

## **White Innocence and Mexican Americans as Perpetrators in the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

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### **Abstract**

This essay discusses white innocence as a mechanism that may contribute to perceptions of Mexican Americans as perpetrators. These perceptions are crucial to ways teachers and administrators respond to student actions as the initial steps in the school-to-prison pipeline. Specifically, this work reviews the rhetoric of white innocence in a high school U.S. History curriculum map and outlines how this rhetoric constructs Mexican Americans, and other people of color, as threats or perpetrators to the innocence of whiteness. The consequence of perceiving Mexican Americans as perpetrators may mediate teacher and administrator reactions to student behaviors and ultimately to initiation of the school-to-prison pipeline.

### **Introduction**

Mexican Americans are often immersed in the school-to-prison pipeline. Evidence indicates Latina/o incarceration rates beyond those of their white peers (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011) exacerbated by evidence that race/ethnicity mediates sentencing (Bontrager, Bales, & Chiricos, 2005), and supported by a penal system that, as Wacquant (2002) describes, is steeped in “frenetic development of a private industry of imprisonment” (p. 20, author’s italics) operating for profit and reliant upon the commodification of crime, criminality, and criminals. These indices investigate phenomena occurring in the formal justice system’s contribution to the school-to-prison pipeline. However, the school-to-prison pipeline is a conduit that includes the schooling system where Latinas/os are disproportionately represented in school discipline (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). While critical, the above cited studies focus on disciplinary actions resulting from student behavior. Germane to this investigation, Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) write, “[a]nother crucial area of research needs to test mechanisms and develop theory regarding the conscious and unconscious processes that result in differential treatment of some racial and ethnic groups” (p. 64). This work attempts to do precisely this by examining how curriculum maps may participate in criminalization projects and ultimately the school-to-prison pipeline.

Below, I describe white innocence and person of color perpetration as foundational to my analysis and critical whiteness studies as a theoretical frame. Then, given that school discipline occurs at the front end of the school-to-prison pipeline, and that teachers are largely responsible for disciplinary consequences (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), I review literature focusing on teacher views of school discipline. After sharing my methods, I describe and analyze data from a high school U.S. History curriculum map to exemplify how white innocence and person of color perpetration are constructed, then discuss its implications vis-à-vis the school-to-prison pipeline for Mexican Americans.

### **White Innocence and Person of Color Perpetration**

Examination of court opinions reveals a discourse that avoids racial accountability. Ross (1990a) indicts the *rhetoric of innocence* in promoting unconscious racism because according to this rhetoric, a person who has not committed a racist act is innocent. However, Ross suggests that individual innocence moves beyond repudiation of one’s racism and considers ill-gotten privileges. He argues that this rhetoric, “avoids the argument that white people generally have benefited from the oppression of people of color, that white people have been advantaged by this oppression in a myriad of obvious and less obvious ways” (Ross, 1990a, p. 301).

Extremely important is that juxtaposed to white innocence is person of color perpetration. Ross

explains that any discursive move of white innocence situates the person of color as “the defiled taker” (p. 310), a perpetrator of threat to white innocence. Ross (1990b) also describes how in the rhetoric of innocence advances this notion. To do so, he analyzes rhetorical themes of white innocence and black abstraction in historical and contemporary legal opinions. Defining white innocence as “the insistence on the innocence or absence of responsibility of the contemporary white person” (p. 3), he attempts to demonstrate how the Courts’ opinions positioned white absolution since, “the horrific circumstances of the blacks were, after all, not the white person’s fault” (p. 6). Ross describes buttressing of this absolution through corresponding utilization of black abstraction. Conceptualized as, “the rhetorical depiction of the black person” (p. 6), black abstraction works to “obscure the humanness of black persons” (p. 6). Framing blacks as lesser humans allows for denial of empathy in social situations. In concert, white innocence and black abstraction work to “obscure the degradation of blacks and to absolve the contemporary whites of responsibility for any images of degradation that might have passed through the filter of black abstraction” (pp. 6-7).

These works are involved in the project of bringing transparency to a common-sense, naturalized milieu that cultivates unequal and inequitable social outcomes. The present study seeks to further this project. In the following, I outline critical whiteness studies as a theoretical frame within which the discourse of white innocence and Latina/o perpetration in curriculum can be understood.

## Critical Whiteness Studies

During the 1990s, examinations of whiteness appeared within the “intellectual genealogy of critical race theory” (Yosso, 2005, p. 71). This intellectual genealogy includes roots in critical legal studies (CLS) and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). With its CLS roots, critical race theory (CRT) shared a rejection of “the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be or could be ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii). With radical feminism, CRT shares a call for critical examination of the “relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as ... habits that make up ... types of domination” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5). To “ensure that a focus on whiteness doesn’t become one more excuse to recenter dominant voices” (Apple, 1998, p. xi), Leonardo (2009) reminds that in whiteness studies, “whiteness becomes the center of critique and transformation” (p. 91). Vital to examination is understanding the difference between whiteness and white people. Making this distinction, Leonardo (2002) clarifies, “‘Whiteness’ is a racial discourse, whereas the category ‘white people’ represents a socially constructed identity” (p. 31).

Driven by ideologies that proclaim whiteness as “nothing but oppressive and false” (Roediger, 1991, p. 13), some CWS scholars posit that only through eradication can unearned privilege and oppression of whiteness be terminated. Ignatiev and Garvey (1996) refer to whites who engage in abolition of whiteness as *race traitors* who reject white privilege participation. In this abolitionist frame, the existence of racism continues as long as there are races. Thus, to achieve the goal of transforming inequitable systems, the extinction of race, including the white race as whiteness, must precede the end of racism since “whiteness is the center of the ‘race problem’” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 92).

In the following, I discuss research attempts to address the discipline gap between students of color and their white peers by focusing on teacher perceptions. While the school-to-prison pipeline certainly includes elements found beyond teachers’ views of school discipline, this literature is relevant to the current examination.

## Teachers’ Views of School Discipline

Overrepresentation of students of color in exclusionary discipline was chronicled in the 1970s (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975). Still to date, studies have not offered any definitive explanation for racial/ethnic gaps in school discipline. Likewise, investigations attempting to explain discipline gaps by assessing behavioral differences have shown no supporting evidence (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, et al., 2002). Germane to this investigation is scant literature regarding the role of schooling agents’ (teachers, administrators) beliefs in assignment of discipline.

Johnson, Whittington, and Oswald (1994) surveyed over 3,500 teachers in Australia for their views regarding

school discipline. Their findings indicated that teachers' beliefs reflected social and ideological considerations about the charge of school discipline and how discipline issues should be approached. Significantly, the authors found that 1) most teachers' lacked engaged assessment of socio-ideological constructions of varying school disciplinary approaches, 2) did not consider school discipline as actions that attended to divergent racial group interests, and 3) most teachers believed discipline issues were the product of problem students.

The finding that teachers perceive students as problems duplicated Guttman's (1982) quantitative study. Guttman found that Israeli elementary school teachers cited students' "need for attention ... psychological problems" and "parents' level of education" (p. 18) as among reasons for student disciplinary issues. Conversely, these teachers discounted "ethnic discrimination" (p. 18) as contributors to behavioral problems. Importantly, Guttman noted that teachers directed "the responsibility for behavioral problems onto the child, and away from themselves" (p. 18).

Missing from investigations was the role of race in teachers' perceptions. However, Gregory and Mosely (2004) addressed this gap. Their qualitative study examined theoretical foundations upon which teachers explained disciplinary issues. This inquiry, conducted in a large, urban high school, "sought to examine the connection between race and teachers' views about students in the discipline system" (p. 18). In this work, most teachers disregarded race in their explanations of disciplinary issues. These researchers described that, "teachers did not raise issues of racial profiling, unconscious racism, or differential treatment as forces that contribute to discipline problems" (p. 25). The authors held that "teachers' beliefs about race can ... impact their participation in the definition and creation of discipline moments," (p. 18), and concluded that their study "set the groundwork for future studies to examine the causal relationship between the type of implicit theory about race and discipline held by a teacher" (p. 28).

The current essay builds on this groundwork by positing a theoretical basis for examination of the discipline gap and postulates how racialization may be informed. That is, white innocence is not constructed neutrally. It is rhetoric that contributes to misrecognition of perceptions that "helps smooth over the apparent inconsistency between" (Ross, 1990b, p. 20) longstanding discipline inequities and school disciplinary approaches and applications by teachers and administrators that are assumed to be unbiased. In the pages that follow, I present examples of the construction of white innocence and Mexican American (and other people of color) perpetration found in a U.S. History curriculum map (hereafter, the curriculum map). Before doing so, I share methods used to analyze the curriculum map.

## Methods

I requested the curriculum map for high school United States History from a school district in the southwest. Written for the 2011-2012 school year, the curriculum map was a district-generated document used as a resource guide for teacher unit and lesson planning. It was a 15-page document formatted with topic titles at the top and several sections below (Figure 1). Employing document analysis, I performed a detailed examination of this curriculum map. During the course of the inquiry, I engaged in continuous data-theory evaluation. I utilized 'Hutchins' (1977) work to direct my document analysis due to its capacity to discern the of documents. Hutchins suggests, "(t)he ability to say what a text is about must be regarded as one facet of our ability to understand a text" (p. 17). Central to document analysis is text comprehension; specifically, the relationship of extant macro-level social structures to narrower micro-level structures as transmitted in a document. As Hutchins comments, "we may envisage the already established macro-structure as providing the context for the interpretation of a particular episode" (p. 27). Thus, document analysis was performed to discern the curriculum map's connection as a micro-level artifact to larger macro-level descriptions of the rhetoric of innocence as described by Ross (1990a, 1990b). In multiple readings of the curriculum map, I conducted line-by-line analyses of content discourse for conceptual connections to descriptions of the rhetoric of innocence. A priori categories I established to analyze the curriculum included the concepts of white innocence and person of color abstraction as described by Ross (1990a, 1990b), as well as omission. Thus, in three separate readings I wrote memos on printed copies of the curriculum that aligned the text of the curriculum map to these categories in establishing a rhetoric of innocence.

Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Curriculum Map*

| Topic -<br>State Standard(s) |                          | Common Core Standards |        |                   |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------------------|
| Themes/<br>Big Ideas         | Essential<br>Question(s) | Knowledge             | Skills | Key<br>Vocabulary |
|                              |                          |                       |        |                   |
| Assessment Tools             |                          | Resource Materials    |        |                   |
|                              |                          |                       |        |                   |

Important to the continuous data-theory evaluation employed in this work is van Dijk's (1992) suggestion that in examination of text and talk there exists "a double strategy of positive self-presentation, on the one hand, and ... subtle ... forms of negative other-presentation, on the other hand. Indeed ... out group derogation seldom takes place without expressions of ... social face-keeping" (p. 89). Thus, throughout the data collection process, I concentrated on two evaluations: 1) how the discursive content of the curriculum at hand (a micro-social analysis) related to analyses of white innocence and person of color abstraction in legal rhetoric described above (a more macro-social analysis), and 2) how discourse utilized in the curriculum engaged in the double "strategy of positive self-presentation" and social face-keeping" for whites through innocence, and "subtle ... negative other-presentation" of people of color.

## White Innocence and Person of Color Abstraction

While white innocence and person of color abstraction work concurrently and in collaboration to veil racial subordination and benefits of white innocence (Gotanda, 2004), I highlight each separately in this section to bring clarity to how the present curriculum engages in such constructions.

**White innocence.** The curriculum map succeeds at posting white innocence through “misrecognition and deniability” (Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. E5) of white culpability by employing a grammatical and discursive device referred to as *mitigating agency* (Duranti, 2004). Mediation (mitigation) of agency is achieved through “grammatical and discourse strategies, including omission (i.e. no mention of agent at all) and alternative grammatical framings (e.g., variation in the expressed connection between an event and the entity that might have caused it)” (p. 460). The curriculum map applies both strategies.

**Mitigation through grammatical framing.** White innocence is achieved via grammatical framing and mitigation of responsibility of historical activities through the use of *accounts* and *techniques of neutralization* described originally by Scott and Lyman (1968), and Sykes and Matza (1957/2003), respectively. An account is “a statement made by a social actor to explain ... untoward behavior – whether that behavior is his own or that of others” (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46). When such acts occur, they “may obligate the actor to give an account to correct impressions ... or to save face” (Buttny, 1985, p. 58). In the present curriculum, saving face (white innocence) is obtained through *justification* by way of techniques of neutralization (McGraw, 1990) of historical proceedings. Justification techniques of neutralization invoked in the curriculum map include, 1) denial of injury (to people) (Buttny, 1985), and 2) denial of victim (as objects), acknowledgment that actions occurred but were acceptable since “there are objects that have a neutral or ambiguous identity with respect to ownership” (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 51).

Neutralizing effects are produced through invocation of white innocence and carried out by grammatical framing through use of modally weak nouns, verbs, and verb phrases where whites are involved. This is possible because, as Bybee (1985) describes, utilization of modally weak nouns and verbs serves the purpose of mitigating agency. The curriculum map illustrates this in the employment of the modally weak verb *contact* and the noun *relations* in passages that mitigate injury to Native Americans:

- When Worlds Collide: Early American Civilizations and European Contact.
- Identify the reciprocal impact from early European contact with indigenous peoples.
- How did contact with new cultures change both the old and new world?
- Early relations with Native Americans ...

These statements offer modally weak grammar that contributes to frames that neutralize injurious experiences of Native Americans occasioned by the arrival and actions of white Europeans. Use of modally weak grammar suggests a reciprocal initiation and interest in social matters. The implication of interest at once palliates injury while indicting, at least in part, Native Americans for their own injurious experiences with white Europeans.

When a modally stronger verb is used, mitigation of responsibility can still be maintained. The curriculum map exemplifies this move in the following:

- Describe the reasons for colonization of America (e.g., religious freedom, desire for land, economic opportunities, and a new life).

Despite utilization of a grammatically stronger modality by way of admission of colonization, justification of colonization is created by offering leads that frame colonization in terms of only the victimless activities of white Europeans. The move, through omission, neutralizes ill-treatment of Native Americans in two domains: 1) the denial of injury as a result of violence perpetrated upon Native American people in the name of reasons offered, and 2) denial of victims specifically in regard to the lead, “desire for land,” wherein no acknowledgment is made with respect to any previous ownership of land.

Ross (1990b) writes that “[w]hite innocence is the insistence on the ... absence of responsibility of the contemporary white person” (p. 3). Modally weak grammar in passages of the curriculum map cited here serves



this resolve by neutralizing narratives of the subjugation of Indigenous populations, diminishing responsibility, and preserving the innocence of whites. Any relative privilege of modern-day whites to that of Indigenous peoples as a legacy of white oppression is obscured through use of historical accounts that utilize dual techniques of neutralization: denial of injury and denial of victim.

In all, the above examples support van Dijk's (1992) notion of the *double strategy* of white social face-keeping and negative other presentation. These reciprocating effects occur as the result of inherent framing that is produced in the rhetoric of white innocence (Ross, 1990a). Mitigating agency by way of *accounts* and *techniques of neutralization* serves to frame whites as innocent through social face-keeping with concurrent negative framing of Native Americans as threats to white innocence.

**Omission.** The discourse strategy of omission can be used simultaneously to, 1) perform the hegemonic act of normalizing whites while rejecting person of color voice as a matter of investigation (San Juan, 1991), and 2) augment mitigation of agency that is fundamental to white innocence (Duranti, 2004). Thus, omission of perspectives of people of color valorizes "the self-evident truths" (San Juan, 1991, p. 467) of whiteness as "the existing social order" (Sleeter, 2002, p. 18) without agent performance, while omissions of explicit identification of agents of activities contribute to misrecognition of agent culpability (Dick & Wirtz, 2011). The curriculum map here practices such omissions.

Similar to Sleeter's (2002) findings of exclusion in social studies curriculum, there is omission of people of color in this curriculum map. By counting the number of people appearing in the curriculum map, the group central to study can be determined. Results reveal a total of 49 names, 45 (92%) are white people, and 4 (8%) are Black people. No person from any other racial/ethnic group is represented in the curriculum map. These omissions contribute to hegemonic acts of normalizing whites as Americans while simultaneously dismissing narratives of people of color. Such marginalization contributes to white innocence as a technique of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957/2003) whereby once rendered as absent, construction of the denial of victim (Scott & Lyman, 1968) of people of color can be achieved with seemingly more ingenuousness. Ultimately, omissions aid in production of abstractions that work to "obscure the humanness" (Ross, 1990b, p. 6) of people of color. This uncompassionate condition allows for denial of empathy with minimal resistance to oppressive activity and absolved responsibility.

Abstractions through omissions also serve to mitigate agency for activities. The following moves in the curriculum map exemplify this:

- Explain the motives for the colonization of America.
- Describe the impact of expansion on people in the west.
- Assess how the following social developments influenced American society ... a. Civil Rights issues

Juxtaposed to omission of people of color that constructs denial of victim and empathy, the above omissions buttress the structure of a denial of perpetrator. They do so by omitting explicit identification of agents of activities (colonization, expansion, issues) and, in turn, culpability for objectionable consequences suffered by those upon whom actions were conducted (Ross, 1990b). These omissions assist in assembling frames that yield a "misrecognition and deniability" (Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. E5) of white responsibility. In this denial, the innocence of whiteness as agent of unbecoming activity is maintained.

**Person of Color abstraction.** The curriculum map regularly represents people of color abstractly by using notions of time and geography as proxies. The map's first topic, *When Worlds Collide: Early American Civilizations and European Contact*, references Native Americans by using a notion of time, *early*. Similarly, later in the curriculum, Native Americans are abstracted by reference to time through use of *prehistoric*. Two instances where this takes place are found in the following passages:

- Describe prehistoric cultures of the North American continent.
- How did pre-historic cultures of the North American continent differ from the Europeans whom they encountered?

These abstractions, representing Native Americans as historical moments, serve the purpose of cloaking natural (native) claims to land. This rhetorical move supports white innocence by substantiating “white privilege through a system of property rights in land in which the ‘race’ of the Native Americans rendered their first possession rights invisible and justified conquest” (Harris, 1993, p. 1721).

Geography is likewise invoked to abstract Native Americans and Mexican ethnics:

- How did the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo affect the people of the American Southwest?
- Evaluate the outcome of westward expansion on people in the west.

Abstractions such as these position people as locations. The abstractions condition denials of victims (Scott & Lyman, 1968) since, according to this curriculum map, specific groups of people are not involved.

Each of the above abstractions serves the purpose of dehumanization for reduction of consideration (Ross, 1990b) while simultaneously maintaining the presentation of a desirable white social identity (Douglas & McGarty, 2001). In the case of the former passages above, Native Americans are represented as historical moments, while they and Mexican ethnics are signified as regional objects in the latter. This dehumanization along with maintenance of an exculpated white social identity is part of the project of white innocence. Ross (1990b) explains clearly this project vis-à-vis Blacks:

[t]he power of black abstraction is that it obscures the humanness of black persons. We can more easily think of black persons as not fully human so long as we do not see them in a familiar social context ... As soon as we begin to imagine the actual circumstances of black persons ... the pain and humiliation ... the rhetoric ... starts to unravel. The great power of ... abstraction is its power to blunt the possible empathetic response (p. 6).

Thus, abstraction of people of color can contribute to social absolution of oppressions by whites and to a nullification of empathy for people of color (Ross, 1990a).

## Innocence and Perpetration

The curriculum map exemplifies how, by way of mitigation of agency (Duranti, 2004), the project of white innocence can be engaged. Strategic use of omissions and “alternative grammatical framings” (p. 460) are interspersed throughout the curriculum and perform work that scaffolds white innocence. Grammatical frames that mitigate agency are shaped by accounts (Scott & Lyman, 1968) and techniques of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957/2003). Together with abstractions and omissions that dehumanize people of color and reject their narratives while normalizing whites as American and maintaining a desirable white social identity, white innocence is sustained through “misrecognition and deniability” (Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. E5) of white culpability.

White innocence in the curriculum map, the result of interplay of the mechanisms of alternative grammatical framings, is conversely paralleled. Ross (1990a) conceptualizes this parallel as follows, “The idea of the innocent victim always conjures the one who takes away her innocence and who thereby himself becomes ... the ‘defiler’ ... the invocation of innocence is also the invocation of sin, guilt, and defilement” (p. 309-310). Discursive moves that (re)construct white innocence, therefore, simultaneously (re)constructs the person of color as an antagonist to this innocence. The person of color becomes a perpetrator through understanding of the perpetrator or defiler as a “natural opposite” (p. 310) to white innocence. This frame is a portal through which issues in the schooling end of the school-to-prison pipeline may be addressed.

## Mexican Americans as Perpetrators and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Several studies find evidence of the influence of race in sentencing (Bontrager et al., 2005; Johnson, 2006; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2001). In their examination of *penology of racial innocence*, Murakawa and Beckett (2010) write, “racial power is ... a systemic institutional phenomenon that reproduces racial inequality and the *presumption of black and brown criminality*” (my emphasis, p. 701). Thus, at the back end of the school-to-

prison pipeline, Mexican American youth may become victims of presumptions that work against them. I posit that contributing to the construction of frames to which Murakawa and Beckett refer is the rhetoric of white innocence and its simultaneous opposite, Mexican American perpetration.

Whenever rhetoric of white innocence is presented, whether in school settings or larger social discourse, groundwork is reinforced upon which presumptions of Mexican Americans, and other people of color, as the “defiled taker” of white innocence are established (Ross, 1990b). Teachers and school administrators are not isolated from this rhetoric at the social level. Likewise, as the examples here indicate, teachers are exposed to this rhetoric in curricula. While most teachers might be able to reject negative, stereotypical frames of Mexican Americans at the conscious level (Ross, 1990b), unconscious racism upon which rhetoric of white innocence contributes remains. In the case of the classroom teacher, the ever-present frame is used to make sense of student actions (Tannen, 1993). Gregory and colleagues (2010) state, “despite relatively similar rates of disruption, Black, Latino, or American Indian students may be more likely to be differentially selected for discipline consequences” (authors italics, p. 62). Thus, perception of Mexican Americans as perpetrators may adversely mediate assessments of the students’ actions and consequences. When acted upon by teachers, student behaviors assessed negatively may result in consequences that would have uneven distributions. Wallace and associates (2008) found these discrepancies and noted that when considering consequences, Latina/o students are more likely than whites to be subject to the most punitive discipline (i.e. suspension, expulsion). These consequences set in motion initiation of the school-to-prison pipeline by casting further the frame of Mexican American perpetration. Hirschfield (2008) speaks to this point,

Expanded school exclusion is a symbolic form of criminalization ... Education agencies that increase their use of exclusionary punishments endorse the prevailing rationale of contemporary criminal justice practice – deterrence and incapacitation. (p. 82)

Ultimately, teachers and administrators can be much more than intermediaries between a student’s conduct and deserved consequences; they can become active participants in the initiation and perpetuation of school-to-prison pipelines (Nolan & Anyon, 2004).

## Conclusion

While the US History curriculum map presented above engages in the rhetoric of white innocence and person of color perpetration, it is only one example of how and where this rhetoric takes place. Critical race theorists are informative to the prevalence of the rhetoric of white innocence when they proclaim that “racism is ordinary, not aberrational ... the usual way society does business” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Meanwhile, standpoint theory (Smith, 1990) informs connections between white innocence in curricula, reactions to student behaviors, and the school-to-prison pipeline as a mode of production in the capitalist system, as leveraged by privileged accounts of assumed “universal and objective knowledge” (Grimes, 2001, p. 134) in curricula (a standpoint) that have as its project (Weeks, 1996) the marking people of color as defiled takers. Thus, addressing formation of Mexican Americans as perpetrators through framing of white innocence will not be interrupted by merely addressing such rhetoric in curricula or school settings. Much larger transformations in social discourse must also occur. That being said, schools and their agents cannot abdicate responsibility for critically reflecting on the rhetoric of white innocence, its mediation of racial formation of Mexican Americans and other people of color, and its potential contribution to the school-to-prison pipeline. Interventions in the form of assessments of written and spoken text can become part of evaluations of curriculum and practice that can be undertaken in attempts to disrupt such discourse. This would, of course, need to be preceded by professional development that assists teachers and administrators in identifying the rhetoric of whiteness.

For researchers, future work should explicitly investigate mediations and contributions of white innocence to racial formation of Mexican Americans. Without a doubt, attempts to introduce white innocence and its rhetoric to educators would be met with some (perhaps much) denial and resistance. Still, attempts must be made if there are to be interventions that seek to get to the schooling root of the school-to-prison pipeline.



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