, white suburbanites. In a classroom community that embraces the communal aspect of writing, we teachers should "explain at the outset that the class will involve writing about the contradictions in our cultural codes, [which] will require that students participate in disagreement and conflict in open, free, and democratic dialogue" (Berlin 104). Only in such an open academic atmosphere can cultural coding of print and non-print media be fully examined: "Attempts to negotiate and resist semiotically enforced cultural codes can take place only when these codes can be named and interrogated in reading and writing, and this is a central role of the teacher in the literacy classroom" (112). Textual forms of literature, advertisement, film, and television are evidence of "culturally coded ideological notions of race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender in the service of economic and political projects," and "in learning to gain at least some control over these forms, students become active agents of social and political change, learning that the world has been made and can thus be remade to serve more justly the interests of a democratic society" (112). The unmaking of whiteness codes is a notion at least as complex and difficult as that of any other ideologies of identity politics, and as such, needs to be examined with as much scrutiny.

Film as Location of Racial Complexities

As Berlin points out in a discussion of students' reactions to such "ideologically loaded" films as Michael Moore's Roger and Me, complexities not easy for students to see. They want to impose a moral neatness on texts that should "make students suspicious of easy resolutions of complex social, economic, and political problems" (Berlin 128).

I had the same experience when my students viewed Spike Lee's Do The Right Thing, a story in which angry black customers of an Italian owned pizzeria in Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn literally burn down the establishment after a confrontation with the owner over the lack of representation of black "brothers" on a wall of fame displayed inside the restaurant. In class discussion and in writing, the white students tended to oversimplify positions of right and wrong, claiming that Sal, the owner, had every right to decorate his place of business his own way, displaying his own ethnic heroes. Even though the class had read and discussed McIntosh's "White Privilege" before viewing the film, whiteness still seemed to stand in the way of white students' sympathizing with the social and economic limitations of the black people in the neighborhood, a situation that Spike Lee had made all too clear. They simply did not understand why the blacks in the movie were disenchanted with the pizzeria whose business they had supported for years, despite the poverty they lived in.

Black students, on the other hand, argued that Sal was insensitive to the heritage of his clientele, who, after all, actually lived in the neighborhood, supported his business over the years, and certainly did not like being called *niggers* as the enraged Sal smashed a customer's radio because the defiant young black man was playing it too loudly. When

the police arrived on the chaotic scene and ended up killing the young man by abuse of force, the mob retaliated with wholesale violence. This blatant abuse of force inflicted on a minority by white police officers certainly recalled black students' own racist experiences and caused them to rally around the cause of the black residents, seeing the looting and burning as a justifiable response to the situation.

Lee's movie is subtle; yet the student audience saw the conflict in, well, black and white. Lee exposes the blatant racism of the Italians but leaves open the question of whether the residents' course of action was legitimate or not. In the last frame of the film are displayed two responses to racism, that of Martin Luther King, Jr., who, of course, opposes violence, and that of Malcolm X, who contends that violence is sometimes necessary to fight the injustices of racism. The white students' defending of Sal inflamed some of the black students, as their written analyses of the film made clear.

Our class discussion of this film revealed anything but the cooperative spirit that Berlin says can result "with teachers and students agreeing about the conflicts apparent in a particular cultural formation." Instead, our experience was of the other kind, the "spirited exchange" Berlin speaks of, with "students and teachers . . . at odds with each other, or . . . the students themselves [being] divided about the operation and effects of conflicting codes." Nevertheless, I acted in accordance with Berlin's prescription: "The role of the teacher is to act as a mediator while ensuring that no code, including his or her own, goes unchallenged" (131). While I was careful not to "take sides" in discussions of whether anger was justified on either side of the racial conflict, students pressed me for a response to the cataclysmic ending of the story. Therein was my chance to interject the role that white privilege might have played in the growing tensions between business

owners and street cultures. The white students might not have been convinced immediately that systemic injustice was afoot in the Brooklyn neighborhood, but they perhaps did note the white encoded, us-as-normal attitude of the Italian family.

Because Do The Right Thing offers such a rich look inside two conflicting cultures with their own linguistic and behavioral codes, students can truly benefit from studying this kind of multicultural text closely, realizing at the same time that as audience members they are "capable of a range of possible responses to any message," whether it be accommodation to the dominant code of the message, resistance to it, or a negotiation between the two, "the most common response, as audiences appropriate messages in the service of their own interests and desires" (Berlin 83). Looking into themselves as culturally influenced beings, the student audience doubtless became more shrewd observers of a cultural text.

The Writer as Constructed Self

In order for agency to become possible, the writer must recognize that the individual voice is more than a product of circumstance, ideology, or experience, that it is an ever-shifting identity influenced by cultural and historical meanings that emerge from the diverse communities of which the writer is an integral part. Especially in the writing classroom, where texts are produced, shared, and critiqued by peers and instructors, the idea of a complete, autonomous self is challenged: "By sharing experiences of interpretation over a semester, most students come to acknowledge that the terms in which we understand experience are not fixed but vary according to our personal histories and are always open to new possibilities for creating meaning" (Faigley 184). Indeed, as Berlin argues, even in the expressivist classroom, "the student's 'true' self is

subtly constructed by the responses of others in the class. The subject formation the student 'finds' in the act of self-investigation and freely chooses as his or her 'best' self is finally a construction of the classroom experience" (179).

By grappling with their relationships to various discourses, students can acknowledge that their positionalities are at least partly constructed. I believe that as citizens/writers/thinkers in-the-making, our students should leave our classes convinced of the importance of their voices in shaping their future, both individually and communally. Included in this discovery of possibilities is the notion that construction need not be a limitation to agency but an enhancer of it.

We Are Not Alone: Cultural Studies as Significant in College Courses

In "A Closing Word" to Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures, Berlin admits to being "haunted" by a sobering comment once made by a not-so-admiring audience member: "My error, he explained, was that I grossly overestimated the influence of the English department in the lives of our students and the workings of our society. English teachers, he insisted, are in the larger scheme of things just not all that important" (177). As would most English teachers, Berlin, of course, disagrees, and has written his book in defense of his position. "English teachers," he argues, "are asked to perform important functions for our society, functions that operate in a manner not necessarily immediate and obvious" (179). But I would suggest that the effects college English teachers have on first-year writing students are more immediate and obvious than even teachers themselves might think.

As a University Writing Center consultant, I was so intrigued by some innovative assignments brought into the Center by students in classes outside the English program

that I decided to conduct my own inquiry into how an introduction to cultural studies in writing class might impact the success of our students in other core curriculum classes. As I interviewed several core curriculum faculty members and collected writing assignments from them, I found that not only do professors in other disciplines appreciate students who are on their way to being culturally aware, but that they also value writing that entails critical awareness of student writers' own cultural situatedness, especially as those writers explore historical and social contexts of the past. Far from considering student writing the mere transmission of information, many professors prefer that students make writing meaningful, as we writing teachers do, with a critical eye towards dominant institutions and discourses, or as Berlin says, to use writing as a means "to encourage critical literacy rather than a passive acquiescence to things as they are" (57).

One history professor, after urging his students not to write what they thought he wanted to read, but instead to explain what they think and why, posed an interesting hypothetical for students to consider:

> Twenty-five years from now, you lead a team representing the United States in negotiations with the first extra-terrestrial trade mission to visit earth. At the end of the third day of talks, the head of the E.T. delegation asks you to remain for a moment. Suddenly, he/she waves an old, dog-eared textbook in front of your face. A flash of memory tells you it is a tattered copy of A People's History of the United States, a text you once read in college. 'Why' demands the E.T., 'Why has the United States always claimed moral justification for its immoral acts? Throughout your history you have allowed millions of poor people to suffer in the midst of affluence, and then claimed it was a necessary part of your economy.

> You have imposed your will on other peoples through economic and military force and said you did so for their own good. In particular, your nation's history from 1945-2000 seems nothing more than a chronicle of greed and exploitation. Yet you seem to be proud of your identity as an American. Can you explain this contradiction to me?'

As I read this assignment, I chuckled to remember the not-so-funny-at-the-time resistance of my white, middle-class students when we covered James Loewen's Lies My Teacher Told Me. Despite my warnings that college demands the questioning of assumptions that are often passed along as "truth," some students were adamant that Loewen's views on Vietnam, Helen Keller, and Woodrow Wilson were simply un-American and revisionist in the worst sense of the term. I wonder now how those same students would react to the postmodernist words another history professor puts on the chalkboard the first day of World History class: "History is what historians say it is." I also wonder if these students will be ready for the E.T. topic.

In another course, the Sociology of Sport, an assignment involving a textual analysis of spaces could have come from any number of writing classes that cover extra-print media as text. This professor asked students to navigate the text of the Superbowl, having them consider how the media display is a manifestation of values associated with American society: achievement and success, hard work, moral dilemmas of right and wrong, faith in the future, conformity of attitude and style, patriotism and nationalism, race and gender values, concern for human welfare. "Are any of these values inconsistent, or in conflict with one another?" she asks. "Explain and discuss these contradictions, providing examples from your observations of sports in American

society." In another assignment this professor asks students to observe the particularly race-based behaviors taking place in the campus Recreational Activity Center and to interpret those observations as a sociologist would. She also asks students to analyze sporting events through the lens of gender inequality, or even capitalistic interests. Such assignments as these are what many of our writing faculty anticipate students will encounter in other college classes.

One colleague from the College of Health and Professional Studies once remarked to me, "I can't *believe* that college seniors come to my classroom without ever having thought about their own social constructions. They believe that their identities are uniquely developed from within, that they are who they are because they freely choose to be at all levels." He then described the familiar identity issues (race, class, and gender) that he has students explore *in their writing* in KINS 4618. In a later email to me, this professor attached his syllabus of the course, which lists among the course objectives, to have students "grow individually, intellectually, and academically; to read alternative, diverse sources of text; to prepare students for entrance into . . . a critical democracy" (Geisler). Such objectives could just have easily been listed in a course syllabus for ENGL 1101 and 1102 by me or any number of my writing colleagues. Now, who would have thought that a "PE teacher" would be explicitly expressing a course objective of exploring alternative texts, including a classroom viewing of Bowling for Columbine? This professor also made a note to me in the text of the email:

> I think all instructors, in all disciplines, especially writing and reading, should use some type of cultural studies approach because higher education is supposed to be more than just technocratic information and skills . . . thus, cultural studies could

> and should be woven into every discipline as it regards ethics, moral, values, politics, neolibreralism, etc. Besides, what's the point of 'learning how to write' if one doesn't first 'learn how to think'? (Geisler)

As promoters of critical thinking, composition instructors do much more to serve students than simply introducing them to the conventions of academic writing: by giving students the opportunity to explore their identities with a critical self-awareness, instructors encourage a critical literacy of the world, one that will serve students well in later academic and career pursuits. The belief is that critically literate students—or those on the way to becoming such—will learn more and produce more meaningful writing in the "content area" courses, having been exposed to the notion that knowledge (and especially considerations of the past, as in history classes) is constructed within cultural contexts of the present. If, indeed, as Berlin states, "the purpose [of investigating the class, gender, race, religious, and ethnic codes of a text] is to become reflective agents actively involved in shaping their own consciousness as well as the democratic society of which they are an integral part" (124), then what better way of fulfilling the university's mission statement's declaration that Georgia Southern prepares students for "leadership and service as world citizens" and instills them with values of "social responsibility"? (University Mission Statement)

Disturbing the System: Review of Scholarly Literature

Attention to whiteness has been evident in the proliferation of scholarly literature on the subject within the past ten years. Scholars and researchers have produced a great deal of commentary on definitions of race and racism, as well as constructions of white racial identity. Of particular interest has been white complicity in institutional racism and

the role of education in problematizing whiteness in such a way as to disturb the system that perpetuates the social injustices of invisible white privilege.

Defining Racism

Much of the current literature on whiteness indicates an internalization of the definition of white racism developed in the 1970s by David Wellman in his study of whites' racial attitudes of the 1960s. Inspired by his own suspicion that racism is not, as previous studies had suggested, a simple matter of prejudiced attitudes of white people towards black people, Wellman, a sociologist at the University of Oregon, distilled some 200 interviews with white people from a wide range of ages, professions, and political persuasions, into six detailed portraits of individuals who discussed frankly their views on race as it pertains to jobs, family, and neighborhoods. Wellman found that rather than displaying prejudice through stereotyping and holding negative feelings toward blacks, white respondents revealed instead a primary interest in preserving white privilege. While acknowledging the oppression of blacks, whites did not see a need to change the system, only a need for blacks to conform to white expectations. Wellman was the first to cast racism in terms of an often unconscious desire among whites to protect an unjust system. His research is widely acknowledged as one of the early forays into understanding white racism as a social force that exerts itself in insidious ways on the individual will.

Beverly Daniel Tatum is among the voices who have embraced this understanding of racism. In the bestseller Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? Tatum comments on one definition of racism known as "prejudice plus power":

> Racial prejudice combined with social power—access to social, cultural, and economic resources and decision-making—leads to the institutionalization of racist policies and practices. While I think this definition [prejudice plus power] also captures the idea that racism is more than individual beliefs and attitudes, I prefer Wellman's definition because the idea of systematic advantage and disadvantage is critical to an understanding of how racism operates in American society. (7-8)

In my study, I am working from this definition of racism because it stands to defuse personal, emotional reactions that result from attaching blame to individuals for social injustices that are actually caused by systematic imbalances of power.

White Denial

"If you see a film like Bladerunner, there's not a single white audience person I've heard in my life say, 'There are no black people in Bladerunner' or 'There are no black people in 2001: A Space Odyssey'"
-- bell hooks, Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies, 175

Alice McInyre expanded Wellman's research in a study of undergraduate white student teachers, making even more explicit the difficulty that white people have in confronting their own culpability as supporters of a racist system that seems invisible to them, the beneficiaries of that system. Interspersed throughout the transcripts of group discussion sessions are McIntyre's observations of the participants' discomfort with discussing racial matters: their conflicted feelings about admitting to privilege yet resisting (and resenting) the loss of it; and their nervous articulation of the us/them dichotomy that emerges in matters of the economic imbalance between white and black workers. McIntyre listens to and analyzes the classroom discourse of her white student teachers as they engage in "'white talk' – talk that serves to insulate white people from

examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism" (45). While McIntyre was disturbed by her students' resistance to critique, she was heartened that at least some students were able to examine their own whiteness and begin to understand that the idea of race entails much more than some often obvious physical distinctions but power relationships as well.

While carrying out a service-learning project for a freshman composition course, Ann E. Green notes McIntyre's "white talk" of denial among the white students who regularly work with disadvantaged black people at a local shelter. Even though Green openly characterizes herself as a "recovering racist" to her students, she finds that white students prefer "polite silence" over discussion of racial inequities: "Throughout the year of teaching service-learning, what most amazed me were the lengths that white students would go both in their writing and their speech to avoid mentioning race and racial difference" (292). When differences were acknowledged, however, white students found "see[ing] past the 'logic' of American meritocracy" nearly impossible (287). Like McIntyre, Green is bewildered by her experience: "The combination of service-learning and a more diverse class . . . did not do anything to problematize the American ideology that any one who wants to can make it in America and in many ways reinforced students' previous racist ideas about people of color" (289). But also like McIntyre, Green is hopeful that sharing "difficult stories" will help "students in positions of privilege become committed to an idea of social justice that translates into lifelong work for social change" (297). By constantly questioning the myth of meritocracy, as well as the tendency for whites to keep silent on issues of race, my study challenges students to examine notions of white denial, both personally and communally.

White Identity

"Whiteness masquerades as a universal code of beauty, intelligence, superiority, cleanliness, and purity; it functions as a master sign. . . . black bodies/selves are produced within the power/knowledge economy of whiteness . . . the black body comes to know the truth of itself as a denigrated thing of absence and existential insignificance."
-- George Yancy, "A Foucauldian Reading of Whiteness," 108

Michael Omi and Howard Winant posit that the early theories of race are oversimplified, having treated race as a static identity characterized by essentialist, biological markings that imply inferiority of individuals seen as "raced." They trace the different paradigm shifts in race theory that have occurred in the U.S. over the past century, and focus on the years since the civil rights movement of the sixties. The paradigms, they explain, have gone from "race" described as a biological indicator, to "ethnicity" measured in terms of behavioral patterns specific to a certain group, to "class-based" or "nation-based" characterized by elements of colonialism and power struggles. Seeing these paradigms as inadequate descriptions of race, Omi and Winant work towards an understanding of race as a *formation*, one that is unstable, ever-changing and that defies definition. Their theoretical approach seeks to disrupt the binaries of race as either "an *essence*, as something fixed, concrete, and objective" or an "*illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate" (54). Omi and Winant do not believe that the concept of race will ever disappear, however, and that notions of race will always play a role in how social reality is perceived by every "raced" individual.

Central to the difficulty of whites thinking of themselves as "raced" is the necessity of confronting the historical perception of whiteness as the cultural "norm."

As many authors have pointed out, Ruth Frankenburg and Lois Weis among them, white identity, as it is known in the United States, is a carry over from the European production of colonial identities as "the dark other." White racial identity, then, "is intimately tied to the production of black identity. [. . .] It is by these very processes of othering that 'white' becomes the norm against which all other communities (of color) are judged (usually to be deviant)" (Weis, et al. 213). The symbiotic relationship between white and black identity underlies a racial discourse wherein whiteness goes unmarked until it shows itself through the act of defining its opposite. Whiteness defining itself this way demonstrates how whiteness has come to be seen as socially constructed, as has race in general. But race has only recently been conceived as anything other than biological fact.

Frankenberg reworked Omi and Winant's theory of the history of racism in America and applying it to the daily lives of thirty white women currently residing in California but from diverse backgrounds. She sought to "explore how white women describe[d] race and cultural difference, and how their descriptions reflect different moments in the history of race" (12). She outlined three "moments" in the history of racial discourse: "essentialist racism," which described racial difference (or sameness) as biological inequality; "color- and power- evasiveness," which emphasized racial convergence in terms of an idealized belief in equal opportunity; and "race cognizance," which focused on racial inequalities caused by social structure. Rather than fitting each the woman's experiences neatly into one of the categories, Frankenberg acknowledged a great overlapping in the ways the women named or recalled their life experiences with race, ways in which the narratives challenged and complicated the historical formulation she outlined. Although Frankenberg would like to have detected in her subjects a racial

awareness that gives way to “race cognizance”—that stage in the evolution of individuals’ thinking that admits white complicity in the perpetuation of a structurally racist society—she found, however, that the prevailing “moment” revealed in the narratives was that of “color- and power- evasiveness”; that is, for most of the women, the moment is “structured so as to assert the idea the crossracial common humanity, albeit on white-centered terms, at the same time as it averts the white gaze from the harsh realities of power imbalance” (188-9). The students in my study were asked to think of white identity as an historical construct, and to be aware of the stages of its development, especially in terms of the “othering” that so many white people attach to people of color.

The historical moments that Frankenberg explored are brought into the personal domain by Robert T. Carter, who describes whiteness as a psychological orientation that sees itself as a “world view” rather than a racial entity. However, he maintains that white people can, and do, come to see their position as raced as they move through six developmental stages of white racial identity, stages that have been outlined by counseling psychologist Janet Helms as marking the progress of “one’s racial identity ego status” as he or she approaches a nonracist identity. Carter sees this progression as a kind of personality development, one in which the individual gradually discerns the social realities of institutional and cultural racism, and evaluates his or her own responsibility for changing the system.

Collecting data from interviews and case descriptions, Carter places the voices at certain white racial identity levels, which “are composed of attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward both self as a member of the White racial group and members of nondominant racial groups (i.e. people of color)” (199). At the “Contact” level, white

people think they are not racist, yet they avoid contact with nonwhite people and see only those people as raced. At the "Disintegration" level, whites understand racial constructions, know that "color-blindness" is wrong yet continue to conform to the beliefs of their own racial group, even though doing so goes against their conscience. The "Reintegration" level is characterized by a belief that people of color deserve better treatment and would get better treatment if only they would adopt the culture of whites. White people at the "Pseudo-independence" level believe that they should fight racism, but they focus on the victims for the solution to racism rather than on themselves as the cause of institutional racism. Whites realize at the "Immersion-emersion" level that the victims cannot change the racist system, that white oppression is responsible for racism. Finally, at the level of "Autonomy" whites are free of white racial denial and no longer see race as a psychological threat. Ideally, all white people would reach the final stage of development, gaining the inner strength that results from rejecting the myths of victims-as-cause mentality.

In her chapter, "The Development of White Identity," Tatum explains most accessibly Helms' model of the six stages of racial identity, adding that the "task for Whites is to develop a positive White identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her Whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it, not in the sense of a Klan member's 'White pride,' but in the context of a commitment to a just society" (94).

Institutional Racism

Bringing the issue of racism to the institutional level, Michelle Fine investigates the ways in which whiteness lives out unquestioned privilege and power in professional discourse and in academic decision-making. Instead of focusing on "the ways in which 'people of color' accumulate 'deficits,'" Fine investigates specifically "the ways in which white adolescents and adults accumulate 'benefits'" (57). She maintains that whiteness is actually manufactured by institutions whose intentions are to keep people of color "othered" by supporting white privilege in ways that often go unquestioned and even unnoticed since whiteness is assumed to be a "natural" condition of "quality, merit, and advantage" (58). Two of the sites Fine investigates are educational settings: a Southern high school wherein the principal openly supports racial division in curriculum design and social events for the students; and a Pennsylvania law school that shows evidence of academic scaffolding that results in the professional disadvantaging of all groups other than white males. Fine calls for social scientists not merely to analyze the pervasive racism of the institutions that create meanings of whiteness and color, but to "interrupt the cultural gaze" (64) that supports such a racist presence.

According to a dissertation written in 2002 by Sharon Rene Willey of the University of San Francisco, white administrators have little understanding of white privilege as it is carried out at the institutional level. Willey studied the racial consciousness of six white college administrators of the student affairs office, noting that they "had difficulty identifying what it meant to be White, as it was perceived invisible and equated to a check box on forms." Even though the participants recognized the existence of white privilege, only one would admit to benefiting from the system because

of race. Willey reiterates a statement well known to teachers like me, who have read countless white resistant voices in student papers: "This inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the direct benefits of being White is consistent with the illusion of meritocracy cited in the literature." Regrettably, the institutional commitment to equal demographic representation on a diverse campus is inadequate. Willey finds that administrations need to "take action to dismantle the existing racial hierarchy." My study, which recognizes that college students can discern the relationship between the myth of meritocracy and white privilege, stands to help expose the unjust role of whiteness at the institutional level.

Whiteness in the Classroom

Catherine Prendergast believes that as long as the discourses of race and racism in the university remain unexamined, the dangers of the exclusion of student voices of color in the composition classroom will never be addressed. She proposes that scholars and teachers look to the mechanisms of critical race theory as they have been applied to legal studies in order to bring about changes needed to disrupt the "colonial sensibility" (Villanueva qtd. in Prendergast 37) that pervades the intellectual atmosphere of composition studies. Prenderast looks at the ways in which such legal scholars as Patricia Williams and Derrick Bell have worked to disrupt, question, and subvert the dominant genres of the legal field in an attempt to be heard by a legal establishment that has traditionally devalued their voices. Interestingly, the conflation of academic and personal discourses that has been recently accepted in composition studies has yet to be recognized in legal circles. For example, the use of personal narrative (especially as it is framed in allegory by Williams) has kept certain under-exposed subject positions from

being absorbed into the legal literature. Prendergast maintains that even the most widely recognized research on social exclusion (Heath's study of Roadville and Trackton) does not often enough take the forces of racialized society into account. Because she believes that Frankenberg's notion of "color-and power- evasiveness" still dominates public discourse—and by extension composition studies—Prendergast calls for a concerted effort on the part of compositionists to examine their own alignment with "insider" institutional discourses as part of the problem: "What composition studies can take from critical race theory is an awareness that if we are to understand the mechanisms (like racism) that prevent some students from being heard, we need to recognize that our rhetoric is one which continually inscribes our students as foreigners" (51). In other words, by keeping race absent in the classroom, teachers are reinforcing institutionalized racism.

An interesting manifestation of privileging white discourse and keeping race absent is the difficulty of conceiving canonical white literature as "raced." Concerned that her students, although adept at recognizing and analyzing black perspectives in literature, are often baffled at the request to analyze the whiteness of canonical pieces, AnnLouise Keating strives in the classroom to present whiteness, not as racialized in the biological, simplistic sense, but as a complex consciousness that eludes definition due to its ever-changing nature and variety of constructions. By presenting whiteness as a construction complicated by other identities of privilege (class, masculinity), Keating hopes to combat notions that making whiteness visible necessarily alienates white students and breaks down efforts to educate students on the real meaning of "race": "At the very least, we should complicate existing conceptions of 'race'—both

by exploring the many changes that have occurred in all apparently fixed racial categories and by informing students of the political, economic, and historical factors shaping the continual reinvention of 'race'" (91). Keating believes that the "invisible omnipresence [that] gives 'whiteness' a rarely acknowledged position of dominance and power" (905) needs to be interrogated but not at the expense of negative stereotyping that Dyer and Morrison have noted in film and literary studies, respectively. Nevertheless, Keating and others (Morrison, Marshall and Ryden) do note that presenting the literature of white authors as "raced" is often problematic, whereas in the works of authors of color, race is quickly assumed to be a primary shaping element of a text.

In calling for a pedagogy of whiteness, Joe E. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg emphasize that making whiteness visible in the classroom need not be so problematic: "When white students find themselves outside of any ethnic community and opt to build a new one around a mythologized white supremacist tradition, critical educators must be ready to show them they understand the context in which such students are operating and to offer them a progressive alternative" (20). This pedagogy, "while it confronts white tyranny directly, it avoids projecting guilt onto white students" (21).

Kincheloe and Steinberg fully recognize the negative reactions white students have shown to the exposure of the white "norm" as traditionally despotic and white racism as intrinsically brutal. However, they believe that white identity can be reinvented as socially transformative: "The importance of an antiracist, positive, creative, and affirmational white identity in this teaching context cannot be overstated" (21).

Perhaps Tatum expresses best the goal of whiteness studies as inextricably connected to identity formation of both white and black people:

> When we see strong, mutually respectful relationships between people of color and Whites, we are usually looking at the tangible results of both people's identity processes. If we want to promote positive cross-group relations, we need to help young White people engage in the kind of dialogue that precipitates this kind of identity development just as we need to help youth of color achieve an empowered sense of racial and ethnic identity. (113)

Introducing whiteness in the college writing classroom provides both black and white students an opportunity to develop their "identity processes" further, ultimately enabling these "mutually respectful relationships" to grow.

Dissertations: Whiteness, Whiteness Everywhere but the Writing Classroom

Some recent dissertations have answered the call for attention to whiteness studies in all areas of education. However, the majority of this research has been done on teachers, rather than students. Studies have focused on the desire of antiracist researchers to educate white teachers, tutors, and administrators on the realities of white privilege and the pervasiveness of white dominance in educational settings of all levels. These studies have assumed and sometimes concluded, as Grace Mathieson has, that "developing a White anti-racist consciousness involves probing our own complicity in White supremacy/racism to see how we have been affected by histories of colonialism and imperialism and are vested in systems of power and privilege. In transforming schooling, space must be created for critical pedagogies of Whiteness within an integrative anti-racism framework" (abstract). To Mathieson, a Masters' student at the University of Toronto (2001), the general task is the same as that of critical educators everywhere: "to dismantle the pervasive power of Whiteness to define normalcy in our educational

institutions" (abstract). One goal of my study is to acquaint students with the power of whiteness in institutional settings, especially in their own educational institution.

Even when researchers probe the beliefs and practices of avowed antiracist professional teachers, they often find efforts to combat racism frustrated. In her 2002 dissertation, "How White Adult Educators Challenge Racism," Karen Elaine Manglitz of the University of Georgia compared white and non-white teachers' understandings of racism and white privilege, finding that white teachers struggle with the contradictions of being white while exposing systemic racism, as well as with "their own white privilege and racism in their continuing efforts to challenge racism" (abstract). Similarly, in a 2000 study of four white faculty members teaching multicultural courses, Kelly E. Maxwell of Arizona State University found the degree to which the teachers internalized white privilege an appropriate factor in considering "the implication of faculty members' racial identity in the classroom." Her disappointing conclusion, however, was that despite the good intentions of racially aware white teachers, "none of the four faculty members emphasized social change as a course outcome" (abstract).

Dissertations on whiteness and teacher training have revealed similar contradictions in the way white identity of teachers influences teaching practice and attitudes. In a 1998 discourse analysis of nine teacher trainees, Virginia Mary Lea of the University of California, Berkeley, "uncovered aspects of the teachers' cultures that were invisible to them." She determined that certain "manifestations of Whiteness" in the language the teachers used in class "enabled white teachers to rationalize practices that marginalize some students of color. In this way, many white teachers who intend to challenge the inequities in education, end up reproducing the status quo" (abstract). In

2001, Sheryl Ann Marx of the University of Texas at Austin conducted a similar study with preservice teachers who were tutoring children of color. However, when Marx performed a discourse analysis of tutoring sessions, she discovered signs of blatant racism in the language and attitudes of the white tutors. After questioning the participants about the contradiction between their belief in all children's ability to succeed and the "deficit lens" that they viewed the children of color through, "most participants eventually saw the racism in their own words and beliefs. The seven participants who came to this conclusion vowed to change their attitudes and behaviors to resist the White racism that they finally recognized as influencing their lives" (abstract). Although the participants' avowal to "go and sin no more" might seem hopeful, as the other many dissertations on whiteness studies attest, the road to reconciling awareness with action is all too uncertain.

A more recent look at how the discourse of whiteness occludes social change involves an analysis of what the author calls "White Educational Discourse" [WED]. Directed by Anne Ruggles Gere, Victoria Shaw Haviland's 2004 dissertation considered "how the power and privileges of whiteness get enacted and maintained" in several educational settings. Haviland showed "how participation in WED stymied attempts at transformative multicultural education or critical research, and thus functioned to reproduce rather than challenge the status quo of educational and social inequality." However, according to Haviland, moments do occur when WED is contested, and only then can educators and students "begin to rearticulate their discourse practices and move towards those that further rather than hinder progressive educational and research efforts" (abstract).

In a similar call for the rearticulation of white educational discourse, Nelson Miguel Rodriguez of The Pennsylvania State University (2000) argued for using a pedagogy of whiteness that "engages white preservice student teachers in the dual process of deconstructing and rearticulating whiteness." He maintained that "when educating white students to 'see' whiteness, a pedagogy of whiteness must also provide an opportunity for them to reconstruct white identity by linking it to an anti-racist, progressive, democratic politics" (abstract). Thus, the shaping of white identity by teachers must be conducive to antiracist education practice in order for white awareness to have an impact in the classroom.

The only extensive study on white privilege in the college classroom was the 2002 dissertation by Linda Elaine Logan of the University of Georgia. She studied the effects of class and race on twelve adult learners of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, concluding that whiteness indeed privileged the white students while disadvantaging the non-white students in a historically white university. She found that white privilege factored into the dominant discourse of the classroom, as well as the dominant physical space of the classroom and the authorship of reading texts. Her conclusions were an indictment of the institution as well as of a social system that convinces minorities that they are powerless against white privilege: "The historically white college and university acts to enable the operation of White privilege in its classrooms, and adult learners of color are complicit with White adult learners in perpetuating White privilege in the classroom" (abstract). This notion of the wide-ranging complicity of whiteness in the academic environment plays heavily into my investigation of student self-concepts of

white privilege in another Southern university, one that is even less white-dominated statistically than the University of Georgia.

A common theme in these dissertations is the sorrowful state of so-called progressive education programs that despite themselves hinder true multicultural study by reinforcing the supremacy of white discourse, whether such is the intent or not. According to one theoretical dissertation directed by Peter McLaren, even critical theory itself, which purports to analyze class dominance, too often dismisses concerns of people of color, and unwittingly supports white supremacy by embracing various theories of whiteness as territoriality, suggesting that whiteness represents a desirable social location (Allen 2002). Again, my study aims to make whiteness visible in such a way as to discredit notions of whiteness as privileged by virtue of denying others that same privilege.

Given the obstacles and difficulties of overcoming the negative effects of white privilege in education, and given the lack of attention to college student writing as a possible means of rearticulating whiteness into workable, positive subject positions, this study of the ways in which white writing students can use texts to help them achieve an understanding of the limitations of white privilege and the benefits of antiracist thinking should make a positive contribution to the literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Standpoint

"If I don't talk about race, how will my students ever know how their whiteness affects society before they leave their suburban neighborhoods and rural homes, go off to college or into the workforce, and carry on their lives as if slavery never happened, as if their fathers, maybe even their mothers, never called me *nigger*?"

-- Vershawn Ashanti Young, "Your Average Nigga," 695

In "Difficult Stories: Service-Learning, Race, Class, and Whiteness," Ann E. Green writes, "As a white child in the North, what I learned about race was very similar to what my white students have learned about race – that race should be unacknowledged and avoided" (285). As a white child in the South, I also learned that in polite company, the subject of race was not to be discussed.

Since white people so consistently find ways to keep silent about race, I expected this conversation on white privilege to be no less difficult for the students, the subjects of the study. But as I hope I have made clear already, the research on whiteness, as well as my experience with student texts, indicates a need for confronting white privilege in writing classes that center on social issues.

Context

I conducted the study in its natural context, the writing classroom. To gain entree, I obtained the permission and cooperation of my department chair and the instructors of three English 1102 sections, the second course of the first-year composition sequence. To elicit responses that relate to the subject of white privilege, I selected writing classes that had the topic of race as a component of the reading assignments and writing activities. Out of a writing department of some twenty or so instructors who are

committed to addressing issues of social justice, I scheduled three sections (working around the hours of my own classes) whose instructors were interested in exploring white students' racial attitudes with me.

In the following sections on methodology, I will contextualize the study: first by outlining the classroom demographics, course content, and writing assignments; then by describing, from my continuous observations, the physical settings and actual workings of the classrooms I studied. Finally, I will discuss the document examination and interviewing processes.

Classroom Section A

Classroom A, an honors section of 13, largely white and female, included one Hispanic female, one Asian-American female, and two African-American females, one of whom was an older, non-traditional student auditing the class. Only three of the students were male, and white. The class met twice a week in a computer lab, and most assignments were online, as was the syllabus, which was updated after every class meeting in order to reflect the progress of the class, as well as adjustments to assignments based upon that progress. Unlike most of the writing faculty, Professor A prefers to meet in a computer lab full time because she uses the technology at almost every class meeting to facilitate collaborative writing and exchange of ideas.

As is her custom, Professor A ran an unapologetically, unabashedly critical classroom. Because she wants her students to "question everything," especially to consider examining social assumptions that have shaped their opinions thus far in their lives, Professor A was eager to have her students interrogate white privilege for this study. Her objective was to encourage students to push "beyond borders" of their

existence, to ask themselves continually what they think and why. From the first day of class, Professor A promoted the classroom as a free space to discuss sensitive issues of race, class, and gender. In this class, it was to be understood from the beginning that we were examining ideas, not people; there would be no *ad hominems*; that is, people would never be under attack personally. She explained on the first day that all of our ideas about identity are not developed in a vacuum, that they are constructed from our experience and the values we have been taught all our lives. We have absorbed these values from family, church, education, and other systems of socialization. Such is the concept of social construction, an assumption that guided this class through reading and discussion of texts that originated from various global points of view, ones that were, more often than not, new to many of the students.

Starting with web-based readings from Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege" and documents from a California student-activist website "Students Challenging Racism and (White) Privilege" (SCRAP), Professor A made clear that the course would foreground whiteness studies while moving through various narratives that describe encounters with gender and racial othering from various perspectives: African American women (bell hooks, "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination"); Asian American women (MitsuyeYamada); post-war Afghani women (Bronyn Winter, "If Women Really Mattered"); Chicana women (Cherrie Moraga, "La Guera"); and one black Palestinian woman's, whose poem, "First Writing Since," details the pain of racial profiling since the attacks of September 11th. Through individual and collaborative reading notebook entries, students responded to these texts in writing, eventually sharing their comments in class discussion.

For the first major writing assignment, Professor A invited students to explore ways in which their own perspectives "intersected" with some of the authors' expressed notions of othering in these texts. Since most of the students were white, it was not surprising that many chose to discuss their views on whiteness. Other major writing assignments included cultural analysis of the film Beyond Borders, a 2003 release that looks at the tensions of global othering created when Western humanitarian aid workers enter war-torn theaters in Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Chechnya. Writing about the film's depiction of the foreign "other" compelled students to question their own subject positions as pertains to the American and British presence in regions of the world in which conflict is a way of life for people often considered "other" by the West but whose struggles can arguably be traced to Western causes. For so many of these students, the de-centering of the United States, having it viewed as possibly a suspect and corrupt power, was disconcerting. Having never before questioned the motives of American involvement in global affairs, they sometimes argued openly in class that the Bush administration's foreign policy was well intentioned, if sometimes misguided. Although Professor A would certainly have disagreed, she was careful to listen to their opinions, compliment the students on their thoughtful comments, and prompt others in the class to respond—all without making students fear that their values or patriotism were under attack.

The final research project entailed the production of an elaborate hypertext document posted on individual student web sites. Professor A asked students to write an analysis of how issues of "culture, identity, and power" relate to their developing subject positions among power structures they must negotiate in their everyday lives. She asked

that they focus on ways in which "our sex, class, race, religion, and nationality affect how we define ourselves, how we are defined by others, and what roles we have been conditioned to play in our societies [. . .] From your own experience of powerlessness or powerfulness, think about how you access and participate in these power structures. How do you obtain visibility and recognition within them? How does this achieve power for you?"

Although one or two students addressed global issues of world hunger and American capitalism in the final web research project, most incorporated some aspect of whiteness studies in their work, getting the message after much class discussion that being white is not a neutral state of being but rather a dynamic position of privilege, even in a global landscape. As so many of the web projects attest, studying racism and whiteness was a learning experience, whether considering, as Matt did, his own Rumanian heritage as the "other white man" or, as Abbey did, assessing her personal identity shift away from a formerly sheltered Southern White female who stereotyped black people by taking cues from television images. The larger implications of whiteness studies – as regards self-examination of a privileged position – were evident in nearly every web project presentation at the end of the term.

Using what she calls "a pedagogy of encounter and witness as a political act," Professor A's goal is to mediate a dialogue among students, one in which subjects of discussion are opportunities for an "encounter with other-ness," opportunities "for participants to move beyond recognizing what is familiar to confirm what they already know, and listen, instead, for 'the unfamiliar that disrupts what we know'" (Oliver, Kelly. Witnessing Beyond Recognition 2). According to Professor A, "Courses that analyze

oppressive power structures and social inequalities critique the culturally normative violences [such as racial inequality] . . . that structure the lives and experiences of many students in our classes. When we ask students to read, think, talk, and write about these issues, we are creating a dialogic space in which students are asked to encounter the presence of these violences in their world, and, frequently, in their own and their classmates' lives" (Amy 2). Professor A believes that once students learn the power of testimony by offering their own stories, as well as listening to the stories of others, they can actually be transformed, changed by the encounter with other-ness that the safe space of the classroom provides. Her hope is that once students are able to understand and critique oppressive power structures, that they will "resist reproducing the structures of oppression and subordination being critiqued through the class's encounter" (Amy 5).

Classroom Section B

Classroom B was the most diverse of all three classes in terms of African Americans to whites/ males to females: The 13 students (after two mid-term drops) were evenly divided along race and gender lines: six were white, and seven black; three of the white students were female, and four of the black students were female. Such an even split, which is highly unusual at this institution, made for an interesting classroom dynamic, considering this was the class in which the instructor placed the most emphasis on race per se. Unlike Section A, which threaded whiteness studies into the context of global issues, this class began with the topic of race in America, gradually moved into whiteness next, then paused over gender and sexual orientation issues towards the end. By far, this class included the most intensive study of race and whiteness, as well as the greatest number of short and long writing assignments.

Since Professor B's research interests have long included whiteness, especially as it pertains to rhetorical issues in student writing, and since she had used readings in whiteness before in her first-year writing classes, hers was an appropriate class to include in the study. Students first read an autobiography by George Dawson (and Richard Glaubman), Life is So Good. The book recounts the experience of a black man whose life spans the 20th century. Using Rothenberg's Race, Class, and Gender: An Integrated Study as the main textbook, Professor B included readings from major voices in critical race theory and whiteness studies. Shorter essays assigned included Richard Wright's "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow: An Autobiographical Sketch," Yuri Kochiyama's "Then Came the War," which describes first-hand the Japanese experience of WWII internment camps in the U.S., and "C.P. Ellis," a conversion narrative based on an interview of a former KKK grand wizard – turned equal rights advocate. Readings then became more expository (less narrative) with an editorial on the erosion of rights to privacy as a consequence of the Patriot Act, by Leonard J. Pitt; Beverly Daniel Tatum's "Defining Racism," which distinguishes between personal acts of prejudice and institutional racism; Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," which personalizes the concept of white privilege; Frank Wu's "Yellow," which analyzes the minority experience of Americans that don't look White; and Omi and Winant's "Racial Formation," which is a scientific discussion of the social construction of race in America. Next, students read selections from Honky, an autobiography on race from the perspective of a young white male growing up in a minority neighborhood of lower Manhattan. Students also viewed Higher Learning, a 1995 film release about racial tensions on a college campus.

Of the several major writing assignments, the one that most applied to the study was called "This I Believe," an essay assignment that provided students an opportunity to express their views on whiteness and other race topics covered thus far in the readings. Writing about race near the beginning of the course was apparently so compelling that several students opted for race topics for the final group research projects that were presented at the end of term. That students would be inclined to do primary and secondary research on race topics was not surprising because nearly the entire term they wrote daily reading responses and rhetorical analyses of texts on race and racism, in preparation for an always animated, sometimes passionate class discussion.

Classroom Section C

Of the three sections included in the study, Classroom C was the most typical of the first-year writing sequence at this institution; that is, the instructor chose classroom texts from different literary genres that focused on certain social concerns, and then assigned a blend of personal and academic pieces for students to write in response to those readings. Since Professor C's main research interest is feminism, her dissertation being about Postmodern Feminist Pedagogy in a First-year Composition Class, and since she treats her first-year writing courses as opportunities to raise student awareness of critical social issues, her class was an appropriate selection for this study. With gender and race as its focus, Professor C's class included three longer written texts: The Secret Life of Bees, by Sue Monk Kidd, a novel about gender and race; The Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler (performed as reader's theater in class, as well as attended production as a campus-wide special fundraising event for the local women's shelter); Our Town, by Thornton Wilder (performed as reader's theater in class, as well as

attended student production), and Honky, a childhood memoir on whiteness, by Dalton Conley. These longer texts were supplemented by shorter readings on whiteness: McIntosh's "White Privilege," and Beverly Daniel Tatum's "White Identity," from Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? In contrast to Section B, this course began with gender and class themes and then moved into race later on in the term. The class make up was a mixture of male/female and black/white that, of all the classes observed, reflected most closely the demographics of the freshman class at this university: Six African Americans, four of whom were male; and 14 white students, six of whom were male.

Students wrote separate papers based on each of the longer texts. For each assignment, Professor C offered students a choice of genres for their writing: personal writing, text analysis, or a combination of both. Although some writing topics for The Secret Life of Bees were related to racial themes of the book, the assignment most applicable to my study was on the memoir Honky, in which students were invited to write their own race stories in light of Dalton Conley's experiences as a white minority in his neighborhood. His story, a dramatic embodiment of white privilege, centered on what it means to be white in a white dominated society, despite the social and economic disadvantages of living among urban poor minorities. Several of the white students – these from white, Southern backgrounds – wrote about race as a lived experience and were, for the first time, examining the power of their own whiteness.

All three of these first-year writing sections concentrated on identity politics and considered white privilege an important part of that focus.

Entrée and IRB

Having processed Institutional Review Board forms for both the home institution and the research institution, I had students sign consent forms in all classes by about the second week of the term. I let them know at that time that I would be observing every class meeting, speaking up during class discussion, and taking field notes on what I observed about their responses to topics on race. I told them I would be reading their writing along with the instructor throughout the term and that I would select a few of them to interview, based upon their responses—both oral and written—to the material on race. Assuring students of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study at any time, I emphasized that in interpreting the data I would be respectful of their input so that outcomes would be truly negotiated: "[E]veryone [respondents and others involved in the study] does have the *right* to provide input on the subject of what are proper outcomes, and the inquirer has an *obligation* to attend to those inputs and to honor them so far as possible" (Lincoln and Guba 211; emphasis original). Due to the delicate nature of the topic, I told them, I would treat their contributions with great care and sensitivity.

I asked them to think of me as just another class member, one who is working on her own racial consciousness as she investigates attitudes of first-year writing students towards studying topics of race and whiteness in class.

Methods of Data Collection

Observation

Lincoln & Guba identify the connection between fruitful observation techniques and developing a useful focus for the inquiry: "If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences—the mutual shapers and contextual

factors—that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail" (304). Attending nearly every class meeting of every section, from the very first day of class through the final exam session of the 16-week semester, I followed the guidelines of prolonged engagement and persistent observation, eventually becoming a virtually indistinguishable member of each class body. To make my presence less conspicuous, I continually varied my seating choice in an effort "float" near different students on different days. That way, I was able to make handwritten field notes unobtrusively, interject comfortably my own contributions to class discussion, and speak easily with students before and after class, at which time I occasionally member checked my observations with certain students I perceived were attentive to class discussion. The act of member checking my field observations allowed me an opportunity to get to know the students and establish the trustworthiness needed to encourage them to be forthcoming during the interviews I eventually conducted.

The individual teaching styles of the instructors, as well as the different personalities of the classes, of course, influenced the dynamics of class discussions I observed. In section A, which met twice a week, for 75 minutes, in a computer lab, when discussion was going on, students rolled their chairs into a semi-circle to face one another and avoid being distracted by the computer screens. Using a conversational teaching style, and offering testimonial stories of her own, Professor A issueed verbal prompts that she insisted every student respond to. Not allowing students to sit in silence, Professor A asked individuals directly what they thought about what was being said. Whenever

students had been particularly quiet, Professor A asked them directly to share their thoughts, not only on the subject but on the progress of the discussion itself, discussion being the place to assess subject positions: “If we can encounter each other through the process of testimonial in such a way that our encounter opens up the possibility for revision, re-interpretation – opens up an exchange between speakers and listeners, in dialogic relation – then our manner of bearing witness creates the classroom as a site of encountering difference, of opening us to other-ness” (Amy 4-5). To Professor A, the very act of “witnessing,” especially as pertains to such sensitive subjects as racism (social violence), is itself the key to finding where and how students’ thinking might intersect with the read texts, as well as how this intersection might be explored in student writing. And a fruitful class discussion includes thoughtful reflection on discussion itself. Frequently, Professor A asked the class to critique discussion by noting who is speaking, in what rhetorical frame, and what the effect on the audience might be. On more than one occasion, for example, Professor A asked students to comment on whether they thought the discussion so far that day had been white dominated, that is, whether they thought the talk “sounded white” and was somehow oblivious to considerations of audience members of color. She asked whether discussion would be any different if there were more African Americans in the class, or none; and if African Americans were leading the discussion, would the tenor of student responses be any different. The preponderance of Southern white, female voices was noteworthy to Professor A, who frequently called it to the class’ attention but in an unthreatening way.

In this critical classroom, students became comfortable within the semi-circle and spoke spontaneously, without fear of censure and with near assurance of approval,

Professor A's demeanor being always supportive, encouraging: "That was beautifully said!" But despite expectations of support from Professor A, the minority students (Monica, the one traditional African American student, and Lavina, the one Latina student) seldom spoke because, as the Lavina later confided in me, she didn't want the white students to "come at" her. Such are the forces of silencing that, despite the best efforts of instructors and best intentions of students, come into play when dominant discourses are evident. The safety in which these mostly white students interacted with one another was doubtless reinforced by the fact that this was an honors section, one in which students were hand selected by recommending teachers from ENGL 1101, creating a classroom space that, interestingly, demonstrated the kind of racial segregation and academic privilege that resulted from similar academic tracking systems that interviewees would describe from their high school classroom experiences.

In Section B, students met in the regular classroom twice per week for 50 minutes and then every other week in the computer lab for 100 minutes. Professor B had students sit in a circle for every regular discussion meeting, thus encouraging face to face interaction. As usual, I took my place among the students, changing seats frequently to avoid appearing too familiar with a certain few students. Typically, Professor B called on students (using the roll as reference) to share what they marked in the reading text. Occasionally, students responded to one another's comments spontaneously. I noted which students responded most passionately – whether positively or negatively—to those texts on race. By far, the most vocal students were ones who already took racial issues seriously: two African American females, Mona and Katherine, whose lives had been severely marked by racism; and one white male, Mark, whose personal commitment to

anti-racism made him prone to respond to texts that focused on prejudice and institutional injustices.

Even when Professor B carefully defined terms of active and passive racism and distinguished bigotry from institutional racism, for the most part, white students were reluctant to discuss racial issues head on; their resistance was marked by silence, downcast eyes, and nervous body shifting. One particularly resistant white male, Sam, who was often late to class and seldom prepared to participate, said that the contents of McIntosh's knapsack were new to him and that he "didn't know about half of this stuff." Interviews revealed that some white students were hesitant to speak because of presence of so many African American students in the class. Apparently, race was not on the minds of white students until the issue of white privilege imposed itself on the classroom. Black students, on the other hand, seemed very mindful of the power of whiteness, race being a part of their everyday lives. Professor B had to prompt white students to respond to readings on race; however, several black students were eager to speak up about racial issues and incidents that defined their lives daily, from feeling unwelcome in a new neighborhood, to being denied prompt seating at a local restaurant.

Section B was clearly not as spontaneous as Section A; overall discomfort with the subject matter seemed more evident. Unlike Section A, this was not a white-dominated honors class. White students in Section B seemed to be grappling with notions of white privilege, whether they believed it to be real or not. In only a few instances did white students speak as though they were beginning to accept that white people enjoy unearned advantages in their daily lives.

Section C, the most demographically typical of classes at this university, was comprised of half male/ half female; six African American students to 14 white, and was scheduled in the same way as Section B. I attended the class as regularly as I could towards the beginning of the semester (missing every other Wednesday due to a scheduling conflict with my own lab) and missing some peer review days as well, but as the class began to focus more heavily on issues of race, I made arrangements to attend more often. The two or three weeks after spring break were especially crucial since the class had recently read the entire book Honky, as well as Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege" and Beverly Daniel Tatum's "White Identity."

Students in Professor C's class seemed quickly to have formed a comfortable writing community from early on. I attribute this sense of cohesion among students largely to Professor C's relaxed teaching style; for most discussion days, students sat in a large circle and volunteered responses to questions that she posed to the class. When certain students had been particularly silent, Professor C asked them directly to talk a little about what was on their minds. On days in which students sat in the traditional rows, a formation usually left behind by the instructor from the class immediately before, exchange was not nearly as energetic, not even from those more or less dominant voices. Another reason these students did not seem inhibited about speaking up in class surely stemmed from Professor C's introducing the ultimate ice-breaker early on: The Vagina Monologues. Assigning every class member a part to practice and read aloud, the professor did not hesitate to include the males in the class. . . all of them. By defusing male sensitivity to being associated with femaleness, she not only encouraged serious male participation in the Monologues but even inspired one student, Malcolm, to

compose his own penis monologue, which he proudly volunteered to read aloud to the class from the front of the room. These kinds of no-nonsense participation strategies resulted in a truly open classroom atmosphere. As in Section A, the professor of Section C directly addressed the importance of discussing the socially "undiscussable" early on with her coverage of The Vagina Monologues, a text that eschews the secrecy of taboo subjects. Professor B, on the other hand, gave no such frank a message to her students; she apparently assumed the class was mature enough to engage in thoughtful discussion of delicate issues.

But again, as in the case of Section B, the topic of race in Section C was often met with hesitation, and not only by white students. The Secret Life of Bees, a novel about many complexities of human relations—loss, coming of age, first love, spirituality, family—is most unavoidably also about race: Lily is a "lost" white girl who escapes her abusive home life, running away with an older, black companion, Rosaleen, eventually taking refuge with an unorthodox family of three black sisters. Seldom, however, during the three class meetings devoted to this text, did students speak up about the several racially charged scenes that depict poignant moments in the story. When Professor C asked what a particular argument between the characters Lily and Rosaleen was really about, Joyce, the African American female who was to become the most outspoken voice in the class, expressed surprise that no one in the class was saying anything about what was obviously a conflict based on race. In the scene, Rosaleen accuses Lily of treating her "like a pet dog. You act like you're my keeper. Like I'm some dumb nigger you gonna save" (53). Indeed, the white students avoided commenting on race in that scene; and another African American student, Rodney, made the safe remark that Rosaleen is

the backbone of the story, that she shows the strength of the black character. Finally, a white student, Brooke, responded that Lily "just needs to belong, needs to feel that she is not simply a white girl feeling out of place," thus defusing a potentially racially charged discussion with a similarly benign comment.

Interestingly, this class continued to allow Joyce, the most vociferous—and extremely articulate and passionate— black female to speak for oppressed minorities, while garnering little support from fellow African American students, a situation that troubled her deeply, as she made clear in a later interview with me. Joyce spoke of housing discrimination on Greek Row of the campus, disparities between treatment of black and white customers at a local club, and general racial segregation at the university. Even though she led the way, black students were still reluctant to speak, probably because they were so obviously outnumbered by white students.

Observing student responses to class discussions on race provided my first clues as to whose writing I would pay closest attention to, and whom I would want to interview for the study. After sharing typed summaries of field notes with instructors, and receiving their input, I gradually selected students to focus on: both black and white; both receptive and resistant to white privilege; both talkative and silent. I also chose one black and one white student who seemed to not to fit emergent categories. These students would serve as negative case examples that would test the hypothesis that white students would resist and black students would accept notions of white privilege explored in the writing classroom.

Documents

According to Lincoln and Guba, "the term 'document' is used to denote any written or recorded material *other than a record* that was not prepared specifically in response to a request from the inquirer . . . . Examples of documents include letters, diaries, speeches, newspaper editorials, case studies, television scripts, photographs, medical histories, epitaphs, and suicide notes" (277; emphasis original). Student writing assignments fit into this list since they are works—though often works in progress—produced by students but not at the request of the researcher. To keep the potentially overwhelming task of document examination manageable, I limited myself to those pieces of writing that explicitly address the subject of race. As Erlandson, et al. caution, "Although one should not impose self-limitations on the quantity or quality of available documents during the initial stages of the investigative process, some discernment and intuition should come into play in document gathering or one will accrue mountains of analytical headaches . . . There must be some tacit and rational screening process involved" (99-100). In managing the time needed to review student writing, as well as to conduct interviews, I was fortunate in that relevant student writing occurred in sequential waves: Professor A's class wrote about whiteness for the first assignment; in Professor B's class, whiteness became the focus in week five; and not until the last four weeks of the semester did Professor C focus the course on race and whiteness. I was able, therefore, to combine observation with document examination all along the way, even though I conducted the early interviewing without the benefit of prolonged engagement that the later interviewing afforded me.

By examining relevant student writing, I was guided toward individuals willing to be interviewed about the implicit as well as explicit content of their pieces. Erlandson, et al. comment on the interaction between interviews and observations: "Through interviews, the researcher often gains a first insight into the constructed realities that are wrapped up in the idiolect of the respondent. Through observations, the researcher gains a partially independent view of the experience on which the respondent's language has constructed those realities" (99). I suggest that examining student writing can offer the same benefits to the researcher, who is using the medium of writing to determine yet another way respondents construct reality.

Race Narratives

Student race narratives written in recent classes of mine indicate that writing about racial encounters prompts students—especially white students—to think about their developing subject positions in a society that sees race first, despite frequent claims to the contrary. As Ira J. Hadnot writes in "Race Fatigue," people of color cannot escape being racially marked in a public setting: "It's not me they see but my color. My race is recognized before I am. I will always be on display or out of context" (208). Hadnot's voice, from the volume When Race Becomes Real: Black and White Writers Confront Their Personal Histories, echoes my African American students' narratives about the visibility of race in their lives. The white voices of the collection, on the other hand, offer up experiences that have helped them complicate notions of white-privilege invisibility in their lives: "To be antiracist is to acknowledge that privilege and take one's place in the political struggle against it" (Jensen 148). Some of the white students of my classes suggested they were taking up the struggle by recognizing their own white

privilege, almost always for the first time. Even Brian, who was "raised in this hip-hop generation, where it's cool to be black," wrote about being introduced to real racial diversity on campus in his essay titled, "Blinded by the Light . . . Skin."

Like the black and white authors who tell their stories about how upbringing, education, and social experience have affected their personal and professional identities, students in the classes I observed wrote about blackness and whiteness in their own lived experience, confronting past encounters with racism, sometimes racism of their own. By giving credence to the personal race narrative, I am guided by Faigley's recommendation of the personal narrative as a powerful means of locating one's own positionality, albeit a developing and incomplete one, within a particular cultural discourse: "Asking students to write narratives about the culture in which they participate is one way of allowing them to explore agency and to locate themselves within their culture. Teachers of college writing traditionally have assigned personal narratives, which . . . can be a means of analyzing the discourses that have shaped them and confronting the discourses they have struggled against" (218). The instructors of these classes were no less convinced than I that race narratives should be included in writing assignments. Whether in the form of reading responses, research projects, portfolio cover letters, or final essay exams, race narratives were embedded in the writing in these classes.

Other Writing

Perhaps the greatest degree of commonality among the three ENGL 1102 classes came out in the kinds of writing assignments the instructors used. Although Professor C did not use portfolio assessment this particular semester, Professor A and Professor B did postpone grading of major pieces until portfolios were submitted at the end of the term.

In section A, students submitted revisions of major papers, along with copies of reading notebook entries and critiques of web research projects at the end of the term. In section B, all writing was submitted in the final portfolio for grading, Professor B having given feedback on earlier drafts and marking their readiness as "E" (early), "M" (middle), or "L" (late), indicating current progress towards final draft quality. Professor C used, instead, a written essay exam that called for reflection of the semester's progress. All classes did include, however, some kind of major research project that required both primary and secondary sources, as well as an oral class presentation. And in all classes, most students chose to do some kind of research regarding race, whether it be racial profiling, interracial dating, or racial tensions in the South.

Since student writing was being produced constantly during the term, pieces of all lengths, purposes, and degrees of formality were available for me to review. If either the instructor or I observed a particular insight, or sign of resistance, from a student document, then I made note to observe that student more closely in class and to consider asking him or her for an interview. Especially interesting were the writings of African American students on the topic of whiteness and racism. The texts were so concrete and compelling. I soon realized that black voices were offering me a glimpse of what so many white student writers were unable to see: that white privilege has great power, especially to those who can never exercise that power.

Interviewing

Purposive sampling for interviewing was based upon my detection of student attitudes toward institutional racism that might be reflected in their writing and articulated in class discussion. I listened and watched carefully as students participated

in class discussion, taking particular note of non-verbal cues that indicated their degree of engagement, or disengagement, with the subject of white privilege.

In a similar study on white students' receptiveness to readings of critical themes of race, Jennifer Seibel Trainor, a participant observer of a writing class, drew contrasting portraits of student resistance and receptiveness based upon interviews with two students "who were chosen because of their strong responses to multicultural and critical texts and for the interesting ways their identities as white middle class students played out across their responses to texts" (641). Like Trainor, I examined the spectrum of student attitudes I observed and selected interviewees accordingly. By using the technique of purposive sampling, I "f[ound] those cases which match the purpose: unusual cases, typical cases, cases that display maximum variation, and so on" (Lincoln and Guba 102). The kind of purposive sampling used is best described as "intensity sampling [which] examines cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely but not extremely" (Erlandson, et al. 83), in this case white middle-class students who exhibit verbal, non-verbal and written responses similar to those Trainor studied. I expected student narratives to run along similar lines of resistance to and recognition of white privilege. As for instances in which students' views fell outside this continuum, I was especially interested in finding out why such students either so readily adopted attitudes consistent with antiracist notions of whiteness, or so adamantly rejected such notions.

After approximately two weeks of observing the students' interaction during class and of reading student writing, I decided to begin with Professor A's class since whiteness was clearly the focus from the beginning. The class was already reduced to the size it would become, so I began selecting students based upon some of their early

responses during class discussion about such master signifiers as the Christian cross, Confederate flag, and Nazi swastika. For example, I selected Abbey, a white Southerner, right away because she adamantly defended Dixie Outfitters' T-shirts, the texts of which always display the Confederate flag, claiming the shirts are not racially offensive since the company uses sports objects as the focus of the image. Her insistence that she's "not a racist" indicated that she was conscious of a possible contradiction between her claim and her endorsement of a product she knew to be controversial at her high school. I eventually chose Lavina, the only Hispanic female in the class, whose dual identity as white and Latina often accompanied her class comments; Matt, who similarly claimed a non-white identity as a descendant of Rumanian heritage; Jerry, who often referred to himself as self-made and not a beneficiary of privilege; Arnita, who said very little in discussion but who dated interracially; Haley, a self-proclaimed Southern feminist; and Deborah, the African American non-traditional female, whose candor about racist experiences was compelling listening to the almost all-white audience.

As Professor B began to assign readings in whiteness, I started to select interviewees from Section B, the class in which African American students actually outnumbered white students. I decided early on to interview the two outspoken black females, Mona and Katherine, since their voices frequently seemed to intimidate, if not silence, some conservative white students who seemed to bristle quietly in the background as such comments were made as "It's obvious to me that the white man has always held the black man down"; or "The white males in the book [Life is So Good] enjoy success and the black males pay for that success." The other four interviewees were white: Angela, who spoke up readily in discussion; Kim, who said little during

class; and Mark and Jason, both of whom were taking seriously the idea of reconsidering personal definitions of racism in terms of white privilege. I wanted to interview one clearly resistant white male, Sam, who, unfortunately, dropped the course, but not before making clear his suspicions that minorities overreact to instances of racial prejudice and stereotyping they experience, as well as an allegiance to the Fox news channel. He was often disengaged from class discussion, sulking in his seat, coming to class unprepared, sometimes even without a book. Judging by his classroom demeanor, which indicated his apparent dissatisfaction with the course, I doubt he would have agreed to an interview.

I selected students to interview from Section C towards the end of the course, when discussion was heavily focused on race, students having read Honky and the McIntosh and Tatum pieces last. In the first class session on white privilege, a particularly revealing discussion of student attitudes towards race, Joyce (who had startled the class early on with her insistence that race be exposed as a major theme in The Secret Life of Bees) gave an impassioned speech about the pain she felt when, as a kindergartener in her first all-white school room, a white girl had refused to lend her a comb because "your hair is too nappy and dirty." Joyce continued, "The worst part of this experience was the silence I got from my mother when I told her about how this white girl treated me. We have to break the silence about race if anything is going to change . . . if people are going to understand how we [African Americans] feel in this world." This particular one of her many contributions confirmed to me that she would likely welcome a chance to talk to me about the class, and I was right.

Another African American student, Rodney, gave an equally stunning testimony during that same class period, describing how his grandfather died. When Rodney's father was only seven years old, his own father collapsed on the job one day and was taken to the local hospital somewhere in rural Georgia. However, the family was told that the doctor "who was allowed to touch colored people" was not in that day, so this student's grandfather died, untreated, on the floor of the hospital. "I never knew my grandfather," Rodney said, "because of the senseless practice of segregation." Although one would think that a person with this kind of story in his background would have a heightened resentment towards white people, Rodney's demeanor and later comments in class signaled that he was unsure about the existence of white privilege. Intrigued by his ambivalence towards racism, and prompted by Professor C, who found his position on racism disturbing, I sought him out for an interview.

Of the four white students I interviewed from Section C, two males and two females, only Maggie seemed to be seriously examining herself as a beneficiary of white privilege. Helen, the other female, steeped in Southern traditions of male chivalry and racial segregation, deemed herself "not a racist," even as she described incidents of racial hatred she had witnessed in a local college bar as "just the way it is, understandably." The two white males I interviewed, Malcolm and Richard, exhibited varying degrees of resistance, from downplaying the importance of confronting race in our everyday lives, to denying the existence of racism in an all-white social background, to downright resentment of using racial texts in the course.

For the interviewing I used open-ended questions that encouraged students to relax and be forthcoming with their experiences regarding race. (See Appendix A)

I wanted them not only to address the issues of race they had written and read about, but also to speak freely about their family backgrounds and experiences that have contributed to their racial awareness. By discussing sensitive and personal questions of what it means to be white and how it is that white privilege, in all its invisibility and pervasiveness, perpetuates itself—especially in Southern culture—both the students and I were better able to understand our positions and responsibilities through being able to name and know them. The conversational style characterized this kind of interview as the "*depth* interview (interviewer and respondent are 'peers')" (Lincoln and Guba 269). Since I was not the instructor of record in this situation, the interviewees did not feel threatened or inhibited by a power imbalance that might exist otherwise. And since I was, by the time of the interviews, a familiar classroom presence, they were comfortable talking with me.

The interviews lasted about 35 – 40 minutes and took place in my private office. I recorded each interview using an unobtrusive (about the size of a cell phone), high-quality Olympus digital recording device, which I kept in plain view on my desktop. After the interviews, I transferred the .wav files to my desktop computer and either transcribed them myself or sent them via email to a transcription service in Wisconsin. For member checking, I presented transcripts to the respondents within a few days and invited them to take their time reviewing the document by adding, deleting, or otherwise modifying the content until it presented an accurate picture of the substance of the conversation. Following the advice of Erlandson, et al., I "gather[ed] data in a manner that present[ed] the most complete picture of what has happened in the research setting . . ." (103). As I closed the interview, I made sure to "summarize and 'play back' for the

respondent what [I] believed ha[d] been said . . . [This process] invites the respondent to react to—member check—the validity of the constructions the interviewer had made . . . and induces the respondent to add new materials of which he or she is reminded on hearing the summary" (Lincoln and Guba 271). Most respondents returned transcripts promptly, having signed and dated the copies to verify their approval of the contents. Interestingly, no respondents made deletions from the transcripts, even though some remarks were clearly racist.

Because the naturalistic methodology of this study involved a human instrument as well as human subjects, I expected what Lincoln and Guba call "mutual simultaneous shaping" to take place. Not only were both the respondents and I affected by each other, but what we constructed together affected the study itself. In other words, as a researcher still struggling with recognizing my own white privilege, I was shaping my understanding of how that recognition affects the writing classroom along with the students I studied. Since "everything influences everything else, in the here and now" (Lincoln and Guba 151), my working hypothesis, along with the focus and themes, changed as the study progressed.

I came into these three classrooms with the intention of analyzing "what's happening here." I knew I would become involved in both the here and now of the class discussions, as well as the now and then of interviewing students about their personal histories. Near the end of the term, however, all the watching, reading, and interviewing I had done put me into a privileged position of knowing more about the participants than the teacher or each of the participants did about one another. I continued to gather and analyze data, privy to such personal information as certain individuals' past traumatic

experiences with race, and certain others' obliviousness to the pain of racial inequities in their cultures. Stories were so intriguing that the limitations of the sampling became frustrating. Had I but world enough and time, I would have extended the study to include every member of every class. Studying human subjects indeed held the complexities promised by naturalistic researchers I had read in preparation for my work: Frankenberg, for example, found her research complicated by "the frustration and the challenge [that] came from the special difficulties involved in interviewing white women on what for many of them was a 'taboo' topic that generated areas of memory lapse, silence, same, and evasion" (23). Because her subjects were recalling past incidents and attitudes while being influenced by their interpretation of her research topic, Frankenberg had to "work to comprehend the logic of their lives and the words with which they described them" (23). She was left with narratives that were human and complex, narratives that she would analyze "in terms of their internal coherence and contradiction, in relation to each other, and in the context of a broader social history" (42).

Far from being able to generalize and draw definitive conclusions about the backgrounds, attitudes, and writing of this population of white students, the best I can offer, as a researcher, is insight into minds and experiences of college freshmen who *seem* to come into our classrooms with an innocent freshness, an openness to all possibilities of the future, but who *really* bring with them a tangle of social experiences and attitudes that they themselves are only beginning to recognize as significant shapers of their identity.

To stretch the notion of the "outsider within," (Collins, qtd. in Denzin 54-55), my position as teacher, researcher, and elder certainly seems outside the context of student,

subject, and youth; but like the individuals I studied, I am white, middle-class, and Southern. I have had my own experiences with racial identity issues, and I have only recently begun to look seriously at some of the questions I asked my subjects to consider.

Data Analysis

Keeping in mind that "data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases" (Lincoln and Guba 242), I built into the study adequate time for coding and analyzing data as it became available, especially in terms of data collected through interviewing, so that subsequent observations and interviews could be made more productive. Applying Lincoln and Guba's version of Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative method in this way, I took advantage of "the notion of a 'continuously developing process' in which each stage provides guidance for the next throughout the inquiry" (Lincoln and Guba 340). Particularly helpful to the continual revising of the working hypothesis was negative case analysis, or "the process of revising hypotheses with hindsight" (Lincoln and Guba 309). I was watchful for data that seemed to test the limits of the hypothesis and thereby demand it be revised. For example, I found that a student displays non-verbal cues in class that prompt a questioning of my previously held beliefs about students' racial awareness. "Thus, negative case analysis eliminates all 'outliers' and all exceptions by continually revising the hypothesis at issue until the 'fit' is perfect" (Lincoln and Guba 312).

The Report

Eventually, theory—grounded in the data—emerged that further explains student concepts of white privilege. The report of findings from observation, document

examination, and interviewing attempts to frame this theory in the context of existing theory, as well as to employ "thick description" to render an interpretation of the data that will give the reader a sense of vicarious experience with the inquiry (Lincoln and Guba). During data collection, I remembered that "while in the context, it is important to stop and look, listen, smell, and feel the surroundings and interaction. When reading a description, one should be able to get a feel for what it is like to actually be in the context" (Erlandson, et al. 146).

Chapter 4, "The Grins and Lies of Whiteness," covers themes that emerged from student interviews concerning individual perceptions and personal histories of white privilege. I concentrate on what white students revealed to me about racism in their backgrounds, their thoughts on race relations in college, their attitudes toward studying race in writing class (and other classes), their notions of whether studying race and whiteness prepares them for life in the academy and beyond. I also look at how theories of white identity set forth in the literature on whiteness might mesh with some of the students' responses, what they revealed consciously and unconsciously.

In "Why Resist?" I discuss how some exceptional Southern white students were really open to, and excited about, stretching their minds into notions of white privilege, ideas that were entirely new to them. These non-resistant students, of course, tended to be the already politically liberal few of the class; but it's interesting that education has made a real difference to them, considering that most come from families that somehow taught racial separation as a given and a good.

"The African American Perspective" deals with black students' attitudes towards studying whiteness in the writing classroom. I got to know black students through

interviews, observation, and writing, too, who were passionate about getting the word of white privilege to white people in general, and who had made such impressive contributions to the class that they cannot go unmentioned; these revelations are kind of the flip-side to what the white students were saying, of course, and they are important to the study and worthy of a section. Race is so much more a conscious part of their identity than it is for whites, and as such, these students see white privilege as not only obvious but writ large. The presence and voices of African American students themselves were actually as great a catalyst as the written texts for getting white students to take seriously the notion that racism is with us and that white people are not the victims but are in a dominant, privileged position to do something about racial injustice. The African American perspective is not monolithic, however; it is anything but. Like the white perspective, it is complex and varied.

Chapter 5, "White Writing: Thinking (and Seeing) Through Privilege," covers specifically the kinds of assignments students were asked to write and the kinds of responses those assignments elicited. I look at the more subtle influences of teaching approaches and classroom dynamics on how and why certain students (all of whom I have interviewed) responded to assignments the way they did. In every instance, students *elected* to write about race and/or their thinking on whiteness in essays, memoirs, research projects, portfolio cover letters, and reflective reading responses. I take up Sections A, B, and C separately, reporting on various degrees of receptivity and resistance displayed by white student writing. I offer some insights here about how white racial awareness might be shaped by the writing experience students have had in these classes, especially when that experience entails writing to discover meaning. I also offer

suggestions and encouragement to teachers who might be thinking of including whiteness studies in their writing classrooms.

I conclude with some commentary on how articulations of whiteness impact the first-year writing classroom. Despite their discomfort with the subject of white privilege, most of these Southern white students used class discussion and writing to locate their positions in a world that would deny the existence of white privilege. By studying theories and manifestations of whiteness, many of these students have examined their attitudes against their lived experience and have come to view their lives as raced and as responsible for effecting change in an unjust society.

Making the context and events concrete for the reader, I hope to have increased the chances for transferability, should a future researcher with similar interests wish to apply certain aspects of this study to his or her own context. The study could be useful to a teacher who may wish to apply some of the findings to another classroom setting with a different demographic makeup or in different discipline; or to a researcher who may wish to conduct a similar inquiry at perhaps a smaller institution, or an institution in another region of the country.

Validity

To ensure credibility, I triangulated the study, continually checking data sources of writing, interviewing, and field notes against one another. I also maintained an audit trail that includes 1) a day-to-day log that lists specific activities related to the study; 2) a personal journal that chronicles the progress of the study and contains reflections on certain decision-making processes that occurred along the way; and 3) a file that holds

such collected evidence as field notes, student writing, transcripts, and correspondence with debriefers, including my advisor.

Time Frame

In January 2005, I received permission from my committee and the Graduate School of Indiana University of Pennsylvania to conduct the study, as well as the approval of the Institutional Review Boards of both Georgia Southern University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I spent spring semester 2005 collecting and analyzing the data, and most of summer and fall 2005 writing the report. The defense of the study took take place soon after its completion, in March 2006.

Final Comments

Working from the notion that what goes unsaid, uninvestigated about the power of whiteness is potentially harmful, I believe that this inquiry into white students' ways of thinking will help us discover how to incorporate thoughtful discussions of dominant discourses into our writing classes. Instead of engaging in what hooks calls "the silence and taboo that make coercion and exploitation more possible" (qtd. in Ellis and Bochner 354), we should examine the positions from which white students write and speak in our composition classes, and allow considerations of those positions to enter into our conversations on the teaching of writing.

As Ellis and Bochner explain in their introduction to Composing Ethnography, students'

> own ways of understanding the world are cultural and political productions tied to and influenced by the discourses of class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Confronting some of the more disturbing accounts is dangerous and may feel

> threatening, but [we] think it would be more dangerous not to do it, to go on imagining people don't live and feel and suffer these things, that they are not vulnerable to relations of power, and that we don't have a responsibility to try to find a way to talk about and care about them. (26)

Defined by Norman K. Denzin, "a good text exposes how race, class, and gender work their ways into the concrete lives of interacting individuals" (10). I hope my text does just that.

CHAPTER 4

THE GRINS AND LIES OF WHITENESS: FACES OF RESISTANCE

We wear the mask that grins and lies
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To Thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

■ Paul Laurence Dunbar

The mask that hides the plight of the oppressed in Dunbar's poem is not unlike the mask of similar grins and lies that hides the unsettling truth of whiteness. Deborah, a non-traditional, middle aged black female from Professor A's class, gave me a dramatic depiction of the mask when she explained her personal observation about white strangers' insincere smiles: "I've been wondering for a long time," she said, "why it is that white people always smile when they meet you [black people] in passing." She went on to describe an incident in which she tested the sincerity of the smiling white stranger. After having met repeatedly the face of a certain white woman during her routine evening walk around the lake at the local recreation center, this African American woman spotted the same white woman at a public school function: "As I approached her in the auditorium, intending to speak to her, I suddenly knew that she was not going to speak to me."

Deborah described the non-verbal behavior the white woman displayed as she struggled to remove herself from the uncomfortable position of having to face Deborah in a social setting. "I don't mind the smiling," Deborah continued, "but it's not real. It's like what I heard on an NPR program one night. This white lady on a panel said she was taught always to smile at black people so they know you are kind and considerate [meaning not racist]." When I responded that I was probably guilty of making a point of smiling at black people—and that I would start checking myself—Deborah assured me that the smiling was fine as long as it was sincere. She had noted that whites don't necessarily smile at other whites, that this false kindness was reserved for black strangers.

Indeed, as I discovered, relationships white people have with black people are often just this superficial. When I asked white students in interviews about race relations in their segregated hometowns, the refrain I heard repeatedly was, "We all got along just fine." This kind of obliviousness to racial separatism and discrimination typified the subtly racist attitudes surrounding many white students as they were growing up. They, as well as their families, believed that "everything was fine," a kind of thinking that suggests a certain unwillingness to confront their own faces of resistance to the idea of white privilege. But the effects of living in a racist world would come out in interviews and writing of these white students. In their daily lives, racism hovers around the edges, but writing demands that they dig deep into what they think and why, examining their own experiences and attitudes as they try to make sense of their lives as white people. This study looks behind the mask and into this tangle of thorns.

Of the twenty students I interviewed, only two were from the North, and of the other 18 born and reared in the South; twice as many were from rural areas, as opposed to

suburban areas of cities that lay a few hours away from campus. Students answered questions about racism and separatism in their homes and schools, gave me their thoughts on race relations in college, revealed attitudes about studying race in writing class and in other classes, and discussed whether they thought studying race, whiteness in particular, actually prepared them for life in the academy and beyond.

Personal Histories: White Perspectives on Race

Many white students admitted, as did I in my Prologue (which I read to Sections B and C near the end of the term) that they came from homes where prejudice exists. But most have learned from experience to resist the influence of racism in their backgrounds, while others have begun to acknowledge its existence only after having thought about white privilege in the writing class.

One student, Jerry, seemed reluctant to admit that his parents were still "kind of semi-racist," as he went on to describe his attempts to explore diversity in his own life despite his parents' objections: "It would be kind of embarrassing for me to hear the things they would talk about with regard to race – in my own home. Knowing that I had friends that were black or whatever. But I can't correct them because they are my parents. You look past it and make an effort in your own mind to separate yourself from that." This student said that his parents' attitudes eventually made it impossible for him to live at home, and so he moved out to "make my own rules and live my own life."

Likewise, other white students had endured conflicts with parents, largely because they had decided to date interracially or to have African American friends in college. The two white women from Section A who were currently dating black men collaborated on a web project in which they researched interracial relationships. One of the two

women had yet to convince her father to accept her boyfriend, whereas the other woman's boyfriend, the second black male she had dated, managed to get close enough to her father to convert him from his racist attitudes. Another student, Angela, said that her father still called her on the telephone every single day inquiring about her new friends, frequently asking "what color" they were, a question that concerned this student since, as she said, her family "always talked poorly of those of other colors." But Angela credited her experience with diversity in college, along with the education on race she was receiving from Section B, for being able to share with her father that she was studying white privilege in ENGL 1102: "It's like getting a new set of eyes, you know, take away the rose-tinted glasses and you see things how they really are." Her father, however, was incredulous: "He goes, 'Did you make that up? Are they really teaching you that?' He didn't *believe* the phrase 'white privilege.'"

Similarly, Jason had re-examined some of the racist attitudes of his home life after having studied white privilege in Section B. Growing up around parents who stereotype black people as dependent on government and who "don't like the ones that won't get out and work and make something of themselves," Jason confessed, "I've grown up with my family saying the N-word. To be honest, I've said that word too. But the movie *Higher Learning* really changed my view a lot." Indeed, the theme of race in Section B helped Jason think critically about the attitudes he brought with him to college: "I think you get a lot of different perspectives, and then you put those with your own perspective on the whole issue together. Mine has changed a lot since the beginning [of the semester]. And with all the readings my perspective has changed a lot on racism."

White students talked fairly freely about racism in their home lives, perhaps because these private interviews were confidential and I was, of course, white, too, and Southern. Also, as we talked back and forth, I nodded in recognition of the kinds of racist attitudes the students related. Given my own background, I was neither surprised nor particularly dismayed with what I heard. These students were, after all, participating in self-dialogue on significant issues in their lives, issues that would intersect with their writing in these classes.

Unconscious Racism: School Bred

Beverly Daniel Tatum might ask, "Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" but most of the white students I interviewed did not. Racial segregation in the lunchroom was thought of as natural, as was segregation in high school sports: football and basketball are black; baseball and soccer, white; cheer leading a "white" sport; in track, distance running is white, while sprinting is black, etc. As Helen put it, racial separation is a given: "It wasn't like we had anything to do with it; it was just how it was. I mean, we just automatically separated." Not so obvious to white, college bound students is segregation caused by academic tracking. When pressed about the racial makeup of college prep English, math, and science classes, white students had to note that very few African Americans populated those classes. In fact, Angela admitted that she had brought a stereotype of black students as under-achievers with her to college: "When I saw so many black students walking to class on this campus, I thought to myself, 'What are they doing here?' I was so used to associating black students with sports and not with academics."

Jason, likewise a participant in white-dominated Advanced Placement classes in high school, said that the black students in his classes were not "ghetto" like the masses of black students he encountered only in the hallways between classes. Predictably, he was accustomed to being around only the kind of black students that were "white" enough to be accepted by academically successful white students. What made these African-American students seem "white" was that they associated so closely with the white majority in academically accelerated classes.

So profound were these racial divides in high school that white students were often indeed oblivious to the presence of black students. For these white students, living with de facto segregation resulted in a lack of knowledge of the "other," a condition which caused a kind of benign racism, manifested not only in oblivion to racial inequities, but in wholesale denial of racism and even a fear of black people themselves. So many white students were like Helen, who went to school with black students but never knew any of them: "Whenever I got to college, I was in complete culture shock . . . I had lived in a white bubble." Helen didn't know where the black students were in her high school and didn't know where the predominantly black schools were until her cheerleading squad had to meet other teams at competitive events. Her lack of experience with African Americans should come as no surprise because when she was in kindergarten, her father had cautioned her not to talk to black children in her class: "It was a long time before I realized that black children actually spoke English." Similarly, Abbey stated that she was "puzzled" by black people. She has had so little experience with groups of African Americans that she finds their behaviors a mystery, so much so that when she is walking alone, she avoids groups of black people for fear of her safety.

No less a mystery to me is whether Abbey will feel less threatened by African Americans after having studied whiteness and racism in honors Section A, which so closely resembles the white populated classes she remembers from high school.

In their educational experience, these white students had not been challenged to think about what causes segregation and how segregation might be a sign of social, educational, and economic inequality. When Tatum argues that the black kids are sitting together in the cafeteria to seek refuge from a white-dominated world that rejects them, white students like these are incredulous because they do not see segregation as a construction of institutional racism but as a natural consequence of efforts to mix people who essentially "do just fine" and "get along fine" as separate groups.

"I work hard": Denial of White Privilege

Ever since I began discussing whiteness with writing students, I have noted consistently negative reactions to the term white *privilege*. The emphasis on privilege perhaps suggests economic advantages that many white people are unwilling to acknowledge. When Lois Weis and others studied white working-class males in the 1990s, they found that these men perceived that the power they traditionally enjoyed became threatened in the workplace with the encroachment of minorities (women, among them). Discursive othering can be literally heard in their voices, in their word choice—especially in the coded language of us/them thinking—that expresses a strong sense of white (and male) entitlement. I have found that white students in general are quick to deny they have a social and economic advantage over people of color, especially those whites attuned to so-called reverse discrimination.

Many white students I interviewed resent implications of racist complicity, especially those students who think of themselves as not particularly advantaged, socially or economically. During our interview session, Matt, who comes from struggling immigrant ancestors from Communist Romania, commented on what he understood as a suggestion made in class discussion that white people have an easier time economically than people of color: "They are saying I wouldn't have to work as hard because of my white skin color . . . I took offense to that. I grew up in a really poor neighborhood. I went to a poor high school . . . I can't have mommy and daddy pay for everything, you know. I'm here purely on scholarships." But what Matt went on to describe was hardly a disadvantaged background. Both his parents are college educated and have corporate jobs. He might not realize that, economically speaking, he is several steps ahead of another white male from the same Section A, Jerry, who has returned to college at his own expense and who also resists being called privileged. Jerry said, "I come from nothing," as he recalled the hardships his grandfather faced during the Great Depression: "He never got out of fifth grade. He was forced to work" because his older brothers were all drafted into the Army and someone had to stay home and work the farm. Despite hardships, Jerry's grandfather taught him that "he can be what he wants to be," a sentiment that black people have only since the civil rights movement been able to relay to *their* children.

Like Matt, Jerry thinks immigrant Europeans have to deal with more difficult social barriers than African Americans do. He cited a Bulgarian friend who came to the United States without knowing English and had to work low-paying service jobs for several months before she could qualify for an interview with a company that would offer

benefits. And like Matt and Jerry, Lavina, the Latina student from Section A, equated privilege with leisure and hedged on whether institutional racism was real. Even though she identifies with blacks more than with whites, she made clear that she works hard and that many black people are lazy: "Some black people don't try very hard to get there [to succeed], so partly the reason they don't do so well is because they're not trying enough, whereas I'm where I'm at because I busted my behind trying to be here."

The term *white privilege* was apparently off-putting to many white students in my study, especially to those who pride themselves on hard work and who are already sensitive to being stigmatized somehow as members of an underclass. To white people who, like Jerry, say that they and their ancestors "come from nothing," the label "privileged" sounds inappropriate, even insulting. These people understand *privilege* as indicating that they have gained success undeservedly. Sensing that the term itself evokes a kind of defensiveness in whites placed in an already uncomfortable position, I have often thought that a more workable term, such as white *consciousness*, might be better received by white people interested in a commitment to social change. Consciousness, after all, suggests an awareness of one's position, whereas privilege connotes a conspicuous display of power.

Denial and Benign Racism: Who is Keeping Hate Alive?

Mistaking peacefulness for the absence of racism is part of a white denial of responsibility for social injustice. As long as whites are the quiet ones, when blacks are not quiet, whites consider those disruptive blacks the racists.

Several white students mentioned that, in their view, minorities "making a point of race" were the ones agitating certain situations that would otherwise go on as

"normal." Jerry told me that during his upbringing and professional life as a restaurant manager he never thought about race; it was simply a non-issue, that is, until some black people would "make it an issue." Similarly, Abbey thought that black people were too sensitive about how white people refer to black people in "innocent" conversation. She declared that only activist types insist on being called African American, and that those individuals are simply "looking for trouble." Helen said that black students in her high school would make noise about the tiniest racial infractions, "just to get their names in the paper." In almost the same intonation, Malcolm described a violent outbreak that occurred in his school after the visit a civil rights activist who came to his town "just to cause trouble."

According to these white students, who would be first to proclaim, "I'm not a racist!" the upsetting of the status quo by offended minority individuals is itself the act of racism. In this context, racism has to be overt and unsettling to be deemed racism at all. The notion of systemic racism is difficult for white students to see, and they often deny that quiet racism exists as well. Especially prominent in my discussions with white students was the belief that if they are not immediate descendents of slave owners, then racial oppression is "not our fault." Entangled in this belief is the idea that tolerance means being unconscious of race altogether—and color blindness is tolerance.

Even Mark, who took a pro-active stance against racism in class discussion, felt labeled as a racist simply because he is white: "I feel I am always having to prove to people that I'm not racist, because of the white privilege thing . . . [it] causes a lot of built up anger. I feel sorry for them [black people] but it's like I didn't do it, you know." And those who don't feel compelled to fight racism have an even stronger tendency to

deny complicity with a racist system, and to blame African Americans for racial strife. Helen wanted black people to relieve whites like herself, whose families never owned slaves, of the responsibility of racism. She wanted African Americans to "rise above that. If you keep talking about it [slavery, oppression] and keep rubbing it in our faces, of course it's going to go back to being segregated . . . you should become your own person and become your own race and not associated with our ancestors. Just go beyond that and become a better person." Interestingly, Helen was unwilling to deny her own white, Southern heritage and spent a great deal of time in our interview discussing her allegiance to traditions of Robert E. Lee and the fact that she is "really attached to [her] Southern roots," not seeing the contradiction between her intolerance African Americans' resentment of historical mistreatment and reverence for her own glorious past.

Likewise, Abbey believed she was not racist since she is not in the Ku Klux Klan: "I'm not prejudiced. I don't hate black people. I'm not going to pull out a white sheet and become a member of the KKK. But there are some things about black people that just puzzle me and that make me uncomfortable. It's unfamiliar territory." Neither did she believe her small Southern town to be racist: "Like we didn't go around throwing burning socks into black people's yards. It [the town] was fairly normal, I guess you'd say."

To these students, racism equals acts of prejudice, a definition that whiteness studies challenges.

White Isolation and Fear

Because so many of these white students grew up separated from black people and lack an understanding of black culture, the result, in some cases, has been an

irrational fear of black people in general. Two white women, Abbey and Helen, described themselves as fearful of groups of black people, especially of black men. They said that black strangers make them nervous. Abbey admitted that she learned to mistrust African Americans by watching how they are portrayed in the media, and then when her friend's sister was raped by a black man (an event she said she would not have brought up in class), she began to fear black people altogether. Helen, the student who said she grew up in a "white bubble," said, "I don't like being in close quarters with a bunch of black people. I wasn't raised like that. I've never been around that kind of area." She then related several incidents of white violence against solitary black people, most of which occurred in white dominated college bars. In her analysis of the situations, she made clear that she believed the black victims were at fault since "they should have known better than to be there in the first place." Apparently, race relations she has witnessed all her life have involved some kind of suspicions about the mixing of whites and blacks together.

Despite the many comments from white students about "normal" separation of the races, white obliviousness to the presence of black people, and incidents of racial violence in schools, the steady refrain in our private conversations remained "We all got along fine." As long as the status quo went unchallenged, and as long as close friends of color "acted white," there was no racial disturbance in these students' lives. It is little wonder so many of these students do not think race is an important social issue. They tend to minimize problems of racial oppression, believing that attention to such problems merely exacerbates them. Prejudice and hatred are easy to see, but institutional racism is not so easily recognized, unless it is so-called reverse discrimination. Although Beverly

Daniel Tatum claims that institutional racism against whites is a logical impossibility, many white students recited memories of school and workplace discrimination against whites by black teachers and administrators. For these students, Affirmative Action is another word for demoting white people out of jobs that they are better qualified to hold than minority candidates.

As Helen said, "There are some things that black people get that we don't, and I don't hold that against them." But then she goes on to say that "if you want to have a Martin Luther King Day, let's have a Robert E. Lee Day, you know, just out of defense."

Avoidance: "Let's talk about something else."

Another way to minimize the importance of studying race is to assert that our society has many bigger problems that are more deserving of our attention. White students who wanted to avoid the topic of race were quick to point out that terrorism should demand our attention just now, that in times of national crisis all Americans should pull together to fight a common enemy instead of dwelling on problems that seem trivial in comparison to life and death issues of foreign war. One student, who was particularly suspicious of the significance of race issues in class, said the end of the world was a more important issue than racial equality. Another student actually said we should be thinking about our immortal souls instead of worrying about who gets treated fairly in this life.

Sometimes students were blunt about their desire to avoid racial issues in the classroom. One white student, Richard, who has had only white friends and hopes to spend his life in the same white company, said he was tired of this topic, that he didn't want to hear about it any more, that civil rights is all that is covered in American History

class already: "I'd love for it [subject of race] to just disappear. It'd be great. Because it's in the news just about every day, and it's old. Really old, because it's nothing new." This student indicated that he is not comfortable with the topic of white privilege, especially around people of color, not even his classmates: "I don't like talking about this [white privilege]. That's why I'm so quiet [in class]. It's just something I don't like to touch on, really. . . . With it [the class] being integrated anyway and there's two of them [black students] sitting next to me, and it's just – I don't want to talk about it." As is the case with Richard, sometimes silence is an expression of resistance.

Spotlight on White: Noting the Silences

Several white students spoke to me about their reluctance to speak up in class for fear of being labeled, as one student put it, "that white racist" (Angela). Especially in Section B, where white students were the physical minority, discussions of white privilege put white students in the spotlight, making them feel even more exposed than white students in the other, white - dominated classes. The silences, however, were broken in the interviews, where students could speak without needing to be overly polite for the audience. In the interviews students of both races expressed concern about offending class members with comments that might be a bit too candid for comfort. Joyce was sure she had upset two white sorority sisters in Section C with her constant criticism of both white and black people who refuse to face racial issues in their lives. Lavina was fearful of having angered both black and white students with her comments about racism towards Hispanics like herself. And Abbey said she learned to hesitate before speaking out in Section A because in her defense of Dixie Outfitters T-shirts early

on in the term, she seemed to characterize herself as a "redneck," a label she, of course, wanted to avoid.

Indeed, the silences were many during discussion, from both white and black students, as I was to discover during interviews. Section C never heard about Malcolm's middle school locker room knife fight with a black student who blind sided him with brass knuckles before coming at him with a knife: "And I knew I was in a fight for my life, so I fought with everything I had, and after I started fighting back, one of them ended up getting severely injured because I picked him up and threw him down on a bench and broke his back." Malcolm blamed the incident on "some racial stuff that was going on at that time":

> The reason all that stuff happened at our school was because some black woman came into our town trying to start a petition about how the whites had oppressed everyone of the black culture, and I was like, you know, I wasn't even born back then, but yet I'm still almost getting stabbed here because that woman came. Now, honest to God, that day, if I'd seen that lady that I knew was in our town causing trouble, I'd have shot her right in the head.

In class, this student played himself off as racially tolerant, as "getting along with everybody," and even going to clubs "on black night and being the only white guy there dancing with everybody." This painful story was not one he would share with the class, apparently for fear of appearing hostile to civil rights workers.

Even the black student who did share his sorrow about the death of his grandfather on the hospital floor did not tell the whole story. In our interview, he confided to me that his father hated white people after that incident, that his father for

years would not wear white clothing, not even white underwear, so deep was his hatred of white people. But upon a later religious conversion, his father reconciled his feelings for white people, a change of heart that influenced his own son not to blame white people for past violence against black people, and to try to live peacefully in an often still-ignorant world. This part of this student's personal history, I believe, explains his tendency not to support Joyce in her attempts to rally the African American forces during class discussion.

Whiteness: A Fresh Look at Racism

Despite hesitations and discomfort in speaking up in class, more students than I expected expressed fascination with the topic of white privilege. For many, coming to college was their first experience with racial diversity; however, even in their second semester, academic attention to racial awareness had been scant, especially in writing class. Some had studied race relations in contexts of U.S. history, sociology, and U.S. government classes, but few had written on racial awareness in English classes, in both high school and college.

In English classes, studies in diversity had been limited to the inclusion of authors of color in the curriculum—especially during Black History Month, as one student noted—and analyzing racial themes in obviously race-based literature, such as Mildred Taylor's Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, and standard selections from the Harlem Renaissance poets, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. But as white students indicated to me, class discussions of race were then of limited value, especially considering that most of the Advanced Placement class members were white, and whenever more diverse classes discussed race, teachers seemed fearful of a topic that

could lead to incendiary remarks from both black and white students. Apparently, the classroom was not considered a trusted space for honest, productive conversation on sensitive issues. It's little wonder that white students, before coming to these college writing classes, had not thought about how being white might have affected their lives. Even Arnita, whose interracial dating caused her to endure being accused of having "jungle fever" by her relatives, never thought about how white privilege could have been behind the reluctance of her boyfriend's family to accept *her* as *his* girlfriend. To examine her own whiteness was an entirely new idea to her: "I never heard the term whiteness before I got to this class. It's an eye-opening experience, something new. You don't sit down and think about it until you start talking about it."

Becoming Real: Looking Behind the Mask

Difficult as it is for white students to encounter the power of white privilege as a subtle form of racism, reading and writing about social constructions of race in these classes has led many of them to insightful moments of self-examination. Several students commented to me that learning about white privilege has caused them to check their thinking whenever racially charged situations arise, no matter how benign these situations might have seemed in the past. They now feel a heightened awareness of their own privilege, whether they catch themselves responding inappropriately to racist jokes, or making stereotypical assumptions about academic abilities about students of color. Even Lavina, the Puerto Rican female in Section A, who has always identified more with black people than white, said that she now realizes how well her dual identity has served her in the past: "I knew that I was light skinned and that I could get the same privileges that white people could get but that black people couldn't. I can pass as a white person

depending on how I'm dressed and how my hair's done that day." Now that she has been introduced to white privilege academically, Lavina understands how she has lived it: "White privilege is not something I've heard of. Not at all. Not until this semester in this class, but in retrospect, in hindsight, yeah, I can see where that comes from."

Receptive White Students

The kinds of writing students remembered from studying racially themed texts did not involve cultural critiques of any kind, let alone self-examination of their positions as white people. As one white student, Angela, from Section B told me about being asked to write the "This, I Believe" response to texts about whiteness, "This has probably been the first time I've been allowed to write a paper that asks me 'What do you believe?' I was really excited when I got to write about that. I had so much to say." She claimed that as a high school student, she "wasn't challenged enough to write about what [she] believed . . . It was like we weren't allowed to have opinions in high school." But after having been in Section B for several weeks, this student credited studying white privilege for her newly found interest in writing. She described the thinking in the class as "in-depth" and her writing as now having "substance." In the cover letter to her paper, Angela explained, "The message I am putting forth is that certain privileges come from being white. Most whites, somehow, through years of improper psychological conditioning, believe that they are exclusively entitled to certain privileges. It is our generation's job to correct this misinterpretation of race for a better future for us all."

Despite general backgrounds of racial separation and home lives where racial prejudice was often a given, a surprising number of Southern, white students from all the classes spoke of childhood and adolescent friendships with African Americans. Half of

the white students interviewed had experienced meaningful relationships with same age and same sex friends of color, usually through school related activities, such as athletics, yet in none of these cases did either party visit the other's home, at least not without signs of disapproval from parents. Abbey's childhood friendship with Ciara went the predictable way of white/black friendships, disintegrating over time as children mature and become more susceptible to cultural messages. Haley tried to maintain friendships with several black high school friends, but the unwelcoming atmosphere of her home kept these relationships on neutral territory of campus or other public grounds. Similarly, Helen had a mixed friend that she and her white friends "considered white," but she would never have brought this person home. Clearly, efforts these white students made to befriend black people were frustrated by social pressure for races not to mix. Getting a new look at whiteness in writing class, as the following portrait attests, apparently helped these students understand white privilege as part of that pressure.

Haley: An Exceptional Portrait

Personal experience with people of color doubtless made some white students more attuned to problems of racism and more receptive to studying race and constructions of whiteness in the classroom and more willing to concede that white privilege exists and that they are personally complicit in institutional racist practices. Perhaps Haley can serve as a negative case example of a white student who grew up surrounded by racism in her home and community but whose awareness of male privilege, brought on by her exposure to feminist ideas in her education, led her to be open to notions of white privilege.

Haley described her Southern upbringing as typical of white children educated in rural public schools: a slight majority white student population and little racial mixing, except for sports teams and cheerleading squads. According to Haley, even the hallways were segregated: "blacks on one side and whites on the other. . . So when we did group projects, we kind of separated ourselves without even realizing it." Couple this educational atmosphere with her grandfather's penchant for telling racist jokes, and a picture emerges of a white-insulated upbringing. Haley remembered being influenced by her grandfather from early on: "My grandfather instilled in me a lot of racist thoughts and beliefs, which I later shook off, but, I mean, it's only natural to believe when you're growing up that maybe you shouldn't be hanging out with someone who's not your skin color."

But Haley indeed "shook off" racist attitudes long before she became versed in the tenets of feminism, a subject her ENGL 1101 class explored the semester before. Since her exposure to identity politics of Section A, she has come to understand white privilege in terms of feminism; in fact, she wears on the small of her back, the rather tall blue letters of a tattoo "FEMINIST," a label she proudly displayed to the class on the first day of the semester. (I think the students were as surprised as I was to see a locally reared student showing off a subversive affiliation by pulling up the back of her shirt in front of a room full of strangers.) When I asked Haley what she thought about the ideas of white denial and color-blindness, she responded:

> The denial [of white privilege] is there. I've had to deal with all the conflicts associated with being a woman: being told I can't do this or that because I am a woman, being told I am the weaker sex. I can kind of identify with the race

> situation. You know, men have a degree of privilege that they may not even realize they have. Male privilege.

When I responded, "Yes, Peggy McIntosh points out that very parallel," Haley said, "So it's understandable that there would be white privilege, but because I am white, I may not see it. I mean, I'll see the things that have got me where I am. I may not see that because I'm white I got the raise at work. It's like being high class [economically]; it's easy to say well, I got this way because I worked for it because you want to believe that."

Haley definitely "gets" the myth of meritocracy, and she credits Section A for exposing her to the value of self-examination: "If you study white privilege and you study different, you know, identity politics, then you can kind of get to the root of who you are, why you're that way, and that you need to make changes to be a better person and to be better perceived by others."

Because Haley has challenged racism in her home by declaring disapproval of her family's use of the n-word and by calling down her grandfather's racist behavior, she shows that she has put her education into practice. Even when she meets with subtle racism, she believes in speaking out. She said her father has inherited some of her grandfather's racist attitudes "and he won't admit that he has them. But he does make certain judgments and say certain things that he may not perceive as racist, but I do." Again, Haley risked "correcting" her father because "if you don't challenge the words we use, the things we say, you can't change anything."

Haley's feminist spirit is embodied in the anti-racist writing she submitted to Professor A on the subject of white privilege, a topic she had never studied, or even heard of, until this class: "Whether the oppression is sexism, racism, heterosexism, or classism,

silence does not accomplish anything except the perpetuation of a standard already in place. Recognizing our privileges and questioning them will probably be the most tedious part of working towards equality, but it is important because as soon as we start to become aware of our privileges, we can correct them."

Now that Haley has learned to name white privilege, she is more aware of what needs to be changed about white people's attitudes towards racism. Her education has already made a difference in her life and given her articulation of a commitment to social change, she herself stands to make a difference in the world.

Black Perspectives on Whiteness

Receptive white students like Haley have moments of insight about their own whiteness and well may take racial injustices seriously, but matters of white privilege are more than simply academic to African American students. Three of the black students I interviewed were extraordinarily concrete about attitudes toward white privilege and racial injustice, not only because they are tuned in to black media but because they consciously live color every day. And like my own African American students, they usually welcome the opportunity to write about the black experience in America.

Mona: Speaking from the Black Table

Peering at her classmates from behind pink framed reading glasses, Mona, with her enunciated, deliberate voice, is a prominent presence in the class. She is the first to volunteer to read aloud to Section B from the narrative she drew from an interview with a 55-year-old black friend, titled "Her Life, My History." This woman described her experiences growing up in the South during the Civil Rights Movement, a time in which white people treated black people "inhumanly" in restaurants and local schools as the

previously white neighborhood gradually became more racially diverse. The message Mona wants her audience to take away from the paper is that personal accounts of early struggles of black people in this country can offer post Civil Rights generations an appreciation for how far race relations have come in recent years. Mona speaks out about the journey to freedom still in being in progress, hampered by constructions of whiteness that absolve oppressors of responsibility for racism.

In our interview Mona said that discussing whiteness in class has helped white students see that racism is "a system and not just a thought." Mona remembered that one white student in particular had recognized white privilege for the first time during a class discussion: "It [reading about white privilege] really opened her eyes, and it was like something that probably a lot of black people in the class already knew for years but it was like she just got it in college, her first year in college." Mona realizes that white students are reluctant to acknowledge the power of their own skin color and how failure to dismantle that power contributes to systematic racism: "They [white students] don't even have to think about it [racism] because they are white, and they don't have to face it, you know, endure the consequences of it, but it exists. That's obvious to people of color: racism and white privilege exist."

Mona talks easily in class about whiteness, from critiquing Hollywood interpretations of Cleopatra as a white woman, to acknowledging black people's internalization of whiteness as desirable and beautiful. She has achieved a critical distance from her experiences with race, enough to recognize the need for all anti-racist people to achieve diversity in their lives, especially for whites to break out of the "white

bubble" that Helen spoke of. In fact, Mona herself values white friendships but has found them difficult to form at this Southern university.

Mona believes that white people should be more aware of how race works in our culture, but studying whiteness has also given her a perspective on how, as a black woman, she has been influenced by a white-dominated society. Although she reads Cornell West, listens to Tavis Smiley on Public Radio, and supports African American films of historic significance, she admits she has bought into the overly positive view of whiteness brought on by mainstream media. She has become accustomed to the whiteness of mainstream movies, noting that blockbuster hit movie, Pirates of the Caribbean, featured only three black characters. She was also not surprised that when she polled the students of Section B, that no white students had seen Amistad, Higher Learning, or any of Spike Lee's films.

Mona appreciated being in a writing class that encouraged students to voice their opinions on social issues. Even though Mona came to the class all too aware of white privilege, the experience of studying whiteness with white classmates provided her some new perspectives on racism.

Joyce: Stirring Up the Black Table

Out of the six African American students in Section C, Joyce is by far the most vocal in class; she wants both black and white people to wake up to the prevalence of racism in our culture and to do something about it, a tall order for Joyce, who is disheartened by the little support she gets from her black peers during class discussions. She said in our interview, "They [the other black students] downplayed everything I was saying, like I was exaggerating [about the difficulty of being black in America]." Indeed,

the one other black female hardly spoke at all in class, and the four black males often obfuscated on the subject of white privilege, usually by mitigating its seriousness, preferring to discuss class and male privilege to white privilege; or by offering such clichéd responses as "why not celebrate our commonalities rather than pointing out our differences?" But Joyce, whose mother was a Black Panther and whose father had to claw his way into a white university as a Vietnam war veteran, has little patience with African Americans who do not speak out about racial injustice: "My black classmates are the epitome of ethnicity according to their looks: they let their hair grow, don't texturize it, don't relax it, but they are actually believing all the hype [about racism being over]." Unlike those students, Joyce uses no soft and safe language in class discussion or in writing, when it comes to confronting racism and white privilege. Joyce concludes her 1500-word essay titled "I Knew I Was Black When . . ." with comments that square with her classroom demeanor, as well as with revelations about her personal history:

> I live race every day, definitely more so now that I attend a predominately white school. When I speak out in class, I get tired of feeling like the spokesperson for my race. The pressure to succeed, especially at a white school, is heavier than any pile of bricks one can lay on my shoulders. I cannot lose, not at anything. I've learned that white privilege is real, that I am educated differently from whites, that there are places I am still not welcomed, and most importantly that racism is prevalent [in society in general], just in a more subtle, un-indictable way [than in the past]. Americans can act like it's a thing of the past but it's only getting worse. This generation is being taught how to hide their hatred of me and cover it up with laws.

The anger in Joyce's voice belies her fervent belief in the possibility of social change. In her final exam essay, Joyce conceded that education in the ways of whiteness can help all people understand the systemic barriers to racial equality:

> After reading the pieces by Tatum and McIntosh, the idea of 'whiteness' became clear to me. "Whiteness' to my understanding is the unrecognized availability of privileges and resources that is granted to Caucasians. Ironically, all the white people in the class seemed to be enlightened to an idea that most minorities, like me, have already been hip to. It just never had a name until now. It is important that this idea spreads because it can create change in the right hands, especially among liberal college students.

Because Joyce refuses to "wear the mask," writing about whiteness in composition class has offered her an opportunity to express concern about problems she has been attuned to for some time at the university. She speaks and writes openly about segregation in the campus eateries, believing that the music and cuisine are established to encourage black and white students to dine in separate facilities: one serving grilled short orders and featuring top 40's tunes; the other offering a buffet that includes plenty of "soul food" options and playing loud hip-hop selections. She also cuts to the truth about local night spots catering to separate races on separate nights of the week, noting that Wednesday is "black night," a time in which prices are high, seating limited, and security tight. Her comments often seem incendiary, especially to white students, but her determination to make race studies real to her classmates results in some critical examination of heretofore unquestioned practices of the college community.

Joyce may not be the obvious target audience for studies in white privilege, but during this writing course she has been able to address herself to white and black students alike, helping make the case that the dismantling of white privilege is a job for *everyone*.

Rodney: A Voice from the Mixed Table

Rodney is a stark exception to the most of the black students, who usually express some degree of interest in exploring racial themes in writing class. Although Rodney comes from a small South Georgia town some thirty miles from campus, the racism he doubtless grew up with is not in the foreground of his mind; in fact, he dislikes discussions of race in class, especially when the tone turns emotional: "I tried to keep it cool the day we talked about white privilege . . . I just can't stand people starting to get upset about it," referring in our interview to Joyce's story about the white kindergartener refusing to share her comb.

Even though Rodney offered his story about his grandfather's dying in the hospital after being denied treatment, he confirmed what Helen had told me about several students, both black and white, talking together just after class about how they wished the class would read about something other than race: "I've discussed that [frustration with the topic] with a few students too. They were saying the same thing. After class we'd be walking away and going, why are we talking about this?" Apparently, Rodney took comfort in knowing that students other than himself were dissatisfied with the topic of race. The question of "why are we talking about this?" was likely not a pedagogical concern, the importance of discussing sensitive social issues having been made clear by Professor C from the beginning. Rather, the question arose as an indication of the overall social uneasiness that discussions of race prompt.

Rodney's aversion to discussing race issues illustrates complexity of racial awareness, that not all black students are as outspoken against racism as Mona and Joyce. Professor C and I were intrigued, even perplexed, by Rodney's frequent mitigation of white racism. His response to studying race in writing class definitely defied expectations.

At the beginning of our interview Rodney said that he was one of the odd ones who sat at the mixed table in the cafeteria: "My table [in the cafeteria] was intermixed because I hang around with more white than I do black people." Even though Rodney appears black, he does not identify with black people at all; in fact, he constructs himself as white: "I remember a long time ago my daddy said 'My son's a little white boy." Rodney's friends called him "graham cracker," a nickname Rodney did not object to because he knew from a young age that he was different from other black people: "Growing up, I was just always different than normal black children. I picked that up pretty quick, that I liked certain movies and music that other black kids didn't like . . . I didn't fit into the category with black people; I fit into the category with white people." Rodney said he has never thought of himself as black, that he doesn't dress or act black: "I hate rap music. I like classic rock like Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, The Who, Pink Floyd, stuff like that. I don't like basketball. I like fencing and running. . . I just don't fit into the mold of black people. . . The last time I had a black girlfriend was in the third grade." When Rodney said that his father was the only black man he knew who drives down the road blasting country music, I respected Rodney's claim that his family was "not at all a typical black family." Rodney said that he was always "the weird kid" who

would be the only black person in the gym reading Nietzsche, sitting out with the two other white boys, instead of playing basketball.

Both Professor C and I had noted—often with consternation—Rodney's silence under the gaze of Joyce, who so vociferously advocated anti-racism with her impassioned speeches. It was not until I interviewed Rodney and read his writing on his own white identity that I came to realize the complex identity questions that studying whiteness has led Rodney to consider. By the end of the interview, after we had talked about Rodney's interest in whiteness as a literary archetype, one that he plays on when he writes fantasy stories that include "undertones about racism and why darkness is always associated with evil, the psychological face behind that [notion]," he conceded that whiteness was a fascinating topic when it is approached academically rather than emotionally. After hearing Rodney comment that this interview was "actually interesting. I actually found this interesting," I have to believe that this student was not as averse to studying race in writing class as he had originally indicated. Perhaps Rodney has begun to question why he tends to identify so closely with white people.

Racial Identity Stages

Faces of resistance in both white and black students reflect the complexity of various stage models of racial identity development. Drawing on Frankenburg, Tatum, and Helms, in "Racial Identity Development: Understanding Racial Dynamics in College Classrooms and on Campus," Hardiman and Jackson outline five stages of identity that indicate a certain racial consciousness in the individual, whether black or white: naïve, a near unawareness of the existence of race; acceptance, an awareness—conscious or unconscious—of racial difference that manifests itself in beliefs of superiority/inferiority

between dominant/target groups; resistance, an acknowledgment of racial injustice that leads to an examination of one's own complicity in racist social messages; redefinition, the beginning of a new cultural identity based upon a comfortable, unconflicted identification with one's race as an equal to other races; and internalization, the adoption of a world view that all forms of oppression, not only racial, should be resisted, if not confronted proactively.

The interviews I conducted with both white and black students in these first-year writing classes confirm what Hardiman and Jackson say about traditional college-age students: "It is more likely that both White students and Black students will enter college at the (passive) acceptance stage and experience primarily the (active or passive) resistance stages only during their college years" (33). The transition from acceptance to resistance is enabled by new experiences of college life: "interactions with people, information presented in classes, stories in the media, or responses to so-called racial incidents on campus" (27). I would add that taking up issues of white privilege in the writing classroom and exploring racial attitudes through writing help students progress from an acceptance of the "way things are" (which seem so prevalent in the themes of this chapter) to a critical awareness of the role white privilege plays in perpetuating racist beliefs and behaviors. In classroom discussions and interviews I have seen what Hardiman and Jackson describe as the "difficult emotions" experienced by white students as they emerge from the acceptance stage: "These range from guilt and embarrassment at having been naïve or foolish enough to believe the racist messages they received, to anger and disgust at the people and institutions that taught them" (27). For black students who have been equally influenced by positive social messages of whiteness (as in the

case of Rodney), the rise to a critically aware stage is no less difficult: “Target group members who begin to exit from the stage of acceptance typically share a reluctant acknowledgment of their collusion with their own victimization and an emerging understanding of the harmful effects of holding on to the acceptance consciousness”(27). Joyce, far beyond the acceptance stage, has contempt for black individuals like Rodney and the four other black students of section C who remain silent during discussions of racial injustice. Her resistance to what she perceives as their “adopt[ing] the prevailing White view of the world [and] weaken[ing] their positive self-concept or positive view of Black people” leads her to be “labeled troublemaker” (32) by both white and black students in the class. Mona, on the other hand, has likely come closest to representing the internalization stage of racial identity. She speaks delicately about feeling devalued by her society due to her race, and she speaks deliberately to all class members, without alienating fellow black students. She has apparently internalized her racial identity in ways that have broadened her understanding of who she is, not only as a disenfranchised African American but as a young woman with the “ability to work effectively with Blacks at all stages of identity development in assisting them to deal with whatever issues their stage of development presents, and not judge or act punitively toward Blacks who are at earlier stages, but help them achieve a positive Black identity” (33-34).

Unlike most white students in the study, most African American students I interviewed consider themselves in embattled circumstances in predominantly white classrooms in a predominantly white university. As writing students, they are determined not to “wear the mask that grins and lies” but to use their voices, despite fears of possible

retaliation, to help sharpen fellow students' understanding of what it means to be on the other side of white privilege.

CHAPTER 5

WHITE WRITING: THINKING (AND SEEING) THROUGH PRIVILEGE

"We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand."
-- C. Day Lewis

Writing activities for the three classes were as varied as the teaching styles of the instructors themselves; however, the focus on writing to discover subject positions on issues of identity and race was consistent among the classes. Each in her own way, the professors put writing instruction at the center of the course, always with an eye towards published principles and goals that every faculty member at the university is bound to. Among those are "to permit opportunities for interdisciplinary learning"; and "to introduce students to different cultural perspectives." (See Appendix B) Instructors in our department are encouraged to "teach to their strengths" by using any approach to composition they believe best fulfills the outcomes.

Although Sections B and C were less explicitly so, the approach to composition in all of the classes could be categorized as Critical/ Cultural Studies. In a 2005 CCC's article, Richard Fulkerson delineates recent trends in the composition landscape. He describes the cultural studies movement into "comp-landia" as one in which "students read about systemic cultural injustices inflicted by dominant societal groups and dominant discourses on those with less power, and upon the empowering possibilities of rhetoric if students are educated to 'read' carefully and 'resist' the social texts that help keep some groups subordinated" (659). He further describes cultural studies writing courses as textual interpretation based (usually on some popular culture theme), inviting a reading of texts that reveals the inner workings of certain power structures that keep themselves in place by oppressing targeted groups. Although he concedes that "some

courses involve a fairly elaborate enactment of writing as an extended, recursive, complex process" (661), he nonetheless asserts that "the course aim is not 'improved writing' but 'liberation' from dominant discourse" (660).

I would argue that in the classes I observed, student writing was anything but de-emphasized in the way Fulkerson suggests, and that writing was not "judged by how sophisticated or insightful the teacher finds the interpretation of the relevant artifacts" (662), but on how convincingly the student writer intersects his or her own developing values based on life experiences with a text, albeit a teacher selected text, that he or she reads critically. (Especially in Section B, rhetorical considerations, such as audience awareness, were emphasized.) These professors acted as writing coaches in every sense ever described by strict expressivists: they held extensive individual conferences with students; they used writing groups to critique assignments at every step of the writing process; and in most cases they withheld grading products until students were ready to submit work for evaluation. These professors were fully aware that students were discovering their own evolving subject positions through thinking and writing on topics that they had been offered little exposure to in their lives until this point, and that those positions would likely not be what Fulkerson claims CCS teachers expect: "a display of valued intellectual interactions with the relevant texts"; and neither would the writing be "judged accordingly" (663).

Critics of CCS in composition, Fulkerson among them, repeatedly evoke the mantra that such approaches somehow dilute the teaching of writing and, worst of all, encourage professorial indoctrination of leftist ideas onto a captive and often politically conservative student audience. But what I observed in each of these classes was an open

exchange of ideas, in an inviting atmosphere of participation, facilitated by an instructor careful not to intimidate students who might not be predisposed to the thinking presented in a text. Some tensions among individuals and discomfort with the subject matter notwithstanding, from observing these classes and talking with the students, I certainly perceived that the teachers successfully combined writing instruction with critical literacy in such a way that students felt unthreatened by the power of the professor, yet challenged to think beyond what they were beginning to see as their limited experience of the world, and consider, often for the first time, their own personal responsibility for contributing to a better, more just society.

In the following sections I will contend that students elected to write about race and whiteness in these classes. However, I realize that in these kinds of themed courses, teachers select the reading material and the messages they want students to "get." Such courses run the risk of being criticized as teacher centered, an issue I will address specifically in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Classroom Section A

Professor A's class might have fore grounded another of Fulkerson's tenets for classifying a course as critical/cultural studies, that is, "giving students new insights into the injustices of American and transnational capitalism, politics, and complicit mass media" (661), but those insights were hardly "given" in any top down, banking concept fashion; rather, they were "offered" by introducing students to complex texts written by individuals whose voices students had not yet heard, including texts on white privilege.

Beginning the term with readings on whiteness (by hooks, McIntosh, and a student website out of California), Professor A used a familiar subject of race in America

to break students into new perspectives that would come later on in the course reading: both personal and academic texts about the plight of Afghani women in a war-torn home country; the targeting of brown-skinned United States immigrants in the wake of 9/11; the masculinist metaphors of making war on Iraq in retaliation of 9/11; the disenfranchisement of female descendants of Latin American immigrants to this country; the invisibility of Asian-American women in our society. By the end of the term, students would be more aware of global social issues, more culturally aware as thinkers and writers.

First Encounters

In the first extended writing assignment, Professor A assigned students to write about their encounters with the texts studied up until that point in the semester (largely articles on whiteness). Most of the papers were in early draft stages, to be revised in a few weeks for the portfolio. However, as I read the drafts written by white students, I could see that they fell fairly evenly along a spectrum, from resistance to ideas about whiteness, through conversion narratives about having now "seen the light" (in a limited way), to having embraced the notion of the power of white privilege after finding out what to call this elusive, often unarticulated, concept. The assignment called for students to be honest about a course theme they were now reflecting on, asking themselves what kinds of ideas they brought with them to the class in terms of "what I've heard before" and "how I feel now." The students were also to examine how they were responding to course content (in terms of a socially constructed subject position), whether they were seeing themselves as conflicted, or as changing positions due to the course content, from the read texts (using at least one quotation), or from class discussions.

Expressions of Resistance

Three papers revealed that students were clearly resistant, even though two of those three would alter their positions by the time web research projects were presented during the final exam period. The defense of meritocracy, apparently learned largely from parents who taught them that "anybody in America can achieve if only they work hard enough," topped the list of resistant sentiments that denied racism is ever the fault of white people. More to the point of blaming black people for racist attitudes of whites were whites' fears of black people, due to criminal events students had either heard about or gathered from the news media. Two white student writers said that readings on whiteness made them feel targeted as whites and were even angry at suggestions that they personally contribute to institutional racism. One writer felt personally attacked during class discussion and felt hopelessly defeated about ability for society to change attitudes of racism because the feeling is unconscious (and must remain forever that way since these feelings are unconscious?).

At best these white resistant writers feel guilty and think of white guilt as white blame, a negative outcome of studying white privilege. They are right, of course, about white guilt being unproductive, but not in the same way anti-racist pro-activists conceive of the counter-productive forces of a white guilt response to white privilege. These students have not yet internalized one of the important precepts of white consciousness they saw in Students Challenging Racism and (White) Privilege: that is, defining "Whiteness as a set of normative cultural practices, visible most clearly to those it excludes . . . . Those who are securely housed within its borders usually do not examine it" (Frankenberg qtd. in SCRAP).

Claims of Conversion

In another three papers, students revealed a fine grasp of white privilege as a corollary to racism, but one that focuses on the advantage of the dominant group instead of the disadvantage of the targeted group. Two were able to admit personally to being party to the system of white privilege, whereas the third was willing to admit only that white privilege must exist, and that his role should be what his grandfather taught him: that "I must be the change I want to make in the world." Advocacy for change was a major theme in these papers. These student writers made insightful observations about the ill effects of white privilege and the need for racial groups to communicate better with one another, to try to understand one another so as to avoid stereotyping.

One student was frank about her father's racist attitudes toward her black friends at high school. Despite her conservative upbringing, she was now thinking about raced positions she has observed, especially in terms of "people who hide their racist feelings from the public, yet continue this cycle of oppression daily." She attributed her anti-racist thinking not to class readings but to her mother, who was always open minded (and usually in conflict with her father over his racism). In fact, she credited her mother for allowing and even encouraging her current relationship with a biracial boyfriend: "I learned from my mother never to let race be a barrier to developing lasting friendships or understanding another perspective" (Julie).

Because these white students had already discussed social injustice with their families, they made easy connections with the readings on whiteness and resolved to communicate with both whites and blacks about issues of privilege and racism in their lives.

Confirmations of Receptivity

The two papers that displayed the sharpest understanding of white privilege came from students predisposed to anti-racism, one a feminist and the other habitually involved in interracial dating. Both had been accustomed to challenging social norms of their communities, but neither had been challenged about her affiliation with white dominant culture. In both instances, the term *white privilege* was new; however, these women stated that becoming aware of their whiteness through class readings and discussion had intensified their commitment to fight racism in their everyday lives.

Unique to these papers was an emphatic call to action, implemented largely through an intolerance of silence. To these writers, "facing the ugliness of society" is a fearsome task, especially when the objective is to get people "to unlearn what they are socialized to believe" (Haley). The fact that most people don't want to talk about race at all makes taking action against racism difficult: "There is no place for silence and passivity in the fight against oppression," says the feminist. "Whether the oppression is sexism, racism, heterosexism, or classism, silence does not accomplish anything except the perpetuation of a standard already in place." The other student writes, "People do not have a comprehensive understanding of racism and how white privilege relates to it." She notes her own silence in the past and resolves to be more vocal about the role of white privilege in her world. "I signed up for this class to challenge myself through writing," she adds; and challenge is indeed what she got: "I found out that my entire life has benefited at the expense of people with colored skin" (Arnita).

Interestingly, the students who came to this classroom best equipped to defend themselves as non-racist were the most humbled by learning about the concept of white

privilege. On the other hand, students who came to the course without having thought much at all about race seemed inclined to think of their newfound recognitions or conversions as a dramatic martyring of an earlier self. In any case, critical thinking promoted by Professor A was working for these students. They are questioning the traditional "givens" of racism by looking further into some larger causes of injustice: white privilege.

Web Projects

By the end of the term, when students presented their research web projects to the class, the impact of having been exposed to whiteness studies became apparent. Students chose their own topics to research and create websites for analyzing the data. In nearly all of the projects some of the larger implications of studying whiteness – understanding social constructions of dominance/othering, thinking beyond one's limited experience – were revealed, whether consciously or unconsciously by the students. Even the originally resistant voices now showed a changing attitude towards acknowledging the reality of white privilege in their lives.

The White Gaze

Projects dealing directly with white racial attitudes towards African Americans included two on interracial couples, wherein two white women who date interracially worked together to research the history of interracial dating and marriage; and one on the construction of the image of the Black welfare mother, presented by the only African American student in the class.

By investigating the history of miscegenation in this country, Arnita and Julie were able to understand social forces that created "this once-called 'taboo' of American

culture," and to conceive of race as socially constructed identity shaped by historical and cultural forces that have changed over time and will continue to change. They were surprised to find that interracial marriage was illegal in most states until the 1967 Supreme Court decision of Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia, at which time states were no longer able to keep interracial couples from marrying, and after which time the number of interracial marriages in the United States continued to climb, from 300,000 in 1970 to 1.2 million in 1990. To these women, who are personally invested in this topic, "to label a relationship as 'interracial' is in itself an act of racism" (student's website).

Having researched the origins of the welfare system in America, a system created for (and, of course, by) white people in the 1940s, Monica, the only regularly enrolled African American student in the class, reached a long set of conclusions about the resistant forces black women had to battle to be included as beneficiaries of a program designed to help poor whites out of poverty of the Great Depression. Monica found that the image of the Black Welfare Queen is a construction of whiteness, that "it is no coincidence that most people associate welfare with black women. That is how society wants you to perceive it . . . . Even though statistically more white women than black women have always been and currently are on welfare, it just wouldn't make sense to associate all of the problems of society with a white woman; after all, they are this nation's embodiment of all that is good." Monica saw that even in the literature on welfare, its history and its effects, she "didn't come across one site or source that explained poverty from the perspective of a black female . . . . Every article, study, or analysis I used to support this web site came from other people who formed opinions and

made conclusions about black women without taking the time or resources to actually look into how they felt" (student's website).

To be able to report to the class that the stereotype of the Welfare Queen was a historical construction of a white dominant point of view was apparently satisfying to Monica, who researched this subject with little prior knowledge of the development of the welfare system in America.

Racial Identity

Several students used the web project assignment to explore their racial identity by researching constructions of their ethnic affiliations. Abbey presented a reflexive account of how studying white privilege brought her in conflict with the influences of her upbringing as a white, small town Southerner. She described how racial segregation in her community, as well as family attitudes towards race and depictions of African Americans on popular television shows, shaped assumptions she brought with her to college. Acknowledging that her opinions were changing continuously, due to considerations of whiteness that she had not considered before, Abbey concluded that she had been experiencing a kind of "cognitive dissonance," characterized by holding incongruous beliefs and attitudes at the same time. She resolved to approach her college career as a more independent thinker, one who is cognizant of the effects new ideas will have on some traditional (and not so defensible) values she was raised with.

In a web project titled "The Other White Man," Matt, whose parents fled the Ceausescu régime, presented his research on historical personalities and events that white America uses to denigrate citizens of East European descent. As a son of Rumanian parents, Matt described his white American experience as different from that of whites

whose ancestors were American born. Matt cited the popularization of the historical Vlad Tepes (the impaler) as Bram Stoker's Dracula as one misunderstood source for stereotyping Rumanians as a secretive, mistrustful group. Add to that image the lingering fear of communism left over from the Red scare of the McCarthy years, combined with the history of Communist Rumania under Ceausescu, and white Americans seize on a "reason" to treat people of East European descent with prejudice. By suggesting that being stereotyped as a strange kind of white man is the same kind of experience blacks endure with racial stereotyping, Matt falls into the trap Alison Bailey describes in "Despising an Identity They Taught Me to Claim": When white people try to deny their heritage as oppressors by disassociating themselves from white identity, they engage in "[c]ultural impersonation and unreflective detours to white ethnicity (or other oppressed identities) . . . strategies [which] whites use to avoid addressing racism/white privilege" (89). In this web project, Matt has learned about constructions of whiteness, but in positing East European whites as oppressed in America, he tries to escape the responsibility of race-cognizance that white awareness calls for. He denies his white privilege altogether by calling attention to Rumanian stereotypes that have affected his life.

Other web projects by Hispanic and Asian students called attention to constructions of racial identity. Lavina investigated ways her life as a young woman of mixed Mexican and Puerto Rican ancestry has been a version of *mestiza consciousness* as discussed by Gloria Anzaldua. Lavina has learned that straddling the Puerto Rican and white boundaries in her life (such as the crossing into whiteness she mentioned in her interview) is a manifestation of a mestiza identity she is learning to examine. Similarly,

Amy, a U.S. born Vietnamese American, explored the history of her father and extended family, refugees from Vietnam, and their affiliation with a local chapter of Vietnamese Nationalists, whose mission is to help network newly arrived immigrants so they can better negotiate cross-cultural obstacles in their efforts to assimilate into American society.

Other students chose less race-related topics, but topics that nonetheless treated other forms of cultural dominance. Justin gave a critique of United States capitalism, concentrating on western domination of the free market system in a global economy. Jerry called his research on world hunger a personal social awakening to oppression. Not surprisingly, Justin and Jerry did not personalize their web projects as deeply as some of the others did. Both students had been disinclined to speak personally about identity issues since the beginning of the term. Nevertheless, their projects seemed driven by a desire to examine Western cultural views and their impact on the rest of the world.

Credit for getting students to think beyond themselves lay in the approach of Professor A for helping students examine new ideas. In this class, writing meant something to students, who were learning more than how to manipulate elaborate features of web authoring, including scanning in pictures and linking web pages to primary research data. Professor A was giving students the tools for publishing writing, showing what they learned in the public forum of the internet.

Classroom Section B

In Fulkerson's scheme, Professor B's approach to composition would best be described as rhetorical, that is, "[e]mphasiz[ing] writing effectively for different audiences, seeing writing as an extended process of multiple tasks and drafts, and

learning to control surface features and formatting" (670). For every extended writing assignment, Professor B had students write a letter to the reader about the rhetorical features of their writing, including audience awareness, main idea/purpose of the writing, stage of the draft, and choice of topic. Students also addressed what they liked most/least about the draft, as well as posed questions to their reader(s) about possible improvements. Professor B responded to student pieces as many times as they liked, evaluating drafts as "E" (early), indicating the need for rethinking and re-seeing; "M" (middle), confirming the ideas as solid but the writing in need of revision/editing; and "L" (late), meaning the draft is close to portfolio-ready, the writing needing only polishing.

The course content, however, centered on critical social issues of race, class, and gender, thus blurring the distinction between the rhetorical and critical/cultural studies approaches to composition. Although Professor B began with the topic of race, not until week 6 did the reading focus on white privilege, at which time she assigned Beverly Daniel Tatum's "Defining Racism," and Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Student responses to these readings, as well as comments made during class discussion, led me to choose certain students to interview.

First Writing

Like Professor A, Professor B had students respond in writing to every reading assignment, using the responses as discussion starters in class. In section B, written responses to two articles on race, McIntosh's "White Privilege" and Tatum's "Defining Racism," elicited an array of first reactions to institutionalized racism perpetuated by unconscious participation in white privilege.

African American students, who made up a little over half the class, were intrigued by the naming of white privilege by a white woman, and were in complete agreement that white people as a group have social and economic advantages over black people. These students were equally convinced that despite efforts of McIntosh and Tatum to educate their audience about the social realities of racist institutions, the likelihood for change in the system was slim. Katherine wrote, "I've never thought about how our social, political, and economic systems operate as White Privilege; I just knew that was how things were, and there was no changing it. I still think it can't be changed, not in our lifetime." Mona simply acknowledged that white people exercise racial privilege whether they intend to or not: "I know that all white people are not racist, but that doesn't hide or overshadow the fact that all white people have an advantage because of their race."

Most of the white students, on the other hand, were not so accepting of the notion that whites enjoy unfair advantages. Some declared, "There are privileges for other races too" (Sam), and "I don't agree that white people have 'advantages' . . . the world is changing and half the conditions she [McIntosh] lists are not true or soon to be changed" (Ivan). Marcia said that claims of mistreatment by people of color are "overreactions to their circumstances," that some people just like to complain "Woe is me" and blame others for their own misfortunes. Defensive feelings of white guilt abounded: "She [McIntosh] makes you feel guilty for being racist and hot even knowing it" (Ivan); and "This essay [Tatum's] makes me sort of angry . . . because I consider myself not racist at all" (Kim). Even the self-proclaimed anti-racist white male in the class, Mark, had trouble with these articles: "In a previous class discussion I spoke of my own personal

struggle with white privilege. I feel as if I can't win. I know I'm not personally responsible for any form of racist event towards another person, yet I am still held responsible because I was born into a certain way of life. It just irks me a little bit. I know minorities have a harder time than white people, but it is just hard for me to accept the fall for them." These resistant responses typify first reactions to learning about white privilege; these students have yet to move beyond guilt and accusation, a necessary step if white people are to recognize privilege and then ultimately take creative action against institutionalized racism.

The only white student response that indicated any type of acknowledgment of white privilege came from Jason, the local high school joint-enrollee from an admittedly racist family background: "This text [Tatum's] really made me think. There are many people who don't consider themselves racist but they really are, unless they are actively going against the societal stereotypes. It also makes me wonder about how I have benefited from racism." Jason might have been a lone voice in these first reactions to readings on white privilege, but by the time students were assigned to write extensively about an issue covered in the class so far, the several who chose the issue of white privilege had clearly changed their minds.

This, I Believe

For the "This, I Believe" writing assignment students were asked to incorporate ideas from the appropriate readings into a personal discussion of an important social issue. Four white students chose to write about their recognition of white privilege and the importance of dealing with this particular form of racism. After reading and discussing ideas of white privilege in class, they were able to express through writing an

internalization of the concept and how it has affected their lives. Kim, whom I had interviewed about her experience with segregation in Detroit, in Washington D.C., and in the rural South, reiterated in her essay the racial tensions she has always felt, including a sense of white entitlement she has only now begun to recognize: "In places where there was very little mixing of the two cultures [black and white] . . . I began to notice that I had a certain advantage in school, athletics, and work, simply because I was white." Citing McIntosh, Kim acknowledged that she too was "taught not to see" how her whiteness benefited her daily life. Similarly, Jason saw the need to expose white privilege, which "goes unnoticed by most white Americans," and which "is racism in a disguised form . . . The bad thing about white privilege is that it goes deeper than the twenty-four instances that McIntosh records; white privilege is an integral part of our society. . . . To stop the indirect racist actions of white privilege, it will take a society committed to taking a stand against the injustices committed." Students were starting to see themselves as complicit in a racist system that needed their intervention to disrupt.

These essays also revealed an awareness of the workings of institutional racism gleaned from various authors' insights on certain advantages awarded whites in areas of housing, education, health care, and employment. Particularly resonant with the student writers was a Chicago newspaper article titled "'White' Names Give Job Seekers an Edge." By reading about how blind reviewers responded to substantially more candidates who bore white-sounding names than black-sounding names, these white student writers found a concrete example of institutional racism at work. These were clearly not instances of personal prejudice but a dramatic representation of a systematically racist situation performed in an arena they could relate to.

Last Writing

As with Section A, during the final exam period, students of section B presented group projects that included both primary and secondary methods of research. Over half of the projects dealt somehow with racial themes, including an analysis of racial tensions on the local campus, a study of racial factors that go into choosing a partner to date during college, and a longitudinal look at whether race relations in general have improved over the last ten years. Apparently, studying race and whiteness during the semester inspired many students to survey and interview peers and professors about questions that had evolved in their minds while reading and writing about race over the previous weeks.

In portfolio cover letters, several white students made a point of commenting on racial awakenings evoked by the course content. Jason found that by an article by Omi and Winant had helped change his understanding of race from an essentialist to a constructivist position: "I have always thought that race was just a biological thing, but I now see it as something social and political." Kim, reflecting on course readings and how they influenced her thinking and writing, recalled the power of McIntosh's essay: "[T]he author explains several advantages white people are given because of their skin color. That essay really helped shape how I think today. Not only did it change my view of American society, but it helped persuade me to write one of my papers, 'The Hidden Obvious.' After reading this essay I was able to look differently at my life, and I noticed white privilege more frequently. Therefore, I was able to draw from my life using examples in my paper to explain how often white people are put at an advantage because of their skin color." Even Ivan, who remained quiet in class most of the time, turned out to be thinking seriously about the effects of white privilege in his life: "When I came

into this class I had the opinion that I was not one single bit racist or sexist. I was wrong, and your class helped me realize that even if you're not an active sexist or racist, you can still be one by laughing at people's jokes and other things."

Through writing on racial awareness, the students of Section B were thinking through subject positions on whiteness.

Classroom Section C

As in Section B, the instructor's approach to composition in Section C was largely rhetorical; that is, students were to take a topic of interest to them, formulate a thesis from which to argue a position, and include sufficient details (from a given text and/or from their experience) to support that position. With every writing assignment, students were required to submit a cover letter, which addressed issues of purpose and audience; structure and support; drafting and peer review. Compared to the other two sections I observed, this section was the least overtly a critical classroom. Beginning the course with a dramatic reading of The Vagina Monologues, however, set a feminist tone for critical thinking about language awareness.

Although the content of Section C was the least explicitly about race, this class drew some of the strongest reactions to the topic of white privilege as it came to the fore late in the semester. Students were invited to write about race early on, with half of the assigned topic options directed towards racial issues of The Secret Life of Bees, but the vast majority of the class chose to write instead about issues of family and religion in the book, despite the few emotionally charged class discussions inspired by Joyce, a black student who highlighted racial themes of the story. By the last few weeks of the term,

however, with white privilege as the focus of the readings (especially with regards to *Honky*), the topic of race became unavoidable.

Race Stories

After having read and discussed Dalton Conley's Honky, the coming-of-age story of a minority white child growing up on the lower East Side of Manhattan in the 1960s, the students were invited to write about their own experiences with race, including an option for a personal essay on whiteness: "If you identify yourself as white, write about how your whiteness has affected our life. This might be the first time you've thought about being white and what advantages you might have received based on skin color." Although Professor C offered several other options for students to approach the telling of their race stories (such as recounting how they might have been initiated racially as children), most of the white students chose to write about white privilege, a concept they had only recently begun to grapple with.

Several papers gave testimony to a new understanding of racism that comes with an acknowledgment of the existence of white privilege. In "A Whole Town of Honkies," Bradley told his race story in terms of community pressures that threatened his few friendships with black people. In his hometown, whiteness has always been required for social acceptance, black people being suspect ever since they were "all run out of the county" back in the 1930s when an alleged black rapist was hunted down by the white townspeople. Because the county was notorious for racism, the recent arrival of Bradley's black friend and football teammate Marlon actually drew a spot on the local news station. An interviewer wanted to know how the team members felt about having a black player represent the high school for the first time. Bradley was astounded that a

professional reporter would think that kind of question appropriate. Such events as this one, as well as experiences with a black roommate being denied entry to college parties, confirmed the reality for Bradley that membership in a given community can be based solely on the color of one's skin. After recalling these experiences through writing and considering them in light of class discussions on whiteness, Bradley began to think of white privilege as hazardous to his own freedom to choose friends.

In a similar race story, "Seeing in Color for the First Time," Karla reflected on the workings of white privilege in decisions her family made about which neighborhood to live in (and move out of), as well as where she would reside as a college student—certainly not in the dorm where she had been assigned a roommate from a part of Atlanta that would indicate high risk for minority. According to Karla's essay, she had "lived [her] whole life never having to deal with the inherited trait of being white." She also noted, "It wasn't until this semester that I realized my privileges, and instead of fighting for what's right, I actually took advantage of numerous 'white only' situations." In her cover letter for this assignment, Karla stated that she wanted her audience to be inspired to do the same kind of self-observation, to "look deeper into their past and want to change the prejudice in themselves." She also reflected in the cover letter that the hardest part of this assignment was "recalling and organizing the events from my prejudiced past. I have never had to think about myself as being racist and this assignment forced me to do just that. It was challenging for me to admit my past and write all of my feelings down on paper." Indeed, for these students, writing allowed them to become aware of the subtle ways that being white has shaped their lives.

Other white students, however, refused to grant that they had received any significant privileges in their lives due to race. Their race stories echoed familiar themes of benign racism expressed in the interviews: faith in meritocracy; belief in racial separation as natural and harmless; perception of affirmative action as reverse discrimination. Laura's essay, titled "We Are All Equal," included all of these sentiments as support for her thesis statement: "Everyone in this world is given a chance to be who they want to be, and if someone does not like you for what color you are they can take it or leave it." The simplistic notion that victims of discrimination could overcome injustice if only they would overlook racial hatred is explicitly stated in Laura's cover letter: "I would like readers to know that this world is not equal, so get over it!" Nowhere in the paper has the writer achieved the critical distance necessary for recognizing white people's role in perpetuating the injustices she claims the victims should just get used to enduring.

In similarly resistant papers, definitions of racism were equally limited to prejudiced behavior by individuals. Raleigh wrote about his notoriously racist hometown and his personal embarrassment over a Ku Klux Klan parade float that attracted media attention and confirmed for him that racism is an act of ignorance by unenlightened white people. Declaring himself "not a racist," Raleigh absolved himself of responsibility for racist public displays by "just walking away from the situation." In another race story, Brooke extolled the virtue of color blindness, suggesting at the end of the paper, "If everyone would just be 'color blind' like we were as kids, different races would not have to struggle with tensions." She used instances from her personal history to demonstrate that discrimination is a reality to people of color and that white people, like herself, who

have crossed the racial divide by forming friendships with other races risk judgment by other whites. However, the naive solution she offers (simply to cultivate color blindness) shows that she has not realistically considered the self-critical elements of dismantling white privilege that Tatum and McIntosh have presented in the class readings. Both Raleigh and Brooke want to write that they believe racism is wrong, but neither goes beyond the ignore-it-and-it-will-go-away kind of thinking.

On the whole, the personal essays on race once again revealed that white students, after having read and discussed sensitive racial concerns, are at least thinking about their positions in a white-dominated society where race is unavoidably marked. On the other hand, only two African-American students chose to write personal race papers, the other four taking up topics from *Honky* that had little to do with race, such as attitudes toward inner city life or third-person character analyses of the author and his experiences. Predictably, Joyce related her personal experiences with racism as a child and as a college student on a racially unwelcoming campus. So too did Bruce, who described his racial awakening through some disturbing episodes of racial discrimination he suffered as a high school baseball and football player. The fact that more white students, proportionally, than black students wrote their race stories after having studied white privilege is not so surprising considering the overall reticence of black students during class discussion of racial issues.

Research Projects

As was the case in Sections A and B, both black and white students of Section C were inclined to research topics on race for individual projects they presented to the class at the end of the term. Perhaps the use of primary sources, such as surveys and

interviews, combined with the use of secondary sources from the library and internet, somewhat distanced the writers from topics in such a way that they felt less personally exposed than when writing race stories of their own. Or perhaps they perceived that Professor C would be impressed by projects that included racial themes.

The highly publicized incident in the New Orleans French Quarter during New Year's, in which a black male student from this campus was killed by white bouncers, prompted much classroom discussion and inspired one black male student to research racist dress codes in a local bar, as well as one white female student to investigate the apparent segregation of local bars to determine whether the trend was due to the preferences of students or the result of manipulation by the management. Other topics included racism in Greek organizations, interracial dating, trans-racial adoption, and the awareness of Ku Klux Klan activity.

Interestingly, black investigators uncovered disconcerting evidence of racist thinking: that local clubs are likely to discriminate against black patrons; that white parents who adopt black children face acute problems in a racist society; that the white-dominated Greek system on this campus is racist, and although most students are aware that people of color feel unwelcome in these social clubs, they are unwilling to call for change in established attitudes and policies of Greek organizations. Studies conducted by white student investigators, on the other hand, found more positive attitudes toward race: that most students are fairly tolerant of interracial dating; that segregation in bars and night clubs is not only accepted but expected by most students.

As in Sections A and B, student writing in Section C revealed an interest in exploring racial awareness by both white and African American students. Early writing

assignments on race triggered student interest in racially centered research projects. Because discussion had inspired writing, students were able to think through racial identities and evidence of social inequities that characterize “how things are” in their world. Although readings and assignments were teacher sponsored, students were writing to find out what they think and why.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After observing some 135 hours of class discussion, reading scores of student papers, and conducting 20 personal interviews, I am perhaps closer to understanding how my own students navigate a first-year writing course that deals with issues of racism and whiteness. The African American students have their racial awakening stories at the ready, probably having repeated them many times before. White students, on the other hand, have usually had no such crystallizing moments to recount, that is, not until studying whiteness has brought them to the point of considering the significance of their own racial perspectives. As one of my recent African American students wrote in a paper about the "live and let live" mentality of "ordinary citizens" interviewed for the film The Laramie Project,

> While watching the movie and hearing the cliché reiterated throughout, I thought of other instances when people have adopted this philosophy. Cliques in high school and self-induced segregation based on race and religion can be considered examples when the live and let live concept was embraced. People want to immerse themselves in their own kind and steer away from what they are not acquainted with, or have been taught is wrong. Cognitive anchors are set at an early age and it is a grueling task to try and change them later in life, *especially if you are not given a reason to do so.* (emphasis mine)

The heterosexism of the small community is another kind of color blindness, wherein dominant identities go unchallenged as the social norm. Seldom are default identities examined, whether they be heterosexual, male, white, Christian, or middle class.

As in the tragedy of the Matthew Shepherd killing, what is deemed normal sexuality goes unmarked, unnoticed until an event occurs that draws attention to that dominant identity, in this case the brutal murder of a young gay man. As this perceptive student pointed out, a live-and-let-live attitude ignores the reality of power imbalances: "Being unfamiliar with [the established] unfamiliar is the seed to hate, thus making the seemingly harmless ideology of 'live and let live' [as a theme of the film] a little less benign than some may have initially thought."

Similar to the task of teasing out the irony in the attitudes of the seemingly gentle folk of Laramie, Wyoming, is that of helping Southern white college students understand the limitations of color-blind thinking in a racist society. As this study bears out, white people—Southerners in particular—are brought up to believe that calling attention to one's race is impolite, and a courteous white person does well to avoid confrontation, even at the cost of racial injustice. White students, therefore, must strain to admit they are the beneficiaries of white privilege, having been in a state of racial unconsciousness for most of their lives. When they meet theories of whiteness in the college writing classroom, often their writing becomes some expression of a resistance, or receptiveness, to white privilege. Not unlike my own white flight confession (that many of them heard me read), white student writing contains elements of discovery, of re-thinking past experiences through a new lens of white privilege.

Recognizing the power of a dominant identity is not easy for white students; and for white teachers, especially those in a racially mixed classroom, whiteness becomes an uneasy presence literally embodied in the classroom authority figure now made to critique her own power signifier. We, as white teachers, are called to share our own

white identity stories, even as we read and interact with those of our students. I found that when the teachers I observed made references to their own experiences as raced individuals, white students were more likely to open up about theirs. Professor C, the only Southern born of the three teachers I observed, even admitted at one point that she grew up in a home that "used the N-word freely." Students looked stunned at first but then began to relate instances of past and present encounters with racism. Indeed, teachers who expect a study of whiteness to be fruitful in the classroom need to be prepared for personal scrutiny. Teachers are never neutral beings in a classroom, of course, and white teachers—because they are white—are anything but transparent in a classroom that examines whiteness.

Similar to the glaring reality of being a white teacher teaching whiteness, is the challenge of being a white researcher of whiteness. As I predicted, entering other teachers' classrooms and interviewing their students on sensitive topics of race was unnerving, especially at first; but as my study progressed, I sensed a growing awareness in myself that I should question some of *my* assumptions about what kind of thinking students are doing in our writing classes that center on social issues. Rather than assuming that students, especially white students, resist discussing race in a racially mixed classroom simply because it *is* mixed, I gradually realized that many white students were struggling with the self-examination that whiteness studies calls for, in much the same way that I had been since I had been studying whiteness myself. As a researcher and a teacher, I was forming connections with my subjects—human connections— that would alter the way I would see my relationship with my own writing students in the future. I realized that while many of our white students have been richly

involved with African American life, many more were encountering diversity for the first time as newly arrived college students. As a teacher, I needed to be mindful that when it comes to racial awareness, the generation gap between my students and me is not so wide that their experiences and backgrounds do not recall mine. In some ways their racially insulated experience is no different from mine during civil rights days; nor is the racism of their upbringing much different from mine. I also became aware that much of what students might reveal in an interview with a disinterested party, and a white Southern one at that, could well not make a showing in class discussion or in writing assignments. As much as I would like for student writing to be an encounter with the self, and perhaps even a means of coming to terms with one's own social responsibility, I now expect some measure of resistance as white students start to examine power structures that implicate white people as part of the problem.

What to Expect from Students

The messages of whiteness studies being difficult to grasp and even more difficult to accept, teachers should anticipate some measure of resistance from young white people, most of whom, if not all, have never before heard of this new field of inquiry. The students I interviewed, who represented a spectrum of reactions to notions of white privilege, indicated to me that their high school education included only a smattering of minority studies (usually in the form of literary sampling). They might have come to this particular ENGL 1102 college writing classroom having covered the Civil Rights Movement in history class or any combination of sexism/ racism/ classism/agism in the previous writing course (ENGL 1101); but never had they been introduced to whiteness studies per se. When discussions of institutional racism arise, these students, especially

the Southerners, are accustomed to feeling unjustifiably blamed for racial discrimination in the academy and the workplace, which they sometimes equate to being blamed for slavery. When they come into a whiteness studies writing classroom, they are a long way from the ideal stage of white identity, that of having redefined their whiteness and internalized a "new" white identity. According to Hardiman and Jackson,

> Indicators of internalization for Whites include:
>
> A clear sense of their own self-interests as members of the White group in ending racism; acting on that self-interest to confront racial oppression proactively.
>
> An understanding of the uniqueness of their cultural backgrounds; not seeing others as "culturally different" and Whites as "normal," but rather understanding how White European American culture is different as well. (34)

Teachers should expect only a very few white students to achieve this level of white consciousness. Most white students will grapple with suggestions that they are personally invested in the power that comes with being white, including being complicit in an institutionally racist system. Some will deny that white privilege exists. Still others will declare that minorities are the privileged few, the ones that erode opportunities of white people. Considering the conservative values so many of these students learned from their families and churches, teachers should not be surprised that many students are reluctant to question a longstanding approval of "the way things are," as well as to relinquish a traditional belief in an American meritocracy. Because the recognition of white privilege requires people to do just that, teachers should not anticipate great numbers of conversions during a semester's work. Rather, they should look for the small moments when white students' spoken and written words about racial awareness reveal

that they are positioning themselves as being conscious of white privilege; when white students no longer see race studies as being concerned only with the negative side of being a minority of color, but concerned also with the positive side of being in the white majority.

Throughout my discussion of these three classes, I have strongly implied that students were *invited*, not *assigned*, to write on issues of race. On writing assignments designed around racial themes, all three professors gave options that would not require a racial focus. Nevertheless, students frequently chose to write about race and whiteness, especially for their research projects. I have also implied that students, through writing, were able to locate subject positions on racial issues that they believe are important in their lives. If these classes offer any indication of what to expect, teachers should look for a great deal of interest in writing about race, as well as a great deal of commentary on ways in which students' views have changed in light of readings and class discussion. What we teachers perceive as "progress" in student thinking is, of course, problematic. We will never know how much of the perceived effect on student thinking, or even the degree of student interest in a subject, is genuine on the part of the student and how much is teacher accommodation. We can be sure, however, that the power imbalance between teacher and student affects student "performance." In Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Class, Lad Tobin gives a great deal of attention to the complexities of the teacher-student relationship, arguing that no writing classroom is truly student-centered: "Most of us are uncomfortable admitting that we *are* the center of a 'decentered' classroom, that we hold so much power, that we are largely responsible for successes and, even worse, for failure" (20; emphasis original). And even in classes that

privilege personal writing, "the teacher [. . .] actually holds more authority because the stakes are higher" (20). Therefore, in suggesting that students freely chose to become interested in racial awareness and wrote honestly about its effects on their thinking, I could seem a bit naïve. The professors did, after all, choose the course content and, as such, directed the agenda of the class. However, as Tobin points out, authority can be negotiated, especially when it comes to student texts: "The synthesis or solution [to the problem of teacher authority] is to move beyond either/or thinking – either we have the authority or they do; either we own the text or they do; either the meaning is in the writer or in the reader—toward a more dialectical definition" (20). The professors I observed worked to create spaces for writing communities to achieve such a dialectical version of negotiated authority. Small group peer review activities, as well as whole-group oral presentations, kept students engaged in an active exchange of ideas. Only in this kind of classroom environment can teachers expect students to make serious progress towards significant racial awareness through writing.

As in any classroom, regardless of whether it carries a politically charged theme, much of what students say during open discussion is only a small part of what they are really thinking. And what they really think is virtually impossible to know. Since Naturalistic research design acknowledges multiple realities, no researcher is ever a completely disinterested party. Even when students trust a researcher entirely, that person would have trouble discerning any one "truth" about how students react or relate to the topic of white privilege in the writing classroom.

Especially when reading is teacher-directed, as it was in these classrooms, professors implicitly set up certain concepts students are expected to "get." In the case of a

whiteness studies theme, students are expected to understand and respond honestly to notions of white privilege. Do we get an honest rendering of student perspectives? Or are students simply teacher-pleasing creatures? To some extent, they are. They know that writing is never free of the teacher's gaze, so aren't students always writing for the teacher?

The issue of honesty in all student writing has intrigued me for some time, the case of reflective writing being the most salient. For many years reflective writing has been accepted pedagogy, and for good reason. According to Peggy O'Neill, "The literature on metacognitive activities—whether in the form of teacher-student conferences as advocated by Richard Beach, writers' memos as explained by Jeff Sommers, or portfolio cover letters as articulated by Roberta Camp and Denise Levine—agrees that such exercises help students become better writers" (61). When we build reflection into our pedagogy, we intend to encourage students to articulate what they are learning and to show that they are conscious of their writing decisions. Most importantly, we want to reinforce for students the value of reflective writing as a means of maintaining control over their own texts.

However, the lessons of reflection are compromised when we ask students to write reflectively in an undeniably evaluative situation. In the case of portfolio cover letters or other such end-of-term reflections, when teacher assessment of student writing comes into play, the reflective exercise becomes complicated by a conflict of rhetorical stances. The teacher becomes the audience who judges student progress based upon a piece that cannot help but be written with that audience in mind. Given the contradictory purposes of reflection and evaluation, we should not wonder that we seldom get the

"whole" truth when, at grade time, we ask students to let us know about what they learned in the class. The task—for teacher and student—is navigating the paradox. But despite the uncertainties of handling the reflective/judicial paradox and the students' tendency to overstep the bounds of tasteful praise, the final reflective piece still offers students and teachers a chance to gather in the good and the bad of a semester's work. The point is that as evaluators, we must consider the rhetorical situation the student is in while under the gaze of the "judge" and estimate ways to discount the end-of-term flattery factor accordingly.

I believe that as writing teachers who take on critical identity issues in the classroom, we need to be aware that we are placing students in a similar predicament: students might want to explore new vistas and seek their place in the world of ideas, but at the same time, they are interested in succeeding in the course, a goal that could at best sharpen their skills at classroom game playing, and at worst, compromise their integrity as autonomous individuals.

Whether we use cultural studies themes of identity, or content themes of sports, popular film, rock music, advertising, and the like, we are teaching students to think critically about ideas that do not simply exist in the world but are powerful influences over developing an identity as an educated person. In every instance, we are up against the problem of teacher accommodation.

Natalie Goldberg, author of Writing Down the Bones, a popular text for first-year writing courses, including mine, eschews teacher-pleasing writing and believes, as many of us do, that writing has to be judgment-free to be genuine. When I use her text in ENGL 1101, I usually ask students to write a final reflection on how concepts of her

book have affected their practices of writing, as well as attitudes towards writing. Despite claims that they have learned to trust their voices, to take risks with their writing, to write to know, to express, and communicate emotion—I suspect students at the end of term still don't believe they are writing for any other audience than me, and why should they? I am grading their writing. Surely we realize that students are not being fully honest when they evaluate the course or outline what they've learned at the end of term when grades are so undeniably on their minds. The desire to succeed in a course will doubtless play some role in all student writing, whether or not students are asked to write about politically charged subjects.

What to Do as Teachers

To be sure, many students, white and black, often will feel inhibited when addressing sensitive racial issues openly in a mixed-race classroom; and just as many will perhaps feel forced to confront issues of whiteness that they would have preferred never to encounter. However, if one of the conclusions of Hardiman and Jackson is right, that "*It should be our goal as educators to facilitate development in students, not stifle it or hide from it*" (34; emphasis original), then we should do as the three professors I observed did. We should guide student reading and writing towards subjects that, with the encouragement of the entire writing community, will help students recognize their changing identities as they prepare to take their place in a world that is rife with identity politics, some of which will surely affect their futures in profound ways.

How to go about teaching racism and whiteness involves ways of "facilitat[ing] development in students, not stifl[ing] it or hid[ing] from it." Creating the spaces for dialogue within the writing community is the greatest challenge, and I can best

recommend methods for encouraging those dialogues by reflecting upon some strategies I have tried since conducting this study. In my current ENGL1102 course, which includes themes of whiteness, consumerism, and war (driven by essays on whiteness by McIntosh and Wise, as well as Dalton Conley's memoir Honky; a book on the sociological effects of the fast food industry on American culture, Eric Schlosser's Fast Food Nation; and Tim O'Brien's novel about the soldier's Vietnam experience, The Things They Carried), I decided to begin the semester with a look at white privilege, thinking that I could best establish a supportive classroom environment by tackling the most socially sensitive topic first.

To start students talking, I used short in-class written responses to the readings, as well as small group meetings with informal oral reports on various sections of Honky. But by far the most effective strategy for getting all students involved in productive conversations about white privilege was a webCT online discussion of a few prompts I developed as a means of starting off the brainstorming stage for the next writing assignment. I discovered that when left to speak for themselves, without my physical presence (even though they were aware that I was lurking while they were discussing), students were able to guide themselves into a negotiated understanding of white privilege. When David suggested in his post that black people have as many privileges as whites (see Appendix C), that "it [privilege] is all based on the persons [sic] perspective," the resulting thread of responses, both supportive and dissenting, opened up an exchange that caused him to rethink his position later on during class discussion. The responders that disagreed with him, who were both black and white students, took this online opportunity to express their understanding of institutional racism, including, "I have

African American friends who have never had the same privileges as I have had. Much of the discrimination is subtle and never discussed." My hope is that discussions as honest and open as this one will set the tone for a semester's worth of safe space for the students and me to learn together about the cultural implications of American consumerism, as well as the psychological and sociological concerns of being a nation at war.

Teachers, of course, will have to decide individually when and how to introduce whiteness studies in their writing classes. Whether they use whiteness as a focused theme of the course (as Professor A did), or work in whiteness as part of a study of race in general (as Professor B did), or allow the theme of whiteness to emerge from literary readings (as Professor C did); the key is to expose students, especially white students, to an often unacknowledged force of racism, one in which developing racial consciousness is crucial to beginning a critique of racist institutions that exert power over individuals in all parts of our society.

Recently, the academic colleges at my university were charged with developing a list of desired attributes that the university should expect all graduates to exhibit. The list is still a work in progress, but prominent in drafts are references to social responsibility, tolerance of various ethnicities, appreciation for diversity, and understanding of the importance of community. Each of these items implies a study of the self, in all its political complexities. If our job is to produce citizens of a critical democracy, then studying white privilege is vital for promoting antiracist thinking among college students.

Racism, after all, did not end with the O.J. Simpson trial or with the anti-discrimination lawsuit against white Texaco executives who referred to African American employees as "black jelly beans that stick to the bottom of the bowl." Soon

after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, news commentator Tim Russert was among the first to note racism in disaster relief efforts of the federal government. On the Today Show of September 2, 2005, Russert said that the "San Andreas fault line of our society is race" and that the hurricane event "ripped the scab off complacency about racial injustice in our country." Within hours of this broadcast, coverage of the treatment of African American hurricane victims made the topic of racism in America a headline once again. Then in December 2005, the California execution of former gang leader Stanley "Tookie" Williams drew more questions about the race factor in determining who lives and dies in our justice system. As long as racism is in our world, educators should have the courage to confront issues of institutionalized racism, including a stark look at how failure to recognize white privilege works to perpetuate racial injustices.

As a writing teacher, I will continue to develop and teach writing courses that deal with themes other than racism, as well as courses that are not at all theme based. One of my purposes in selecting courses that dealt with racism and privilege was to investigate student responses to teacher-selected subjects that students may or may not believe are applicable to their lives in any academic, political, or personal sense. Some of the resistance I encountered could be linked to students' feelings that the uncomfortable subject of racism had been thrust upon them by teachers whose political persuasions were opposite from their own. But whenever I do decide to pursue topics of social justice, I cannot imagine teaching even a brief unit on race without including the topic of white privilege. My research reveals that white students are struggling with the challenges of rethinking their identities and personal roles of responsibility in bringing about social change. Writing about white privilege has made writing meaningful for many of them,

especially for those who have become accustomed to thinking of writing class as little more than a review of basic skills. The first-year writing classroom is an excellent place to engage in conversations about such important issues as white privilege and institutionalized racism.

An interesting future research project might be to examine the kinds of residual effects learning and writing about white privilege in a first-year course might have on students as they continue through the core curriculum and into their majors. In fact, I would like to follow up my study by interviewing some of the same twenty students (and perhaps others from the three classes) within the next two years to discover whether learning about white privilege has served them in other coursework, as well as to find out what kind of impact being conscious of whiteness has had on their lives in general. Assuming the transferability of this study, that "observers of other contexts [will be able] to make tentative judgments about applicability of certain observations for their contexts and to form 'working hypotheses' to guide empirical inquiry in those contexts" (Erlandson 33), other researchers in other parts of the country might be interested in conducting a similar study with writing students from a particular region, perhaps with reference to a minority other than African Americans. Racism against Hispanics, for instance, is apparently on the rise at my Southern university. Several times I have noted white students speaking disparagingly, and without fear of censure, about "the Mexicans" whom they perceive as a threat not only to economic stability but also to personal safety. The stereotyping goes on from there. Perhaps because the Hispanic student population is low at this university, polite silences do not apply. Such is not likely the case, however, at an institution located in the Southwest, where a study of racial attitudes and concepts

of white privilege might be distributed differently along the spectrum from resistance to acceptance.

My hope is that including a critique of whiteness in what has become a standard fare of identity issues explored in the writing classroom, that students of all ethnic persuasions will be inclined to break the silences that have limited writing about race to "blaming the Other." Bringing the notion of white resistance into classroom discussion and writing should promote antiracist thinking that will benefit white (and black) students as they begin a college career on a diverse campus and a lifetime of participation in a critical democracy.

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Appendix A

Before asking the interview questions, I will talk with the student about the neighborhood where he or she grew up, and about the racial make up of the schools attended and whether they were public or private. I will not necessarily ask the questions in the order that they appear here.

1. Did you know many people of color when you were growing up? Were any of these close friends of your family?

2. When you speak of African Americans, what term do you most frequently use? African American, Black, or what?

3. What kinds of racial inequities have you noticed since you've been at the university?

4. Did you notice any racial inequalities when you were growing up?

5. Why do you think these inequalities exist?

6. Do you remember when you first discovered that different races existed?

7. Do you remember a time when you felt negatively about black people?

8. Do you ever feel blamed for injustices done to African Americans?

9. Are you ever conscious of being white?

10. Do you notice how white people are portrayed in the media?

11. What kinds of reading did you do as a child?

12. What do you think about some of the readings you have done in this class on race?

13. Do you feel you can speak freely in this class? Do you say what is really on your mind?

14. Do you think that your white classmates' writing is any more or less written from a racial standpoint than your African Americans'?

15. What about in your own writing?

Appendix B

Printable Version

ENGL 1102 - Composition II Course Requirements

Course Description:
A composition course that develops writing skills beyond the levels of proficiency required by ENGL 1101, that emphasizes interpretation and evaluation, and that incorporates a variety of more advanced research methods. Prerequisite: A minimum grade of "C" in ENGL 1101 or equivalent.

Course Goals and Standards:
ENGL 1102 builds on ENGL 1101 continuing the focus on learning the processes writers employ and on using writing for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating through extensive reading and writing practice. In ENGL 1102, students will learn to:

understand how the rhetorical situation shapes reading and writing
write in several genres*
generate texts through a series of tasks including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources
integrate their own ideas with those of others
use a variety of formats and technologies to address a range of audiences as appropriate
follow appropriate conventions of usage, vocabulary, format, and documentation
demonstrate competent use of syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling

* For the purposes of this document, "genre" is used to refer to a distinctive category of discourse of any type with or without literary aspirations.

Rationale:
As a core course, ENGL 1102 contributes to the principles and framework specified by the Board of Regents. The following principles are particularly applicable to ENGL 1102:

To develop written and oral communication skills and critical thinking within the broader academic context
To permit opportunities for interdisciplinary learning
To integrate international components that increase global awareness and introduce students to different cultural perspectives
To include an informed use of information technology.
To be cohesive and provide entry into a larger number of specialized fields.

Types of Writing:
ENGL 1102 assignments will include practice in composing a variety of texts more complex than those written for ENGL 1101. Assignments will include formal and informal types of writing totaling 20 -30 pages, or 6000-8000 words. Students will compose 3-6 final, distinct writing projects, at least 3 of which will have been taken through multiple drafts and 2 of which integrate sources.

Many types of writing activities, informal and formal, may contribute to the total pages, including tasks associated with process and/or revision, summary, reading response/reaction papers, analysis, synthesis, argumentation/persuasion, annotated bibliography, proposals, editorials, interpretation/evaluation, self-assessment/letter to readers, and on-line genres.

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Compiled Messages

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 1:08 PM

Subject: D Brown **Author:** Brown, DAVID

3. If you identify yourself as white, have you noted any instances of privilege that have come your way since you began reading about whiteness in this class?

I identify myself as white. I do not believe in the so called "White privilege", but instead in a universal privilege that every race, sex, or culture contains. Because the majority of the country we live in is white, there will always be the minority who is upset and the majority trying to be politically correct. But privilege does not belong to only whites, but any class or order. A few examples are; (Men but not women unlisting for the draft. Historically Black Colleges. Black Entertainment Television. Black Stars. College/ Institutional Requirements for females/minorites. Anyone can find privileges belonging to any class or order. It is all just based on the persons perspective.

Reply | Forward

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 1:20 PM

Subject: Re:D Brown **Author:** Shumpert, Steven

You brought up a good point about the reason for the privilege is being the majority and that all groups have some kind of privileges.

Reply | Forward

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 1:21 PM

Subject: Re:D Brown **Author:** Quasebarth, Rachel

I couldn't agree more!

Reply | Forward

Topic: Honky
Date: February 1, 2006 1:26 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown
Author: Trahan, Mary

You brought up some ideas that I haven't thought about! It is very true about BET television! What would happen if we had White Entertainment Television? I doubt it would be as accepted. . . Or what about Black History Month? Definitely something to think about! But what are some examples of when you HAVE seen privilege, if you have any?

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky
Date: February 1, 2006 1:31 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown
Author: Green, Tamu

I agree that every group can find privilege somewhere, but you contradict yourself when you say that you don't believe in white privilege. I think that you mabe taking a closed-minded approach to concept of "white privilege."

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky
Date: February 1, 2006 1:32 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown
Author: Groover, Stephen

I also know of a lady (i wont give names) who is a widow of a man that stood for civil rights. One day she was on a plane going back to the great state of Georgia and a flight attendant came by and asked her what she would like to drink and the lady replied, "I dont associate with servants." I am sad to say that this lady has passed from this world, but the irony of it all. Her husband stood up for blacks, and was killed for his beliefs, and all the while his wife learned nothing from it all.

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky
Date: February 2, 2006 10:41 AM
Subject: Re:D Brown
Author: Dessommes, Nancy

I've not heard about incident on a plane. Where did you get the info?

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 1:33 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown **Author:** Davis, Jeremy

There are things that are taken way out of proportion. I wish things were just resolved. Usually if there is an arguement between a black person and a white person somewhere along the line race comes into the picture. I don't understand why people don't let it go.

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 4:11 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown **Author:** Rose, Kenrick

I see where you are coming from, but i think the class lesson was not focusing on if we believe in white privilege, but to aknowledge it. It may be hard to fully understand until you have walked a mile in another race's shoes.

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 4:24 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown **Author:** West, Holly

great points

Reply Forward

Topic: Honky **Date:** February 1, 2006 8:25 PM
Subject: Re:D Brown **Author:** Franks, Suzanne

Hi,

I understand where you are coming from, but overall I disagree with this position. Ours is a society dominated by the white and middle class. I am a part of this, but I can see how it is very difficult for minorities. I have African American friends who have never had the same privileges as I have had. Much of the discrimination is subtle and never discussed.

Reply Forward