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An Epiphany of Privilege: A Critical Examination of Nigrescence, White Privilege, and Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

This essay explores White privilege in relationship to Black identity development and the education of youth through juxtaposition of the author's White privilege and his bi-racial son's nonprivilege. Through analysis of the exhaustive, yet mandatory, search to embody the stance of a "Critical Democrat" (Warren & Hytten, 2004) the author explores his son's life through critical pedagogy and the expanded theory of nigrescence (NT-E) providing a critical analysis of society's oppressive structure for Black males. Further inquiry demonstrates the dominant narrative's detrimental impact on "successful" Black youth, and how the counternarrative can unveil the unequal power dynamics in America. Only then will the education of marginalized youth become a liberating experience.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy; Nigrescence; White privilege; Critical democrat

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Waking up, I heard my son hurriedly putting on his clothes. This was quite the anomaly, so I asked him why he was up so early. He excitedly said he was getting ready to meet his kindergarten teacher (orientation was scheduled for that evening). Since finding out who his teacher was, he has been ecstatic about school. His journey begins tomorrow and I am torn between exhilaration and despair. His excitement makes me smile, but the school's indoctrination process drops a heavy burden on me. Amplifying this burden is his beautiful bi-racial identity (my wife is African American), and the negative perception of Black males in schools (hooks, 2004; King, 1991; Monroe, 2005; Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Woodson, 1933).

I believe my son will be successful in school, but the complexity of his success is a steep learning curve for a person of privilege, like me (i.e., White, male, middle-class). He can read short passages and identify numbers beyond 100. Current educators often comment on his readiness for kindergarten. This is important because he has the potential and class privilege to be successful; however, the added racial component gives me a glimpse into the pressure of being on the margins (Dubois, 1903).

This article has two strands running simultaneously: my son's bi-racial experiences, and my exposure to privilege. Defining my privilege as a White, middle-class male has been a challenging process, but concurrently liberating—challenging because it is difficult to realize your success is not simply hard work, liberating because I learned to acknowledge my privilege and its relation to systemic power structures. My past thoughts regarding “those” people categorized as “behind” adds to my despair.

Claiming to be progressive and growing up experiencing the beauty of different races, sexualities, genders, and economic classes, I was overtaken by the dominant narrative, or stock stories (Bell, 2010) describing my successes as a derivative of hard work, motivation, and intelligence. Stock stories are summarized as the normalized ideas and discussions heard every day leading to their presence as mythically “just the way it is”; therefore, reproducing racism and White privilege (Bell, 2010). The dominant narrative infects society and its ubiquitous nature makes it hard to detect (McIntosh, 1990); when privilege is everywhere, it becomes difficult to see it anywhere. Privilege becomes natural and from my privileged standpoint I thought, “Why can't they do what I am doing? They just need to work harder.” My previous mindset forces me to problematize Whiteness in connection to nigrescence and structural inequalities. Assisting in the deconstruction of Whiteness is a counternarrative, or concealed stories, which reveals the point of view of marginalized voices, as well as historical context of our society from a non-White perspective (Bell, 2010).

Deconstructing privilege exposes economic advantages afforded to White males throughout U.S. history, from slavery and the Homestead Act, to the World War II G.I. Bill, and many others. This sets the foundation for understanding financial privileges often forgotten, but impacting social hierarchies. My privilege is apparent when I stumble, but my actions are overlooked and not an implication of my character, but an anomaly to dismiss. “Run-ins” with the law do not make me a criminal; too much drinking does not make me hyper-sexualized; when speaking about race my voice is respected instead of challenged. My unearned privileges are not easily exposed, but must be analyzed for

educators to see the insidious ways privilege works to educate youth (McIntosh, 1990). Furthermore, my privilege cannot remain the only focus of this article, but juxtaposed with nigrance and social structures to decenter Whiteness.

Review of Literature

As a social creation, race is used by humans to oppress, uplift, silence, and normalize the patterns of society that no longer seem created, but hegemonically inform our structural and individual relations. Although the categories of race are an illusion, its perceived reality insidiously weaves itself into the fabric of our institutions and has significant material ramifications throughout the United States and the world (Bell, 2010). This reality leads to an exploration of White privilege, as Lazarre (1996) outlines, “With institutionalization comes a kind of obliviousness among those not being hurt” (p. 12).

An acknowledgement that race is socially constructed, but also heavily impacts society, leads me to explore White privilege, which McIntosh (1990) defines as:

an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (p. 73)

Literature on Whiteness and its major component, White privilege, is extensive, and two characteristics remain prevalent. First, Whiteness gives social privilege to those identified as “White,” yielding

unearned power over the “Other” (McIntosh, 1988). Second, Whiteness’s hegemonic power is ubiquitous, and therefore invisible to White people (Warren, 2001). This autobiography focuses on White privilege, and most literature on this topic focuses on teacher education or graduate level courses with the goal of exposing privilege to majority White students. Although this is important, this autoethnography builds upon Warren and Hytten’s (2004) “Critical Democrat” within Whiteness studies, and shows the lived experience of this position. Furthermore, critiques on Whiteness show how this autoethnography both resists and falls within the problematic analysis of this topic. My positionality as a White male with a bi-racial son provides a unique juxtaposition of Whiteness with nigrance, and I feel “newly accountable” to expose my participation in racism (McIntosh, 1988).

The Critical Democrat stems from the common positions students move through while problematizing Whiteness. Using Conquergood’s (1985) model of ethical pitfalls, and building from their earlier study (Hytten & Warren, 2003), Warren and Hytten (2004) explain four fluid pitfall positions and a liminal space identified as Critical Democrat. The four positions include: Torpefied, or having guilt and desiring simple answers; Missionary, or desiring progress and impatient with talk; Intellectualizer, or believing they understand but lacking self-reflexivity; Cynic, or pessimist believing the problem is unfixable. These positions can reinforce problematic stances regarding White privilege, whereas,

... a Critical Democrat must balance their own relationship with or investment in whiteness—that is, they must not obsess about their own actions, ending up with a worldview that begins and ends with them—

while always keeping their own implication in the perpetuation of racism in play. The Critical Democrat must do both, balancing competing messages and finding spaces in the uncomfortable middle of opposing forces. (Warren & Hytten, 2004, p. 330)

A Critical Democrat is not static and accepts a stance of listening and not-knowing. This paper demonstrates movement and intersections among these positions; however, the choice of occupying this liminal space demonstrates further privilege. Mayo (2004) confirms, “Privilege ... gives whites a way to not know that does not even fully recognize the extent to which they do not know that race matters ...” (p. 309).

I find the Critical Democrat most useful and appropriate for my own understanding of White privilege. Historically, this topic has been studied only in the context of others’ experience; whereas, this is an autoethnography. Furthermore, other studies call for White people to critically examine personal experiences regarding Whiteness’s impact on how we live our lives (Warren, 2012; Yancy, 2012).

Whiteness and White privilege have been critiqued in much-needed ways. Most critiques highlight the spurious attempts to problematize Whiteness while continuing to center the discourse on White identity; lacking analysis on relations among privileged and nonprivileged identities, as well as power structures upholding inequities (Blum, 2008; Mayo, 2004). Further critique questions “exceptionality,” or White people desiring to be viewed as “not the average white person” (Thompson, 2003), and thus continuing to center White identity. This essay addresses these critiques

by decentering Whiteness through juxtaposition with nigrescence, and interrupting Whiteness through critical pedagogy and structural analysis.

Expanded Nigrescence Theory

Black identity development has gone through many stages of understanding, starting with Cross’s (1971) original nigrescence theory (NT-O), moving to Cross’s (1991) revised nigrescence theory (NT-R), and currently research is situated within Cross and Vandiver’s (2001) expanded nigrescence theory (NT-E). The expanded theory includes four identity stages that African Americans move through as they develop their identity, which contain specific identities included within each phase: The Pre-encounter stage includes identities of “Assimilation,” “Miseducation,” and “Self-hatred”; the Encounter stage is a life event or events and does not include any identities; the Immersion-Emersion stage incorporates identities of “Intense Black Involvement” and “Anti-White”; the Internalization stage includes identities of “Black Nationalist,” “Biculturalist,” and “Multiculturalist.” It must be acknowledged that this theory is often challenged (Cross, Grant, & Ventuneac, 2012; De Walt, 2009 & 2013) because of the complexity of Black identity that is difficult to place inside a static model; however, nigrescence is a useful tool for framing explorations of Black identity development.

The nigrescence model starts identity development in the Pre-encounter stage with a neutral or negative association with being Black until a jarring event or events occur (Encounter stage) where the person must reevaluate his or her social group membership regarding race. “If the cognitive and emotional discomfort produced by this

reexamination is sufficiently intense individuals move to the Immersion-Emersion stage” (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagan-Smith, 2002, p. 72). Immersion-Emersion is categorized as diving deeply into a person’s Black identity, which can lead to romanticizing the Black experience, as well as a strong rejection of everything White. This stage is often characterized as deeply exploring African American history and literature, as well as other aspects of African lineage. The final stage is Internalization, characterized by a person feeling positively about the importance of race and becoming active in highlighting this importance; therefore, moving past romanticizing and accepting the complexity of Black identity. Examples of this stage are becoming actively involved in promoting Black Nationalism, analyzing identity as more than simply race, and/or attempting to bridge the divide among a variety of racial groups.

Traditionally, nigrescence is studied in the context of college students (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007), but Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) highlight Black identity development as beginning in the infant stages. Therefore, the expanded model of nigrescence can be applied to my son, and this paper focuses on the Pre-encounter stage due to this being the first stage and the young age of my son. Furthermore, Pre-encounter’s difference from the other stages is its neutral or negative associations with Black identity, and moving through each stage involves a deeper commitment, and higher positive feeling related to Black identity. Movement from Pre-encounter to Encounter to Immersion-Emersion and finally Internalization is viewed as positive for Black identity development. Specifically, this paper shows methods of disrupting the Pre-encounter identities to decrease the negative associations in this stage.

Furthermore, this paper is situated within this stage because as a five-year-old boy, my son has not yet had the jarring events occur (Encounter stage) leading him to the Immersion-Emersion stage. As a parent, it is important to support his development through these stages, but problematize the Pre-encounter stage through critical pedagogy, and highlight my epiphanies of privilege as we navigate these experiences as two related, yet different racialized beings.

Assimilation is the first identity within the Pre-encounter stage, and it is acceptance of a mainstream identity, and this attitude minimizes or sees the importance of race as neutral (Worrell & Watson, 2008). Miseducation is the identity being disrupted in this paper and is defined as “acceptance of negative stereotypes about Blacks” (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007, p. 189). These stereotypes can be formed through music, television, newspapers, magazines, school curriculums, etc. The third, Self-hatred, is an internalization of negative stereotypes, and being Black is undesirable (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007). These attitudes reflect a low or negative feeling about being Black (Worrell & Watson, 2008). This paper’s goal is to impact educators by combining nigrescence with the work of Dubois (1903), Fanon (1967), hooks (2004), and Woodson (1933) to demonstrate society’s problematic education of youth.

Connecting Whiteness and nigrescence to social structures, critical pedagogy is used to focus on power dynamics and how to disrupt society’s problematic education of youth. This philosophy exposes schools and society as places of oppression and liberation (McLaren, 2003), as well as emphasizes contradictions within the dominant and counternarrative (Duncan-

Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Highlighting the counternarrative, or concealed stories, is one component of critical pedagogy, and I view this philosophy as imperative to disrupting the negative implications of nigrance's Pre-encounter identities. Other essential characteristics of critical pedagogy are critical dialogue, problem posing, and locating a critical consciousness that mandates action upon the world to address social injustice (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy problematizes school as a place of oppression through a focus on the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970). Following this concept, teachers convey knowledge, while students are empty receptacles to be filled. Critical pedagogy requires schools to promote the problem-posing concept of education, creating an atmosphere of students asking questions and pursuing their curiosities connected to injustices in their lives (Freire, 1998). The teacher and students work together in a reciprocal relationship where both are teachers and learners (Freire, 1970). Problem posing allows teachers to facilitate learning through students' interests and experiences, and uncovering the counternarrative as it applies to students. Freire's (1970) work outlines how the banking concept is often oppressive, while problem posing can be liberating. Using classroom dialogue, power structures are critically examined and exposed as socially constructed, and therefore changeable. As critical consciousness develops, students see themselves as active participants in changing the world. Critical pedagogy's empowering stance questions whom the power structure benefits and detriments, as well as what needs to be done to change the power structure.

At this point Whiteness, nigrance,

and critical pedagogy coalesce. Whiteness affords me unearned privileges including the dominant narrative, and critical pedagogy disrupts dominant narratives, which disrupts negative Pre-encounter identities of Assimilation, Miseducation, and Self-hatred. Combining Whiteness, critical pedagogy, and the Pre-Encounter stage demonstrates how society's education of youth can be both oppressive and liberating, and here, hope surfaces.

Autoethnographic Reflections

The following pages outline my experiences with my son, connecting the detrimental effects of White privilege on his Black identity development. Furthermore, as a bi-racial boy with a White father and African American mother, his experiences differ from non-bi-racial children. A review of this topic highlights the complexities of bi-racial identity development, but consistent is the reality that many bi-racial children from White and African American parents choose to identify as African American or Black (Baxley, 2008; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Lazzare, 1996; Qian, 2004; Wade Morrison & Bordere, 2001). It is understood that the use of Black identity in connection with my son should be problematized, but as an autoethnography this is the most accurate way of expressing how my wife and I approach his identity. As Lazzare (1996) eloquently outlines in her personal reflection on her bi-racial sons' identities,

Black and Jewish, raised in a nonreligious home, coming of age as young Black men at a time when their very lives are in danger from several directions simply because they are young Black men, they had learned, by the time they were ten or twelve, that most Jews see them as

“different” — at best not quite Jewish or not Jewish at all, but always as Black. By the time they were in their teens, they had come to know themselves as Black men, an identification that seemed not only right to me but sane. (p. 20)

Additionally, the counternarratives employed in these experiences continue to frame our approach “in a social constructivist paradigm, which argues that reality is constructed by individuals” (Aldous Bergerson, 2003). This ensures that we do not slip into the simplistic focus on the celebration of Blackness. The examples highlighted show the education of youth through an insidious narrative regarding race and how this journey of unlearning, listening, and not-knowing has led to a series of epiphanies for me.

Entering my son’s school, I quickly realized how the dominant narrative can impact him. An example of the dominant narrative is a student-made, tile portrait of Thomas Jefferson hanging in the halls. Tiles are combined to form the famous quote, “All men are created equal.” Although one of Jefferson’s great statements, the reality that he owned slaves exposes a contradiction that must be examined. By noncritically analyzing this quote, schools reinforce the dominant narrative that all men are equal; an injustice is done to all students, but most detrimentally to marginalized students. Teaching this dominant narrative in a society that structurally discriminates against people of color, women, and the poor reinforces the ideology that marginalized populations are “behind” because they do not work as hard as those who are “ahead.” Therefore, the dominant narrative of meritocracy is reinforced. This is a poignant example of how schools problematically educate youth. While

reading this quote, an epiphany of privilege consumed me; without the experiences of having a bi-racial son, I would never think this quote was detrimental. Trying to situate myself as a Critical Democrat, I brainstormed ways to interrupt this message.

Employing a counternarrative to humanize the curriculum (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; King, 1991), I asked why Jefferson made this statement when he owned slaves; leading to inquiry about all men *not* being treated equal in a society claiming equality. Humanizing the curriculum further required discussions about this quote in the context of contemporary social issues: Are all men (what about women) treated equal today? If not, why do we claim equality? This becomes humanizing to all students, but most significantly marginalized students. Students begin to see the complexities of society and that people categorized as behind are not lazy, unmotivated, and dumb; and concurrently, people categorized as ahead are not working harder, smarter, and more motivated. Humanizing education creates spaces to challenge the dominant narrative; highlighting the need for further social progress, which requires students to be active creators of a new reality (Freire, 1970). This is the first example of how my son can be successful in school (accept the dominant narrative) while simultaneously being oppressed (failure to acknowledge the counternarrative) (Fordham, 1988). My first trip to my son’s school, where I observed Jefferson’s quote, reminded me of the many spaces that can be detrimental to the education of youth.

The previous example made me reflect on other experiences I recorded throughout the early years of my son’s life. During this time another epiphany of privilege occurred while leaving a birthday party. As I loaded

four kids into the car, my nephew said, “You know how Paul Jr. is brown? I think that makes him stronger somehow.” I was taken aback. My nephew, a second grader, just highlighted society’s stereotype about Black males. How did the dominant narrative dictate that my son, because of his “brownness,” was stronger? Obviously media can be blamed; the fact that many athletes are African American certainly informs our thoughts about Black males. Hip-hop videos also inform stereotypes of Black males through a performance of hyper-masculinity (hooks, 2004). These thoughts inform the next example.

Attempting to navigate the liminal space of a Critical Democrat, I took informed action to increase our collection of books with brown and Black protagonists. During my childhood I never thought about this issue; never noticing my relation to the main characters. The epiphany of privilege regarding my absence of racial awareness as a child was eye-opening because having a bi-racial child mandates a focus on race.

Entering a book fair, I searched for books with a brown or Black main character, and I was saddened at the minimal offerings. I thought, “It would be nice to have a larger selection, but I’ll get what I can.” As I stacked the few books in my arms, a stark reality struck me: Jackie Robinson, Tiki and Ronde Barber, and other sports stars were the protagonists. The books pertaining to African Americans were focused on sports, or strength—in my nephew’s words, “... just stronger somehow.”

Society’s effect in shaping the mind of youth does not stop with my nephew, or only privileged students. While I was picking my son up from daycare, he told me with a disdainful look on his face that Anthony (an African boy) was “*really*

Black.” I was speechless! My wife and I constantly exclaim the beauty of his skin color; we often commented on how he is a “beautiful brown man.” I was sure he knew to be proud of being brown. I miscalculated the dominant narrative’s power regarding race and the construction of Black as inferior to brown. Reflecting on the dominant narrative’s construction of being Black, Fanon (1967) explains every idea corresponded to a negative self-image; from speech patterns and slavery, to intellectual inferiority. The dominant narrative left my son placing negative judgment on the constructed “deficits” of darker skin.

My son was only four, with parents who knew the importance of over-emphasizing the beauty of being Black (Neblett et al., 2009), and the dominant narrative prevailed. I attacked with the counternarrative. I had been telling my son that he was a beautiful brown man, and I realized he saw Anthony as being *Black*. The counternarrative provided ammunition and I said, “He is a beautiful Black man just like you. And he is really Black like Mama, and we know she is beautiful.” He continued to fight me, “No, he’s *really* Black, more than Mama.” Trying to position myself as a Critical Democrat, I explained that society sees them both as Black men, and they come from kings and queens, and “thinkers.” Looking confused, he made it apparent that this “color thing” was complex to him. That night we read, *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children* (Pinkney 2000), so he would understand the complex beauty of Black people.

This story highlights the dominant narrative’s impact on Black identity through the miseducation identity within nigrescence’s Pre-encounter stage. Coupling this with the school’s re-inscription of the dominant narrative through the Jefferson

quote is a reminder of how all forms of miseducation (i.e., media, school, etc.) work to construct definitions of who is good and bad, beautiful or ugly, etc. These experiences demonstrate the power of White privilege producing miseducation through the dominant narrative; therefore, these ideas are not simply theory, but daily difficulties for people of color (Dubois, 1903). This exposes my epiphany of privilege once again; my exhausting anxiety from grappling with these thoughts disappears if I continued to live in my White reality.

The dominant narrative is now evident everywhere in my life. Cote and Allahar (1996) implicate mass media in youth miseducation by explaining its “vested interest in creating and maintaining a certain consciousness among the young” (p. 148). They, as well as Robinson (2010), explain this production of an adolescent mentality perpetuating the current power structure tacitly recognizing marginalized populations as inferior. Moving beyond this, hooks (2004) outlines the impact miseducation has on young Black males:

[M]ass media in patriarchal culture has already prepared [Black males] to seek themselves in the streets, to find their manhood in the streets, by the time they are six years old. Propaganda works best when the male mind is young and not yet schooled in the art of critical thinking. (p. 27)

Therefore, the dominant narrative is exacerbated when comments seem to uplift (i.e., athletic, strong, entertaining, etc.), but continue to reduce Black characteristics to physical qualities; ignoring the intellect or being of a person. Focusing on the physicality of Black males (i.e., their

muscles, penis, dance moves, etc.) perpetuates the dominant narrative through objectification (Fanon, 1967).

The exposure to my privilege and my position as a Critical Democrat led to an analysis of this phenomenon in preparation for the first day of kindergarten. White privilege once again is revealed to me when I realized that my parents had less anxiety than I do because of the privilege afforded to White parents to not worry about the subjugation of their child. As Robinson (2010), an African American woman described, “I wanted nothing more than to be educated, to be whole. Instead I received a first rate education on how to be fractured” (p. 149). I react viscerally to this quote as I think about my son’s experience with the dominant narrative in the early years of his life.

My concern stems from my epiphany of privilege about school’s reaction to resistant Black youth (hooks, 2004; Robinson, 2010). I want my son to know and feel confident in speaking the counternarrative. My shock came when my mother-in-law explained this would not have happened prior to 1960s, because a child of color challenging the status quo could be hurt or killed. As Woodson (1919) explains the hesitation to educate freed slaves during the Antebellum period, “[I]t was impossible to cultivate the minds of Negroes without arousing overmuch self-assertion” (p. 2). Therefore, anxiety increases when teaching my son the counternarrative because he may be perceived as a “troublemaker” (Robinson, 2010).

Understanding that nigrescence’s Pre-Encounter identities are reinforced in school and have a negative impact on Black youth (Fanon, 1967; hooks, 2004; Irvine-Jordan, 1991; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010,

Woodson, 1933), I became vigilant as kindergarten began. Trying to maintain my stance as a Critical Democrat, I raced upstairs to talk with him while reading hooks (2004), *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. My reaction when hooks (2004) stated, “Time and time again when telling their life stories, black males describe being punished in schools for daring to think and question” (p. 36), and quoting Madhubuti, “No one actually told men, ‘you should hate yourself.’ However, the images, symbols, products, creations, promotions, and authorities of white America all very subtly and often quite openly taught me white supremacy, taught me to hate myself” (p. 36). Contemporary experiences by Black youth tell the same story, but in an implicit way (Robinson, 2010). Living White privilege and informed by nigrescence’s Pre-encounter identities in relation to systems of power was again exhausting.

With hooks (2004) on my mind I ran upstairs, my son happily playing in the bathtub. I sit down and explain my need to talk; he says (as he usually does), “Let’s talk about important stuff.” A smile forms as I tell him to not be scared to politely tell the teacher he thinks she is wrong. I continue my rant about always being a thinker, pointing to my temple like the Pooh Bear cartoon. I explain that as a Black man he needs to remember he comes from thinkers. I ask, “Who do you know that are thinkers?” He knows this routine, “Bob Marley, Carter G. Woodson, Barack Obama...” He pauses, and I say, “Mary—.” He replies, “Bethune.”

As Critical Democrats, my wife and I try to balance how diligently we push our message of questioning. Knowing this, I stop myself from re-telling the counternarrative about Native Americans being the best horse riders, not the Cowboys. As our conversation closes, he

says, “Like I can tell her Natives are the best horse riders?” Ecstatic that he understands the importance of a counternarrative (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), I reply, “Yes, that is exactly what I want you to do.”

Another epiphany of privilege occurred a few days before school began. Reading his favorite book about George Washington Carver, he asked how “those people [slave owners]” could be George’s parents; they were White and George was Black. Exhausted, I did not want to have a critical conversation about slavery. Knowing the effects of the dominant narrative regarding slavery (Neblett et al., 2009), I proceeded to explain slavery. My goal was introducing the counternarrative of African American resistance to slavery to empower my son. After this explanation, he pumped his fists in the air and said, “I would have fought for freedom, too.” Looking at the page where Carver is looking in a school window at a class full of White students, he stated, “I’d tell them students, you need to let me in there because I’m smart, too.”

These stories can, and should, be problematized as “patting myself on the back” or centering myself as “not the average White person,” but that is not my intent. The goal is to highlight my epiphanies of privilege when realizing that this is the everyday battle many Black parents face when raising their children. The counternarrative stories highlighted above work to disrupt the negative implications of nigrescence’s Pre-encounter identities, and my wife and I believe this approach will benefit the identity development of our son.

My final epiphany of privilege demonstrates marginalized populations’ deep understanding of oppression. Finding out that our second child would be a boy, I was ecstatic. However, my wife instantly

began to cry. I was puzzled. She said, “The world is not fair to Black boys.” I realized, as a White male this would never cross my mind; privilege blinded me to the reality of people of color.

The complexity of her grief is multilayered; she loves her unborn son, knows we can provide him a head start to be successful, and that Black women also have it hard, but understands the abuse Black men endure. The relationship between society and Black males shows a *desire* for Black maleness, but lacks *love* (hooks, 2004). Society implies that he must become more White to be “successful,” but continually reminds him that he will never be White enough (Fanon, 1967). Within this dehumanizing environment I find hope in an alternative framework for my son’s success: a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) challenging miseducation and the dominant narrative. Using Jefferson’s quote, “All men are created equal,” exemplifies how this meritocratic message ensures limited arousal of self-assertion in contemporary times. Hope materializes through a humanizing, problem-posing education using the counternarrative (Freire, 1970). Fanon’s (1967) example of this humanizing process comes after repeatedly being told that Black is inferior:

It was here that I made my most remarkable discovery. Properly speaking, this discovery was a rediscovery. I rummaged through all the antiquity of the black man. What I found there took away my breath ... Segou, Djenne, cities of more than a hundred thousand people; accounts of learned blacks (doctors of theology who went to Mecca to interpret the Koran). All of that, exhumed from the past, spread with its insides out, made it possible for

me to find a valid historic place. The white man was wrong, I was not a primitive, not even a half-man, I belonged to a race that had already been working in gold and silver two thousand years ago.” (p. 130)

Highlighting the counternarrative at home and taking action to do the same in his school, as well as constantly working to maintain my Critical Democrat position, provides hope for an alternative way of educating youth. Hope in a Critical Democratic stance that listens from a place of not-knowing, and embracing the struggle to take action will lead to greater possibilities for my son and me.

Conclusion

Bringing together in dialogue the theories of nigrescence, White privilege, and critical pedagogy highlights the importance of the counternarrative. The literature exploring nigrescence and critical pedagogy has increased my awareness of my unearned and continually reoccurring privileges. These theories inform my approach as a parent and I continue to struggle in my attempts to find myself in the liminal space of Critical Democrat. Each month a new epiphany of privilege exposes itself, and I am learning to take comfort in the lessons learned in these moments. Navigating the pitfalls and liminal position of a Critical Democrat mandates my exposure of power structures to my son, while instilling pride in his bi-racial identity. This task is complex and exhausting, yet mandatory. Each epiphany of privilege has been difficult, but needed. I hope to continue to listen and embrace not-knowing. It is painful, yet healthy. This article addresses the added stress of being on the margins in comparison to my White, middle-class, male experiences, exposing epiphanies of

privilege. The challenge for me is attempting to find the liminal space while critically analyzing my experiences with privilege, challenging miseducation, and acknowledging my contributions to an oppressive society. A step towards freedom is on the other side of this challenge.

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