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ARTICLE

Poverty's Multiple Dimensions

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Abstract

Poverty is examined historically and multi-dimensionally focusing on the gendered nature of racism and capitalism. Multiple intersections are discussed that undergird poverty's structuralization and institutionalization to maintain capitalism's efficacy. The discussion supports Kunjufu's (2006) assertion that Payne's (2001) poverty model represents deficit thinking. Education and its relationship to poverty to attain social transformation and social justice are addressed. Analysis is done through critical race theory and critical race feminism.

Poverty's Multiple Dimensions

Poverty in the United States (U.S.) is a structural, embedded, institutionalized, and systemic requirement to maintain capitalism's efficacy; it is an ongoing outcome of hegemony, patriarchy, and a capitalistic economic structure. Property in its numerous forms is the foundation upon which poverty rests. Accumulation and disaccumulation (Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Duster, Oppenheimer, Shultz, & Wellman, 2003) of wealth and property, in concert with the politics of distribution (Books, 2004; Rank, 2005), maintain the status quo. At the same time, the poverty-ridden are cast as lazy, dysfunctional, ignorant, undeserving, less-than, deficit, and shiftless. Deficit (Gorski, 2008) essentialist ideology is as engrained in the U.S. as are racism (Degaldo & Stefancic, 2001, 2000) and sexism. The face of poverty has become code for and synonymous with African Americans, urban, people of color in general, poor Whites, and women of all hues. The feminization of poverty continues to be devastating and pronounced. As such, poverty is neither simple nor one-dimensional. Poverty is steeped in the historical, political, social, legal, and very personal intersections of multiple dimensions mired in racism and capitalism.

The focus in this article centers on racism, sexism, and capitalism and is prompted by Kunjufu's (2006) numerous references to them in his response to Payne's (2001) poverty model. However, as noted above, poverty is multidimensional and as such, requires an examination grounded in multiple realms. Distinctive elements of how capitalism undergirds racism and sexism are examined through a critical race theory (CRT) lens, specifically, racism as embedded in U.S. society, racialization and differential racialization, interest convergence and the myth of legal neutrality (Bell, 2004, 1980; Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2000).

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970s from critical legal studies as the study and transformation of the relationship among race, racism, and power. Here I add that race and racism may be interchanged with gender and sexism. CRT is historical and contextual, bringing a broader perspective to economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. It questions the foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. CRT contains an activist dimension—it not only tries to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better. Critical race theory emerged in educational studies in 1994 (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Six common themes are found in CRT:

1. CRT recognizes that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society;

2. CRT challenges dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit;
3. CRT challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law;
4. CRT insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society;
5. CRT is interdisciplinary; and
6. CRT works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Matstuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993). (from Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 4)

Concepts essential to this discussion and to CRT analysis are property, accumulation and disaccumulation of property and wealth, Otherness, sexism—as ingrained in the U.S. as racism and in conjunction with women in general and double jeopardy for women of color, (King, 1988; Lerner, 1973; Terrell, 1904), scientific racism, and (White) male privilege.

Kunjufu's (2006) assertion that Payne's (2001) poverty model represents deficit thinking (Gorski, 2007, 2008) is valid. Payne's model is both classist (Gorski, 2007, 2008) and paternalistic in that its goal is to make them like us, i.e., there is something wrong with people in poverty and they need to be fixed accordingly to become acceptable and functional by middle-class values and standards. Further, Payne's thesis offers no solid research basis.

Her premise reads like a recipe and there is no singular dimension or solution to poverty. An in-depth and multifaceted understanding of poverty is necessary in order to stimulate understanding, empathy, and action. When especially White middle class people who have never experienced poverty are presented with a recipe, there is a potent danger that the recipe is perceived as a panacea, which is accepted thoughtlessly and without critical analysis, much less understanding and empathy. An example is found in a conversation I had several years ago in a higher education setting with a White female faculty member and administrator who is qualified to train others about Payne's model. During a conversation with this person, she revealed she volunteered with an African American boy. She stated she grew up poor in a military family. She continued to describe the little boy's mother and relayed an account of her shopping and spending habits. The faculty member expressed disdain that the boy's mother made no attempt to save her money, but rather chose to spend her money on, by her definition, more frivolous and extravagant purchases. Although I do not recall the mother's exact purchases, they would not be questioned if she was not a welfare recipient. The faculty person clearly demonstrated no understanding or empathy of the grinding brutality of experiencing chronic poverty on a daily basis. Her mindset revealed she did not understand nor empathize with what living in poverty could be like through her stereotypical and judgmental statements. She believes the poor are not entitled to enjoy equity in a media-saturated culture advertising a plethora of "stuff" to capture the dollars of the consumer.

However, the mother's choices represent an act of resistance to poverty and the rigidly strangling welfare system through exercising her right to purchase the same commodities as someone not on welfare (Kelley, 1996). Surely, the mother would have been criticized if she purchased steak instead of hamburger because she does not deserve to spend her food stamps in such an extravagant manner. It is this aura of arrogance and condescending attitude that exposes the lack of depth and understanding of poverty by some of those trained in Payne's model. The faculty person in this example is limited in her ability to be an effective educator. Rather than creating understanding and empathy in her classroom for her students, she further perpetuates stereotypes, a judgmental attitude, deficit thinking, and

misunderstanding.

This encounter impacted me dramatically as someone in higher education whose agenda is social transformation and social justice, and as a single mother formerly dependent on welfare for the survival of my family, unbeknownst to my former colleague. These statements and others like it confirm the danger and damage in Payne's thinking on a personal level for those whose lives are lived on the edge as Other, and professionally where research and substantiation are lacking in Payne's model.

Racism and capitalism are essential to the maintenance and perpetuation of poverty. Kunjufu's (2006) work is provocative and pertinent with many accurate statements, however the paucity of his supporting citations and documentation make it difficult to access or reference his claims. His position seems to focus more on African American males than females. Although I am alarmed and concerned about the current precarious state of too many African American males, African American females' rich tradition and history occupy the heart and core for racial uplift for African Americans (Hill Collins, 1991; Giddings, 1996; Gordon et al., 1997; Lerner, 1973; Yee, 1992). I will provide more depth, historical context, and analysis in discussing the multidimensional intersections affecting poverty. To that end, I move beyond both Kunjufu and Payne and assert that poverty is gendered in racism and capitalism. I historically contextualize and analyze these intersections through critical race theory and critical race feminism. Finally, based on the preceding, the implications for poverty and education are addressed. Through this discussion, the reader may understand poverty more fully.

Historically Structured and Institutionalized Elements of Poverty

Poverty did not happen in a vacuum. A competitive free market place is characterized by private or corporate ownership of accumulated assets or capital goods and making a profit. Competition is considered both healthy and essential in the scheme. In order to achieve success in this setting or in any competition, all of those in pursuit of accumulation must begin on an equal plane. There is an underlying social Darwinist aspect, even if distorted, to the free market that implies that those who are the most fit are ordained to succeed. Those who do not succeed, are deemed less-than, failures, and unfit. However, the starting place has not been equal for many centuries and the inequities continue to mount. Contributing concepts to an imbalanced and inequitable opportunity to achieve and sustain a decent life in the U.S. are being Other; White and male privilege; women, sexism and double jeopardy; scientific racism; racialization and differential racialization; interest convergence and the myth of legal neutrality; accumulation and disaccumulation of property and wealth. Underscoring the inequities is access to an education that is relevant, truthful, rigorous, and meaningful. I will discuss each of these categories in turn.

The Onset of Other

The founding fathers' battle cry of freedom, albeit, for powerful, elite, propertied white men of the time, is legendary in American mythology. Centuries of public and educational propaganda have convinced the American public, i.e., the commoners, that the cornerstone of America was and remains freedom, in combination with individuality, competition, opportunity, and the promise to lift oneself up by the bootstraps to make the American dream come true through the free economic enterprise system. Competition is a key element not only for capitalism, but also in diffusing community, family, cooperation, and pitting people against each other. Whereas an agrarian economy was conducive to the nuclear family structure, the current economy often creates the necessity of dispersing the nuclear family in all directions in search of work, thereby undermining the familial support structure and frequently creating competition between and among family members for resources. DuBois (1959) artfully described the success of patriarchy in pitting poor Whites against Blacks and vice versa in their competition for resources and the distribution of goods.

Foundational to the American dream is property and ownership, e.g., the now time worn and obsolete 1950s ideology of a two-parent heterosexual household with two children, a dog, and a house with a white picket fence. The indoctrination informs us that if anyone does not attain this dream intended to content the masses, then there is something inherently lacking in the individual's character, motivation, and intelligence. Property ownership is central to this widely-held egalitarian misconception and is touted at the core of the U.S. Constitution through the designation of "three fifths of all *other* Persons", i.e., slaves/property (italics added, The Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 2, 1787). Hence, we witness the birth of Other. Additionally, no one, i.e., White elite wealthy males were to be, "[deprived](#) of life, liberty, or *property*, without [due process](#) of law; nor shall private *property* be taken for public use, without just compensation (italics added, The Constitution of the United States, Amendment 5, 1791). Male, female, and child slaves were not the only property coveted by patriarchy during this time, so also were White women and children, i.e., the Others. Property ownership by White men, whether land, goods, or humans, contributed to their accumulation of assets at the expense and oppression of Others through Others' intersection of race, class, and gender. The lived experiences of those in poverty, many whose lives began as property and chattel, are in stark contrast and oppositional to the American rhetoric of life, liberty, and free enterprise.

White and Male Privilege

Inherent and implicit in the precept of property is that whiteness constitutes property (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2000; Harris, 1993). Whiteness, in addition to providing an economic advantage in a racist and capitalist economy, is considered to represent the majority, i.e., White folks are ordinary or normative. Establishing whiteness as ordinary in American society automatically renders people of color less-than, as implied through the term, minority. Whiteness serves important psychic and material purposes, which ultimately translate into economic, social, legal, and political advantages for Whites, constituting racism's companion, white privilege. White privilege is an unearned asset and advantage in American society by virtue of having white skin that provides social and cultural capital while placing people of color at a disadvantage and subject to oppression. Topping the hierarchy is White male privilege, wherein all Others are rendered subordinate. Being male maintains the top position in the stratified order. Through the social and political construction of race and gender, racism and sexism are equally embedded in the American psyche where being male trumps being female, no matter the color. Power in the U.S. since its beginning was by patriarchy for patriarchy as noted earlier. This patriarchal structure is represented in the top-down hierarchies that pervade everything from the national government, the traditional and outdated perception of what constitutes a family, to our schools, i.e., the "White father" as the head. It is the essence of White male privilege and paramount to the mentality of manifest destiny discussed below in concert with accumulation and disaccumulation.

Science and Ideology Legitimizes Racism and Inferiority—Ingrained Disaccumulation

Through the guise of science and universal truth, Darwinism turned into scientific racism and became a hallmark of American scientific thought and practice. Science was twisted in an attempt to prove the biological and intellectual inferiority of Blacks to Whites. In 1735, Carolus Linnaeus, a famed biological taxonomist, was one of the first to classify humans on the basis of the socio-political construction of race. His typology used skin color and personal characteristics to divide people into White, Black, Red, and Yellow. His classifications are fundamental in the classic racial stereotypes that exist today. As early as 1854, Arthur de Bogineau promoted White supremacy in *Essai sur l'inegalite des races humaines*, (*Essay on the inequality of the human races*) (Watkins, 2001). Sage (1974) provides a common example of the manifestation of scientific racism in the early thinking of the free state of Iowa and the rest of the country when determining the rights and status of Negroes:

On the question of the status and rights of Negroes, convention members and many of

their constituents proved themselves to be no more and no less liberal than their contemporaries throughout the country. The Missouri Compromise may have saved Iowa from slavery; it had not saved the Negro—in Iowa or elsewhere—from a status of inferiority. In this era there was little disposition to think of the Negro as a human being. It is almost startling to find the convention members seriously considering a proposition to exclude Negroes from residence in the state; startling, that is, until one recalls that the biological science of that day taught that the Negro belonged to a lower order of beings than the white man. Even advanced thinkers who believed in abolition of chattel slavery were not ready for the idea of Negro equality. (p. 83)

Regarding scientific racism Rutledge (1995) asserts that the arguments and intellectual bases are, "more than mere abstractions; rather, they are germane—indeed, they are central—to both the idea of the democratic process and the question of what constitutes a "just" society" (p. 243). Gould (1996) rigorously refutes scientific racism and *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Herrnstein & Murray (1994) champion scientific racism by stating unequivocally that Whites have higher IQs than Blacks. They further advocate that educational practices and interventions are a waste of time and money for the same reason: If someone is genetically and inherently inferior it serves no useful purpose. They further fuel their charge by claiming that the social fabric of the U.S. is being harmed because the less intelligent class is reproducing at a faster rate than the intelligent class. They also claim that Asian Americans have a higher average IQ than White Americans. Contrary to the knowledge and beliefs of antiracist educators, they claim the differences are not a result of cultural bias in testing and that intelligence is heritable. Unfortunately, Gould's statement likely reflects the current sentiments and beliefs of too many:

In assessing the impact of science upon eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views of race, we must first recognize that the cultural milieu of a society whose leaders and intellectuals did not doubt the propriety of racial ranking—with Indian below whites, and blacks below everybody else. (1996, p. 63)

Scientific racism invades contemporary American thought and resides not as residue of an earlier time, but in ongoing racism and disaccumulation wherein economic disadvantages accumulate over time for African Americans. A recent cogent example is Gates' June 2, 2008 interview with Nobel laureate and DNA pioneer, James Watson, who asserts Blacks are genetically inferior (Gates, 2008). Consider the implications for children in American schools when embedded racist notions go unexamined and are the subtext of their teachers, testing, and textbooks. For example, undergraduate pre-service and graduate pre-/in-service White teachers in my classes typically are shocked, visibly uncomfortable, often angry, and in denial (the lowest stage of racial identity development) when presented with the concepts of white privilege, racism, and sexism. A few may have encountered the issues in high school or another college course, but they are few overall. Students of color are surprised but welcome the safe environment that recognizes their daily struggles and frequently volunteer to share their experiences with their White peers. The honest and personal stories make the issues real and impact some White students tremendously. Nevertheless some White students, primarily undergraduate, often resist, which translates into lower teaching evaluations for me and comments to the effect that the class "was all about race." Clearly, students who end the semester with that mentality have closed their minds and it does not bode well for their future students and classrooms. Ingrained disaccumulation is perpetuated.

Racialization and Differential Racialization

Racialization and differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) maintain the White patriarchal status quo and are crucial for their economic accumulation. Racialization imposes a racial

interpretation on, categorizes, or differentiates on the basis of race. Differential racialization, i.e., "the process by which racial and ethnic groups are viewed and treated differently by mainstream society" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 145), most commonly as a response to the labor market, has assisted in the accumulation of wealth by the elite. This occurs in America's past, first with the racialization of Native Americans. They were assigned the same derogatory characteristics that malign today's poor: lazy, [savage], stupid, undeserving, deficit, shiftless. Historically, numerous groups were subjected to differential racialization, including Chinese, Japanese, Irish, Catholics, and more. The contemporary burden rests upon the shoulders of workers predominately of Hispanic or Latino origin. However, differential racialization of African Americans seems to remain constant.

Interest Convergence and the Myth of Legal Neutrality

Interest convergence, or material determinism (Bell, 1980, 1989, 2004), works oppressively in concert with racism, racialization, and capitalism. Bell (1980) explained interest convergence in the following:

[The] principle of "interest convergence" provides: The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites [male elites]. However, the fourteenth amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle and upper-class whites. . . . Racial remedies may instead be the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper-class whites. (p. 523)

Here I add that Blacks may be interchanged with Hispanic, Latino, all women, or fill in the blank according to differential racialization prominent at any particular point in time. Interest convergence is pivotal in America's past and present and underscores not only educational inequities but also the maintenance of privilege and concentration of wealth by the few in the capitalist regime. One powerful example is the Marshall Trilogy, which demonstrates interest convergence for the U.S. government to the detriment of Native Americans. Three legal cases form the basis of Native American law during the time of Chief Justice John Marshall: (1) *Johnson v. McIntosh* (21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823)), (2) *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (30 U.S. (5 Pet.) 1 (1831)), and (3) *Worcester v. Georgia* (31 U.S. (6 Pet.) 515 (1832)). The result of the first case denied sovereignty to Native Americans to determine issues regarding land ownership and brought this under the jurisdiction of the federal government because of the European conquest of Natives. The second case established Native Americans as wards of the guardian federal government, thereby implicating that the tribes were incompetent to manage their own affairs. In the third case the Court established the principle that states are excluded from exercising their regulatory or taxing jurisdiction in Indian country. Essentially, the Marshall Trilogy was racist, paternalistic, and assimilationist in spirit and intent. Further, it was a guarantee for the federal government for cheap access to property rights to the disadvantage of Native Americans (Fletcher, 2006). A second gendered example of interest convergence is found in the 15th Amendment, giving Black males the right to vote over Black and White women. Again, this emphasizes the cardinal primacy of maleness at the pinnacle of the power hierarchy, which further underscores the gendered imbalance of power and inequity. A third example is the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, but only as a concession during World War I. This was an interest convergence accommodation by the U.S. government, while making claims to defeat fascism abroad, to placate women on the home front alleging fascism at home through their White House protests. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are further examples of powerful and privileged White males wielding their control. Bell's (1989) powerful counter-story, "Neither Separate Schools Nor Mixed Schools: The Chronicle of the Sacrificed Black School Children," illuminates the interest convergence of these Acts.

Important in Bell's statement above is "judicial remedy". Common American ideology and rhetoric purports that jurisprudence in the country is neutral and that justice will prevail for all, regardless of race, sex, or creed. This, quite simply, is untrue and is the underlying premise of critical race theory. When a system is created by White elite males, it stands to reason they are the ones who have, do, and will benefit the most from it. In the past, lynchings not only were common, but were attended by Whites as parties, rather than reason for a murder trial. Qualified and representative counsel by an attorney frequently remains the privilege of those who can afford the best. People in poverty do not have the means to secure the best legal counsel available. Interest convergence is real for those in whose interests the convergence does not translate into equity or justice.

Accumulation and Disaccumulation

Accumulation and disaccumulation of wealth and property add a critical and important dimension to the state of poverty for the haves and the have nots. Accumulation of wealth and property is fairly straightforward and achieved through investments of capital in products, such as real estate, savings, or the stock market. Disaccumulation "is usually ignored" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 23). "Just as economic advantages (for example access to skilled trades) can accumulate, economic disadvantages (such as exclusion from well-paying jobs [paying higher interest rates for loans]) can be compounded over time" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 23).

One powerful example of the onset of accumulation of property by patriarchy is found in the massive accumulation of land that displaced those already living there, for example, the 1626 purchase of Manhattan for 60 guilders; designation of the Northwest Ordinance territory in 1787; the Louisiana Purchase in 1803; and the 1838 Trail of Tears. January 16, 1865, marked the possibility for accumulation for freed slaves when General Sherman, with the approval of the War Department, issued Special Field Order No. 15. This order is the basis for the unfilled promise of forty acres and a mule:

The order stated that "the islands of Charleston south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering St. Johns River, Florida are reserved and set apart for the settlement of Negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States." Furthermore, Sherman's order specified freedmen would be offered assistance "to enable them to establish a peaceable agricultural settlement." (New Jersey State Bar Association, Retrieved on January 20, 2009 from <http://www.njsbf.org/images/content/1/1/1121/Respect%20Fall%202002.pdf>)

This historic promise benefited 40,000 freedmen with 400,000 acres of abandoned confederate land. However, the former White landowners protested because they feared Black landowners and farmers *would begin to accumulate wealth and power*. As a result, slightly one year later in 1866, then President Johnson ordered all land titles rescinded, Black landowners were forced off their land, and the land was returned to the former White plantation owners. Disaccumulation for Blacks continued, but not for White elites. This trend continues with 75 percent of White Americans owning their homes in contrast to 47 percent African American homeowners and 48 percent Hispanic homeowners in 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Disaccumulation through segregation in housing, resulting in segregated schools, is a prominent historical example that extends into the present. Blacks commonly could experience home ownership only in a specified geographical area in a community. In these areas, real estate prices and land values were lower, thereby creating a two-pronged effect that resulted in lower rates of accumulation and a lower tax base for school resources. Massey and Denton (1993) describe the phenomenon, hypersegregation. Hypersegregation represents five distinct geographic variations describing Black residential distribution: (1) overrepresented in some areas and underrepresented in others, i.e.,

unevenness; (2) *racial isolation*, insured by rarely living in a neighborhood with whites; (3) tightly *clustered* neighborhoods that form either an enclave or scattering in a checkerboard fashion; (4) *concentrated* in a small area or sparse settlement throughout; or (5) *centralized* around the central urban area or on the outskirts (Massey and Denton, 1993). These practices are cited as largely responsible for creating urban ghettos. At the time of their study, one-third of all Blacks in the United States lived in conditions of intense racial segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993). Realtors exacerbate racism and discrimination by not showing or offering property available for purchase to Blacks outside the racially isolated areas, while lending institutions do so by charging higher interest rates. Further, Leigh (2005, 1997) exposed residential segregation by gerrymandering in school segregation and desegregation in the Ohio Valley. Another tactic, gentrification, removes the urban poor from their communities altogether. Through gentrification, urban core communities are displaced and dislocated through the affluents' investing in urban property. This, in turn, drives out the poorer residents while rebuilding and preparing for an influx of the middle class and wealthy. These racist residential practices perpetuate ongoing disaccumulation in property rights and access to viable educational experiences for poor children.

The tactics to remove and displace people in poverty are riddled in the past and present. For example, the 1846-1848 Mexican American War aka the U.S. invasion (Velasco-Márquez, n.d.) and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (*New York Times*, 1852) are further testaments of the barbarism and genocide employed to execute the ideology of manifest destiny and accumulation of property and wealth. Perhaps the most potent and enduring example of accumulation for White elite males effectively began with slavery in the U.S. And, for African Americans, slavery demarcates the incipency of disaccumulation.

Equally important to note is the ongoing use of governmental acts and legislation through jurisprudence to create legal doctrine to accomplish and maintain accumulation by the White status quo. Eminent domain's inclusion in the Fifth Amendment, is another tactic supported by the powerful. This is the, "right of a government to take private property for public use by virtue of the superior dominion of the sovereign power over all lands within its jurisdiction" (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2008). The myth leads Americans to believe that in the event of the exercise of eminent domain, it is for the greater good and affected property owners receive a fair price for their land condemned by the government. However, this was not my family's experience in the early 1960s in the case of our livelihood and family farm. The compensation for our farm and for displacing our lives and community was in no way fair or enough to purchase anything comparable. This right has, for example in the 1950s and 1960s in Des Moines, Iowa and Buffalo, New York, eroded African American communities and businesses when new freeway construction was undertaken. More recently in Des Moines the renovated freeway construction demolished and dislocated blocks of Section 8 housing. Although sometimes overlooked and designated as rural rather than considering farmers in an examination of poverty, many farmers would not continue without farm subsidies from the government. The expansive interstate highway system in the 1960s broke up farmland across the country and for many, was the impetus to leave the land and farming as the movement continued toward larger and more corporate-like farms, thereby contributing to disaccumulation.

Accumulation for the privileged wealthy minority continues and gives pause to wonder when and how much is enough? The question is more pronounced in the face of such brutally oppressive poverty and disaccumulation for the many.

The Davis-Bacon Act of 1931

During the Depression, Black Americans experienced more extreme racism and employment further declined for Black males as the Davis-Bacon Act was passed on March 31, 1931, which kept non-

union members from working. The Davis-Bacon Act required federal construction contractors to pay their workers prevailing wages. The intent of the Act was clearly to favor White workers who belonged to White-only unions over non-unionized Black workers. By the 1930s, most of these unions excluded Black membership completely. The construction industry in the South provided Blacks with more jobs than any industry except those in agriculture and domestic service in the 1930s (Kruman, 1975). Blacks were migrating north at the same time. Parallel to their southern experience, Blacks held a disproportionate share of unskilled construction jobs in the North. "By 1930 black workers had obtained a foothold in the northern construction work force, but the low proportion of skilled construction workers who were black suggests that the foothold was a tenuous one" (Kruman, 1975, p. 39). The Davis-Bacon Act effectively eroded Blacks' economic foothold in both the North and the South.

When Bacon introduced the discriminatory bill, Congressmen immediately recognized its implications. They passed the bill because they saw it as a way to protect local, unionized White workers' salaries during the Depression era years. When Davis-Bacon became law on March 31, 1931, the federal government was initiating a public works program that accounted for approximately half of all the money that was spent on construction in the country. Within the boundaries of the discriminatory intent of the act, almost all of this money went to White workers (Bernstein, 1993). Most workers were recruited through the White-only AFL union, a practice that further disenfranchised Black workers. Not only did these practices have substantial effects on Black skilled workers, they were devastating to unskilled Black laborers. George Nichols, historian, remembers that in his youth in Des Moines there existed a thing known as common labor. He recalled that there were opportunities for Blacks when he first came to Des Moines from Louisiana through Missouri along the Mississippi River. "In those days they had janitors, elevator operators, window washers, manual work with shovels, picks, and wheelbarrows. That's something that doesn't exist today. There's no such thing as common labor" (Nichols, 1985). Any gains that were made by Blacks living in Des Moines, and the rest of the country, during the 1920s and 30s, were thwarted and diminished greatly because of the Davis-Bacon Act, while accumulation for White male workers continued upward. However, the Davis-Bacon Act provides little to account for the working lives of Black or White females, thereby underscoring racism and capitalism as gendered. Women were considered property and were expected to conform to the cult of true womanhood and domesticity. Only a scant decade prior to the Davis-Bacon Act had women received the right to vote. Further, social welfare policies, discussed next, were and are racist and gendered. As noted earlier, maleness tops the hierarchy and all others are subordinate. Sexism renders all females inferior and particularly females of color experience double-jeopardy through racism and capitalism.

Origins of Social Welfare and the Exacerbation of Sexism, Double Jeopardy and the Feminization of Poverty

The origins of social welfare provide another dimension and perspective into accumulation and disaccumulation, interest convergence, sexism, racism, and the feminization of poverty. Recall that all women's origins in the U.S. are that of property and chattel. For centuries, White women's accumulation, identity, and place were dictated by marriage and subject to the station of their husband and fathers. For all practical purposes, women had no rights or accumulated wealth, much less the means to attain them. Black women fared much worse. Black female slaves faced circumstances that today seem impossible to imagine. Nevertheless, Black slave women endured being objects that created economic prosperity for White males not only through their labor, but also through no control over their reproductive rights. Rape was common and children were prized by their owners for their economic value. Children were sold. Families were torn apart. Education was forbidden . . . for centuries. This exemplifies accumulation by Whites and disaccumulation for African Americans in one of its basest and most grotesque forms; it is a culmination of racism, capitalism, racialization, sexism,

and interest convergence of immense proportion. White women most certainly contributed greatly to their husband's accumulation through their unpaid labor, but never were subjected to such dehumanizing atrocities as were Black women. Black women contributed to both White men and women's accumulation of wealth through their service as domestics—at the expense of contributing the same to their own families and homes. Today, African American, Caribbean, and Latina domestics do the same for White male and female wealth and accumulation.

Social welfare is longstanding in the U.S. In the early years, families and communities took the responsibility and initiative to assist their less fortunate neighbors in times of need. Some communities had relief systems for the poor, almshouses, or workhouses. It was the Great Depression and the New Deal that launched social welfare and relief into the governmental arena. These programs were designed primarily for White men:

Although mandatory programs have been the norm historically, another type of work program has also existed. In the 1930s and again in the 1970s, voluntary programs were established in which participants received decent payments based on private-sector wage rates. Yet these programs—the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Civil Works Administration, and Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, and the Public Employment Program and Public Service Employment that was part of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act in the 1970s—were not set up with women or people of color in mind. Whereas since 1930 the mandatory programs have focused primarily on women, disproportionately women of color, the voluntary programs have been intended chiefly for men, and until the 1960s, for white men. (Rose, 1993, p. 320)

Public works programs were the precursor for social welfare programs, originally designed for the benefit of White men only and linked to a work ethic during a time when women's gendered role was to remain in the home performing unpaid labor (Abramovitz, 1988). Nelson (1990) exposed a two-pronged welfare system—one with policies applying to men and another for women. This originated during the Progressive Era of Workmen's Compensation "for mostly white, industrial working-class men and Mothers' Aid for impoverished, white, working-class widows with children" (Rose, 1993, p. 322). White males were the greatest beneficiaries of social welfare programs through receiving higher payments than women with the "female/male wage differential . . . institutionalized not only in the work programs but also in the National Industrial Recovery Administration (NIRA), the cornerstone of industrial policy during the first few years of the New Deal" (Rose, 1993, p. 325).

Early twentieth century campaigns paralleled scientific racism and its counterpart, the eugenics movement. "Campaigns were launched to limit the fertility of the "lower-races," and for many in the Black community, birth control remained identified with the eugenics movement. . . . In some cases, acceptance of welfare benefits was tied directly to sterilization" (Nadasen, 2002, p. 283). Thus, the choices for Black women were sterilization to receive welfare benefits, or have more children they could not afford due to the job choices available to them. Once again, racism and gender discrimination clearly are ingrained in the reproductive rights of Black women. The idea of choice for women did not come to the forefront until the mid-1970s.

Welfare policies in the 1950s, 1960s, and into the 1990s became more oppressive and harsher. Invasion of privacy, control over personal and reproductive rights, and the right to work versus women's role as mothers became dictated by the government through welfare policies (Nadasen, 2002). Any minor deviation from the stringent policies, and mothers were threatened with cancellation of their meager benefits. Again, the idea of choice, be it in motherhood or in the workforce, was absent. For Black women, work in the public sphere was most often a source of oppression rather than the means of empowerment seen by White women. Marriage, regardless of the abuse or subordination experienced

by women, was favored by the establishment to maintain the patriarchal model. The 1967 welfare reforms required recipients to seek work and was the source of institutionalizing the "different social expectations for Black and white, poor and middle-class women regarding employment" (Nadasen, 2002, p. 284). The experiences of women varied considerably depending on their race and socio-economic class, again emphasizing the constant nature of differential racialization for African Americans. In 1996, the benefits dictated by welfare reform were thenceforth limited to five years. This is highly oppressive and unrealistic in a system designed to keep people down, with employment opportunities that do not provide a living wage, no benefits, no child care, or no transportation to name a few. Poverty is not a situation that magically disappears in five years. Although the welfare rolls may be becoming smaller, the homeless population in the U.S. is soaring.

There is perhaps no more potent example of whiteness as an economic asset than in Blacks making the difficult decision to pass as White, often to ensure economic survival for themselves and their families, as well as to be accorded the taken-for-granted privileges Whites enjoy on a daily basis—that people of color do not (Brown et al., 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2000; Hitchcock, 2002; Jensen, 1998; McIntosh, 1988). Whiteness and color underlie the formation of racial identity. Harris (1993) provides insight into the economic and psychological impacts of her grandmother's experience in passing:

My Mississippi-born grandmother was confronted with the harsh matter of economic survival for herself and her two daughters. . . . she took one hard look at her choices and presented herself for employment at a major retail store in Chicago's central business district. This decision would have been unremarkable for a white woman in similar circumstances, but for my grandmother, it was an act of both great daring and self-denial, for in doing so she was presenting herself as a white woman. In the parlance of racist American, she was "passing." She was transgressing boundaries, crossing borders, spinning on margins, traveling between dualities of Manichean space, rigidly bifurcated into light/dark, good/bad, white/Black. No longer immediately identifiable as "Lula's daughter," she could thus enter the white world, albeit on a false passport, not merely passing, but *trespassing*. (p. 1711)

This testimony bears witness to the falsity of color-blindness whether as interpreted through the law or as experienced in life and exemplifies the material benefits of whiteness as property and as economic advantage. Color is obvious and claims to ignore or deny its existence eliminate the daily experiences of racism that people of color experience. Although the above represents an earlier time and generation, its effects remain just as real and damaging today.

Discussions about gender too frequently center on White women and leave out African American women and women of color at large. Hill Collins (1991) expands this idea: "For many African American women, far too few white women are willing to acknowledge—let alone challenge—the actions of white men because they have benefited from them" (p. 190). This speaks to the companions of racism and white privilege: "White women's inability to acknowledge their own racism, especially how it privileges them, is another outcome of the differential relationship that white and Black women have to white male power" (Hill Collins, 1991, p. 190). White feminist scholar McIntosh underscores Hill Collins' statement, "I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, just as males are taught not to recognize male privilege" (1988, p. 1). However, Black and White women have much in common through their subjugation and oppression by White men. The 1970s welfare rights movement formed alliances with Black and White men, and Black and White women in opposing essentialized notions of race and gender (Nadasen, 2002). Women share in the marginalization and inequities that continue today for all women. Currently, women make 76 cents for every dollar earned by a man. "Among lower-skill, lower-paying occupations, women earn approximately 60% of men's wages for comparable work" (Thibo, Lavin-Loucks, & Martin., 2007, p. 5) whereas "The poverty rate

among single-male heads of household was approximately 17.6%, while the rate for single-female heads of household was 36.9% in 2005" (Thibo et al., 2007, p. 2). Women share in lower wages overall, bearing the financial responsibilities in female-headed single-parent homes, disaccumulation, ongoing oppression, racism, sexism, and the feminization of poverty. The ongoing state of poverty is fueled by an outdated and ill-conceived 1955 guideline and definition of what constitutes the threshold for poverty in the U.S. (Books, 2004; Rank, 2005; Rose, 1993; Nadasen, 2002; Thibo et al., 2007).

The discussion and examples delineated through this point, although not exhaustive, demonstrate some of the historical, social, political, and legal constructs that provide the conditions for poverty, its perpetuation, and the racist and gendered ingrained inequities of capitalism. The phenomena are multidimensional and complex. The following examines the implications of these multiple dimensions for education.

Education and Poverty

Access to education has been inequitable for centuries. Before public schools were established in America, the elite brought tutors from England for their male children or sent them abroad for education. Women were not considered worthy of an education due to the social construction of being feeble-minded—in the same vein as scientific racism and eugenics. Slaves were not to be educated at all for fear they would rise up and rebel. Nevertheless, some received an education at the risk of loss of life, and others still rose up and rebelled.

The onset of the common school is a sacrosanct event in American history. Initially, the idea was met with opposition by the powerful and elite (Anderson, 1988; Spring, 2007, 2005; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). (See, for example, Spring (2007), "Education and the creation of an Anglo-American culture," p. 10; Spring (2005), "Authority and social status in colonial New England," p. 17.) However, persuasion prevailed and the common school was hailed as the *modus operandi* to eliminate poverty, create an informed citizenry, provide equal opportunity, and increase national wealth (Spring, 2007, 2005; Urban & Wagoner, 2004), paralleling goals of education today. Additionally, it provided an opportune setting for ideological indoctrination, social control, and social reproduction of the masses. The common school was not intended for Blacks in the South, however, at least not until after emancipation and then, predominantly through a Eurocentric curriculum and teachers. The government interceded in education for Native Americans through their deculturalizing and destructive boarding school practices (Adams, 1997; Reyhner & Oyawen Eder, 2006; Spring 2007, 2005). Powerful White philanthropists were highly influential in framing the educational experience for Native Americans, but even more so, for Blacks. As noted by Watkins (2001) in his piercing analysis of *The White Architects of Black Education*,

Education, that is, schooling, in the modern corporate-industrial society has emerged as central to state political and ideological management. Political and ideological management involves ideation, which in this context means the imparting and reinforcement of ideas and values that support the current economic and social order. . . . Ideology becomes the currency of those dominating the culture. Ideology is imparted subtly and made to appear as though its partisan views are part of the "natural order." The dominating ideology is a product of dominant power. (p. 9)

It is this dominating ideology that permeates education and the curriculum in public schools in the past and present. Although it may provide uplift for some, far too many schools continue to endorse a curriculum of the absurd that encompasses heroification of primarily White males (Loewen, 1995) while the contributions of women and people of color (that seldom go beyond tokenism) appear in pop-out format in textbooks. Scripted curriculum, relentless testing, and the oppressive mandates of No

Child Left Behind (NCLB) create a robotic-like setting for mindless regurgitation of irrelevant and contextually void facts (Kohn, 2000) that challenge our most creative, dedicated, and culturally responsive (or not) teachers and run the remainder out of teaching all together. Additional ingrained unexamined and unchallenged practices like tracking (Oakes, 2005) complement a picture of alienation for too many children in today's schools. In spite of the numerous challenges to tracking, it remains common practice in today's schools and further perpetuates societal and educational inequities. As noted by Oakes (2005):

The deep structure of tracking remains uncannily robust. Most middle and high schools still sort students into classes at different levels based on judgments of students' "ability." This sorting continues to disadvantage those in lower-track classes. Such students have less access to high-status knowledge, fewer opportunities to engage in stimulating learning activities, and classroom relationships less likely to foster engagement with teachers, peers, and learning. The sorting and differentiated opportunities promote gaps in outcomes of every sort: achievement, graduation rates, college going, and so on. Low-income students and students of color still suffer disproportionately from these negative effects, both because they are tracked disproportionately into the lowest classes in racially mixed schools and also because they are more likely to attend racially isolated schools where lower-level classes predominate. Thus, through tracking, schools continue to replicate existing inequality along lines of race and social class and contribute to the intergenerational transmission of social and economic inequality. (p. xi)

The intersection of gender with race and social class further reproduces this annihilation of opportunity and equity for females. (See, for example, Bettie, 2003 or Lareau, 2003).

Rather than providing a venue for intellectual challenge, curiosity, and growth, too many of today's American public schools perpetuate ignorance in the form of dominant cultural reproduction that undermines independent thought and goes against the best interests of our students (Macedo, 2006). These practices do not prepare students in American public schools to overcome or surpass conditions of poverty for themselves or society at large. Although there are public schools and teachers who are making a positive impact on our children, they are too few. Poor children are especially the most susceptible to alienating classroom environments. Too many teachers, the force of which is predominantly White, are not well-informed about issues addressing poverty or culturally responsive teaching. And, even if they are, NCLB's stringent and oppressive requirements make creating an environment for a meaningful and culturally relevant curriculum and teaching next to impossible to survive or maintain.

Another virulent mandate of NCLB is less advertised: the command that any public school receiving federal funding must allow military recruiters into high school classrooms. If the school is designated as a Title I school, a public school with a high percentage or number of poor children and families, the Pentagon then has access to high school directories with students' names, addresses, and phone numbers (Books, 2004). In either scenario, federal funding or Title I, schools that do not comply risk losing federal money. Although parents in Title I schools may formally object, it is questionable how many parents are informed about the practice or formally object.

However, children attending private schools who do not receive federal funding are exempt from the oppressiveness of NCLB. Children of the powerful, wealthy elite have had the opportunity for a private education for generations. It is in the halls of the private, elite boarding schools where the leaders of tomorrow are groomed and become well-versed in their privileged ideology and obligations that separate them from the public commoners' sphere (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Inequity and inequality are embedded in multiple facets of the American educational system. Many of the policies and

practices serve to maintain social control and do nothing to alleviate poverty. Although occasional success stories emerge informing the public of how some common and/or poverty-stricken people have overcome incredible odds to rise up from their circumstances, these stories are few when compared to the many left behind to live in the grinding and debilitating circumstances created by poverty.

A More Current Rendition of Poverty

Public school funding relies, in part, on property taxes. In communities with little property ownership (disaccumulation) in the way of a tax base, schools, and therefore, children, suffer. Those who have the least receive the least. The growing economic polarization in the U.S. is described by Books (2004):

Wealth, like poverty, is a function of political economy—the politics of who gets what. The gap between rich and poor in the United States more than doubled between 1979 and 2000, according to an analysis of government data by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (Browning, 2003). The analysis shows the richest 1% in 2000 had more money to spend after taxes than the bottom 40%. Economic disparity between rich and poor was greater in 2000 than in any year since 1979 when the government began collecting this data.

A smaller breakdown of the income spectrum offers a clearer picture of the trend. An analysis of the after-tax incomes of the top 1% of households between 1979 and 1997 showed most of the gains this group enjoyed actually went to the top 0.1% of individuals with incomes of more than \$790,000, and almost half of those gains went to 13,000 taxpayers with incomes of at least \$3.6 million and an average income of \$17 million (Piketty & Saez, 2001; cited in Krugman, 2002). Between 1992 and 2000, the 400 wealthiest taxpayers more than doubled their share of all income in the U.S., while their tax burden dropped sharply from 26.4% to 22.3%. Had the tax cuts passed in 2003 been in effect, these 400 taxpayers would have averaged a tax rate of only 17.5% (Johnston, 2003). (from Books, pp. 23-24)

As the figures above indicate, the effects of this extreme disparity in wealth affect a major portion of the U.S. citizenry. Further, a significant number of those in poverty are represented by two-parent families working several jobs, often with no medical benefits, and who still are unable to make a sustainable living. As many have asked, how can the allegedly most affluent country in the world account for the extreme poverty and inequities that exist inside its borders? Parts of America constitute, parallel, and rival if not surpass Third World countries. Those who reap the benefits in the current time are those who profit from long-term and embedded racism, differential racialization, sexism, interest convergence, and accumulation over time since the inception of the United States. Some might argue this is a result of the natural order of things, but how does that argument suffice in a country whose wealth and prosperity is heralded as second to none and whose homeless population, adults and children, as well as increases in poverty, continue to rise? The middle class, a curious label in a mythologically classless U.S. society, is disappearing, and descending precariously closer to poverty. For many, the loss of employment is the invisible line waiting to plummet them into poverty and destitution.

The role of public schools in America continues to face challenges from the time-appropriated myths that education can and will solve all of America's ills. This is an unrealistic and impossible task. Nevertheless, teachers are placed in the forefront of this dilemma and many have no personal experience, much less idea or educational background to address issues of poverty in their classrooms in an understanding, empathetic, and caring manner. When Suzy takes extra food and the teacher finds it hoarded in her desk or pocket, is Suzy accused of stealing first, or does the teacher consider that

Suzy and her family may be homeless or lacking food in her home? When a child acts out, does the teacher consider the multiple causal possibilities? For example, perhaps the child did not get enough sleep in the shelter, or the child's parents were fighting all night, or the child went home and was responsible for caring for younger siblings, or one of the child's parents was arrested and taken off to jail, or the child needs glasses, along with a multitude of other scenarios that likely are absent from a teacher's personal and professional repertoire of thinking and action. Another destructive and common stereotype held by teachers is that parents of poor children do not care about their education. They cite parents' lack of involvement or attendance as a reason. However, they fail to understand that poor parents love and care about their children and their education just as every parent does and that their lack of involvement or attendance may be due to working several jobs, unreliable transportation, or numerous other factors.

It is my contention that educators have known for a long time now how to create an engaging and challenging learning environment for all children at all levels. Terms may be re-tooled and given a new name in education, but the essential characteristics remain the same: active, engaged learning; a caring, learner-centered environment; small teacher to student ratio; relevant and meaningful curriculum wherein the students see themselves represented; equitable resources; cooperation rather than competition, which eliminates the winner versus loser mentality; an environment where children feel safe and valued for who they are; teachers who are caring, empathetic, and understanding; an environment where there is trust, honesty, respect, realness, genuineness; and staying with the same teacher for more than one year (Dewey, 1938/1997; Meier, 1995, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Students want: to be trusted and respected; to be part of a family; for their teachers to be helpers; opportunities to be responsible; freedom, not license; a place where people care; teachers who help them succeed, not fail; and to have choices (Neill, 1992; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). The idea that learning can be fun, exciting, foster imagination and creativity is one too often forgotten, or that there just is no time for today under the oppressive edict of NCLB. Although these characteristics may not eliminate poverty, they will provide learners with a solid foundation upon which to build, rather than reproducing control, mindlessness, isolation, and stratification.

Conclusion

There is no simple answer to alleviate poverty, just as there is no simple answer for its manifestation and embedded state in America. However, the common element shared by all, whether in poverty or not, is our humanness. People devastated by poverty are not deficient, less-than, or sub-human. They are not broken, however, the system in which they are embroiled very well may be.

There are numerous aspects of poverty that are beyond the scope of this article. Health and dental care are critical needs that deeply affect the ability of the poverty stricken and children to function well in their educational setting. Some of our senior citizens' lives are abjectly distraught and plagued by poverty. Homelessness has reached new heights in the U.S. People in poverty have the fewest resources and least access to taken-for-granted things such as ongoing telephone service, health care, reliable transportation, nutritious meals, adequate clothing, and shelter and yet are criticized by those who have no understanding or realization of all that poverty entails.

Although it is impossible within the constraints of one article to fully expound on the multiple dimensions of poverty, some of the critical underpinnings and intersections have been discussed from the perspectives of critical race theory and critical race feminism. Poverty is structural and institutionalized in U.S. society. Capitalism is, by its very nature, gendered and racist and perpetuates poverty. In addition to the ongoing national rhetoric and indoctrination of the dominant ideology, other factors that contribute to this ongoing oppression include Otherness, male and white privilege; scientific racism; racialization and differential racialization; interest convergence and the myth of legal

neutrality; accumulation and disaccumulation of wealth and property; punitive and discriminatory social welfare policies; social control and social reproduction; and inequitable educational opportunities. The relationships are not dichotomous: Poverty is not a Black or White issue and concern—it is a human one and not only national, but also global. Poverty is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. It stands at the apex of multiple intersections, at a minimum, the intersections of race, gender, and class. Ideally, this provides a deeper and fuller understanding of the gendered nature of racism and capitalism and how these elements frame, shape, and underpin poverty and its perpetuation in the U.S. to move toward social transformation and social justice.

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