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PROMOTING MULTICULTURALISM THROUGH A REVISED DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE AND INTERSECTION DAY ON AMERICAN COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Author: Hughes, Sherick

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Abstract: This essay discusses challenges in teaching and learning about race, class, and gender in U.S. colleges and universities. A "post-ism" vs. "anti-ism" public dichotomy is growing. "Post-ism" refers to the idea that we are in a post-racial, post-class, and/or post-gender moment in society where race, class, and gender are no longer barriers to educational achievement. The post-ism argument is that if race, gender, and class conversations are muted, then race-class- and gender-related problems would subside. Strong counter-evidence suggests that we are far from this moment with regards to race, gender, and class. The theory of intersectionality provides a useful possibility to engage this debate and bridge differences on campuses. Moreover, a revised Declaration of Interdependence and an Intersection Day on American college campuses can be promising vehicles for promoting multiculturalism and intersectionality. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

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Abstract:
This essay discusses challenges in teaching and learning about race, class, and gender in U.S. colleges and universities. A "post-ism" vs. "anti-ism" public dichotomy is growing. "Post-ism" refers to the idea that we are in a post-racial, post-class, and/or post-gender moment in society where race, class, and gender are no longer barriers to educational achievement. The post-ism argument is that if race, gender, and class conversations are muted, then race-class- and gender-related problems would subside. Strong counter-evidence suggests that we are far from this moment with regards to race, gender, and class. The theory of intersectionality provides a useful possibility to engage this debate and bridge differences on campuses. Moreover, a revised Declaration of Interdependence and an Intersection Day on American college campuses can be promising vehicles for promoting multiculturalism and intersectionality.

Keywords: post-racial; dysconsiousness; racialization; sexualization; intersectionality

There are at least seven challenges in teaching and learning about race, class, and gender in U.S. colleges and universities. Today, perhaps more than ever, a "post-ism" vs. "anti-ism" public dichotomy is growing. "Post-ism" refers to the idea that we are in a post-racial, post-class, and/or post-gender moment in society where race, class, and gender are no longer barriers to educational achievement. The post-ism argument seems to reside in the notion that if race, gender, and class conversations are muted, then race- class- and gender-related problems would subside.

A common post-ism reply to race, gender, and class dialogues contends, "It wasn't a problem and you brought it up!" Yet, strong counterevidence from peer-reviewed research suggests that we are far from this moment with regards to race (Leonardo, 2009), gender (North, 2009), and class (Van Galen &Noblit, 2007; and Anyon, 2005).

An "anti-ism" argument suggests that although educational outcomes are better for everyone, there are still gaps that separate how and whether those opportunities are equitable. If the academy remains a place to initiate and sustain the leadership in critical thinking and application, toward equitable opportunities to teach and learn, then, then the post-ism vs. anti-ism dichotomy must not be dismissed. The promising theory of intersectionality and a revision of Will Durant's concept of a Declaration of Interdependence provide a defensible response to this debate.

SEVEN CHALLENGES

As a student, I was consistently privy to discussions about race, class, and gender as social constructions for inferring human group differences, largely based on superficial, physically observable differences (Eberhardt &Fiske, 1998). Although this connotation is necessary, it is insufficient, because few scholars (Gossett, 1963/1997) were explaining how they came to be such a detrimental living concepts. The "race, class, and gender (including LGTB) as social constructions" message alone is limited in explanatory strength for answering a tougher question "if racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism are merely social constructions, why are they so persistent and debilitating in educational settings and in lived experiences" (Bowers, 1 984)?

The problem of diagnosing and treating the "isms" is a convoluted one, filled with contradictions at the intersection of identity and knowledge. It is particularly salient when we find reported problems of race, class, and gender in academia, where the isms rear their ugly heads often in places espousing social justice. A sense of dysconsiousness, fatigue, resentment, and denial seems to accompany the recent legacy of the isms in academia. This legacy appears to create barriers to our abilities to begin anticipating, recognizing, and acknowledging our inherited interdependent privileges and problems without under-estimating, over-estimating, or dismissing their contributions. Evidence of these barriers emerge from over a decade of experience as a college-level researcher, teacher, and service worker studying and teaching about race, class, and gender at nationally ranked, predominantly white institutions. The evidence supports an argument for at least seven problems of race, class, and gender value orientations, each with its own set of assumptions, values, and problems.

Challenge 1

To speak of all U.S. Black, White, Latino, Asian, as well as, Jewish student communities as separate "races" suggests that we ignore evidence arguing that the traditional and prevailing concept of "race" is often a misnomer for describing all of these human groups (Montagu, 1972; and Blum, 2002). It denies and devalues socio-historical, socio-cultural influences on lived experiences and educational outcomes. Due to this type of misrepresentation of what "race" means, we may act upon racial prejudice in self-justifiable and more incorrigible ways. To become a racist and to contribute to racism in education, one must first and foremost hold a traditional view of "race" as a real birthright entity influencing human group academic capacities in education and elsewhere (Montagu, 1972; and Blum, 2003). The widely cited W.I. Thomas theorem suggests that if a myth, like "race" is socially defined as true, then it is real in its consequences. So the misunderstanding of race can lead authors like Herrnstein and Murray (1994) to equate IQ and race without deconstructing IQ and without considering socio-historical forces, which arguably account for 100% of reported significant differences that are based on racial categorical comparisons of educational outcomes.

Challenge 2

Because we, as educators, are limited in reflexivity and examining our own positionality (due partially to constraints from national and state educational structure and standards), we commit to our race, class, and gender related expectations (Oakes &Lipton, 2003) in a given learning context without considering the influences of hidden rules and norms on student success - rules and norms founded upon the social and environmental history of our ancestors. This history weaves a complex relational web of (a) genotype (human capacities for survival in geographic space), (b) phenotype (degree to which survival and social mobility depend upon physical characteristics, observable resemblance, and immediately traceable genetics to claim ancestry and the in-group power distribution; if power involves multiplicity of force (numerical differences, technology, innovation, natural resources, etc.), having a monopoly on those forces, and ability to manipulate human relations through that force), and (c) politics (the degree to which human groups have or grant access to higher distributions of power, believe the existing inequitable distribution of power is inevitable, or aspire for the same power that oppresses). Without further challenging and then reframing the term "race, class, and gender" in accessible praxis in order to more accurately portray lived experiences in our work, isms may continue to show up in primary, secondary, and post-secondary classrooms. Schooling may continue too often to reflect instruction to the racialized gendered, and classed "other" with limited education about the "other" and without an education to be critical of othering (Kumashiro, 2001).

Challenge 3

"I don't need to learn this, because I won't be working in one of these mixed race, class, and gender environments" is a common mantra. This typical response from preservice and inservice educators and social workers seems to resist critical pedagogy, constructivism, and critical consciousness. Perhaps, our teachings about race, class, and gender fall short on explanations of the integral need for intergroup social contracts. Perhaps, our strategies for teaching and learning offer little for those students planning to teach and work in ethnically homogenous settings. An illustration of these gaps in our teachings is evident in students' waning support for "busing" in enough knowledge and experiences to validate diverse pk-12 citizens, irrespective of me degree to which those students are physically in the school building. It seems that, like many pre-service teachers, too many of us rely upon the hope that we can or will return home to teach to our own race, class, and gender enclaves and that our mono-group teachings are sufficient to fulfill the pluralistic ideals of a democracy.

Challenge 4

Unfortunately, language, literacy, and culture are sometimes mismanaged in our dialogue when working with adult stakeholders within a school community. Arguably, educators throughout the world, at least occasionally, have difficulty code-switching and advocating for the marginalized group members that produced us as we struggle through colonizer/ colonized, insider/outsider, mainstream and homeboy/homegirl dilemmas. Our own position in language, literacy, and culture influences our abilities to address within our own communities the (a) exaggeration of racialized, gendered, and classed in-group similarities and between-group differences, (b) exaggeration of racialized gendered, classed, and sexualized in-group and out-group characteristics rendering human tendencies inevitable and unchanging, and subsequently self-fulfilling, and (c) delivery of commentary and other communicative acts consistent with beliefs in racialized gendered, classed, and sexualized group hierarchy (e.g., Asian students are naturally better learners than Black students) (Hughes, 2003; Blum, 2002). It is a touchy subject to approach, because of the difficulty of serving our communities in ways that honor them.

Challenge 5

There is a relatively long and culturally engrained history of work by education scholars in the U.S. by geneticists, historians, philosophers, political scientists, and policy analysts to debunk overly deterministic ideas about race, gender, and class that tend to fall in one of three categories: Over-emphasis on group similarity based on genetic and social similarities (e.g., Blum, 2002); and over-emphasis on group differences based on genetic and social differences (Kochman, 1981; and Hernnstein &Murray, 1994). These types of overemphasis in research tend to involve a view of race, class, gender, and GLBT communities through deterministic screens. Research sometimes implements such screens without critiquing the researchers' motives. Such research can teach readers something about race, class, and gender without offering clear understandings of difference, and thereby rendering any difference a deficiency. One group is particularly vulnerable to our applications of race, class, and gender - school-age children. For example, much inequity exists in the unfair and unwarranted placement of Black, Latino, and impoverished youth (often males) in Special Education with labels of high incidence special needs like ADD, ED, and ADHD (O'Connor &Fernandez, 2006; and Blanchett, 2006).

Challenge 6

Difficulties persist in the paradox of learning how to expose the misuse of race, gender, and class as group identities without denying any meaningful good that has come from unique ethno-cultural group experiences (e.g., jazz). Where are we going, where have we been in the search for meaningful words and communicative behavior to replace divisive discourse? What foreseeable critical thought processes lie ahead in the land of self- and other-identification after race, gender, and class, and how might those processes move our society along paths of more holistic learning and teaching?

Challenge 7

There is a paucity of assessment (VanGunten &Martin, 2001) to understand better the influence of our curriculum and instructional strategies on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of our students and ourselves. There is limited evidence of the influence of our scholarship and pedagogy about race, class, and gender on preservice teachers and on the professional development of novice and veteran teachers. Such assessments are important as we seek understanding about our space in the battle of pluralistic democratic ideals versus democratic responsibilities and the democratic rights of individuals to be left alone.

A SHIFT FROM EARLY MODERNITY

These seven challenges can be linked directly to individual and intergroup value orientations, ethno-cultural significance and the U.S. shift from early Modern times. Some may have an orientation about race, class, and gender where we at least, on occasion communicate amongst ourselves and with others in a separate caste-like manner. There are some of us that seem to have an orientation, where we consistently communicate amongst ourselves and with others as if we are driven mostly by ethnicity or a more class-based rather than caste-like system of rules and norms for survival and success. The degree to which one senses a more class-based rather than caste-like existence and vice versa seems related to time period (i.e., decade of events); phenotype (signifying more immediate heritage traits like skin color); geographic location (e.g., country of events); timing (i.e., frequency and intensity of events); encounters with knowledge, skills, and disposition to engage critical praxis; and influential social surroundings (e.g., In general: school, university, neighborhoods, employment, and church events. More specifically: courses involving learning through the contradictions of multiple and occasionally intense intergroup experiences).

To make it even more confusing these orientations aren't necessarily fixed within individuals, or even families, so when some people engage empathie growth, public or private resistance processes, it may become even more difficult to pinpoint an accurate assessment of their intergroup orientation. Each intergroup orientation engages essentially a battle of democratic ideals (e pluribus) vs. the democratic responsibilities and rights of individuals (unum) to maintain group isolation. Herein lay a bulk of major obstacles that must be scaled to eliminate inequities emerging from intergroup value orientations.

U.S. citizens, visitors, and "undocumented" immigrants, have already embraced race, class, and gender identities, such as, Black, White, and Latino, Queer, Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual/Straight that have their own "ethnocultural" (Blum, 2002) significance. This ethno-cultural significance may explain why a move to a mere change in terminology like "African American" hasn't produced large changes in within-group or between-group socialization and economic mobility. In light of this challenge, Blum (2002) suggests that instead of a focus on identity, we move to a focus on equity and inequity. Equity and inequity in the U.S. has a historical relationship with the ethnocultural significance of race, class, and gender in our society.

Riggs' (1999:12) further alludes to the point that the U.S. shifted from a large slave and indentured servant economy during early modernity to the late modernity economy that witnessed increased goals for democratization, the industrial revolution, and nationalism. He argues that the country's shift from early to late modernity involved a simultaneous shift from a more caste-based (race-based usually to distinguish involuntary immigrants) society to a more class-based one. Similar to Blum (2002), Riggs (1999) limits the discussion of how this shift continued the racialization and sexualization of class. Whereas being a woman, gay, or Black guaranteed or pre-determined one's lower class and status in pre-modernity and in early modernity by law, U.S. society during the later years of modernity enabled the inequitable treatment of women, bisexuals, homosexuals, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans and other marginalized groups. In sum, people may not be as controlled by race, class, and gender categorization in later- and post-modernity, but their lived experiences of equity and inequity are still largely informed by it.

INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

In pre-modernity up to today, representatives of race, class, and gender oppression are pitted against each other by the global elite in the fight for limited resources available to them. For example during slavery, the biggest fear of slave owners was arguably the fear of impoverished Whites and Black slaves joining forces to fight for freedom and an ideological, educational, and politicaleconomic redistribution of power. This fear led White elites to devise successful ways to separate the two groups through such tactics as separate housing, schools, and worship; and by separating the reward and punishment systems in favor of Whites (Zinn, 2002). The residual effects of these tactics remain as detrimental barriers to efforts to bridge these two communities. Hill-Collins (1990) offers a way of thinking that moves us beyond pitting groups in race vs. gender vs. class positions toward understanding the complex connections between us. For Hill-Collins, race, class, gender, operate as "interlocking systems of oppression" (1990:225). Although interlocking, each system takes on varying degrees of significance in particular institutional contexts. Thus, Hill-Collins challenges us to learn how to appropriately center each system of oppression rather than weigh each one against the other, as is so often done when people are reduced to variables (O'Connor, 2001:159). In short, she resuscitates theories of intersectionality that look to dynamic processes to explain social phenomena. Her work adds an anticipatory both/and component in educational theory and research to direct burgeoning scholars away from a narrow political educational stand (Fraser &Honneth, 2003) upon either race and gender (i.e., culture) or schooling and class (i.e., structure).

Many education scholars from Blanchett (2006) and O'Connor &Fernandez (2006) to external evaluators of the Yale Comer School Development Program (Noblit, Malloy, &Malloy, 2002) provide support for the claim that the most promising social science projects should at least anticipate the type of multiplicity and complexity suggested by Hill-Collins (1990). In 2007, 1 began to illustrate the theory of intersectionality and to connect it to multicultural achievement through the metaphor of a compass.

I found the compass metaphor to be particularly useful because a compass moves according to the movement of the person holding it and thus it changes as the circumstance and situation in which one finds himself/herself changes. When taking the compass to pure race and gender, or pure class extremes or poles, we find the compass dial not working for us, but spinning in a circle (just as a traditional compass does at the North and South poles). Moreover, by remaining suspect of the poles with oppression at the center, the focus stays on challenging academic and social inequality rather than the social group affiliations or the moral superiority of those bringing the issue to the table. The compass of intersectionality may dissuade race, class, and gender groups from becoming just liberal, just conservative, or just radical enough to hear our own voices. It may also direct us away from justice for just us narratives of race, class, and gender.

THE DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE

Potential vehicles for promoting multiculturalism and an appreciation of intersectionality on American college campuses could be a revised Declaration of Interdependence and an "Intersection Day."

In April 1944, leaders in the U.S. Jewish and Christian communities approached Pulitzer Prize-winning philosopher Will Durant about organizing a movement to raise moral standards. Instead, Durant suggested that they work against racial intolerance and proposed a "Declaration of Interdependence" (Durant, 2009).

The Declaration was inaugurated in March 1945 at a Hollywood gala with an estimated 400 people in attendance including such national figures as Nobel Laureate, Thomas Mann and the actress Bette Davis (Durant, 2009). Thomas Mann, in his speech at the gala proclaimed, "All problems - political, economical and cultural - that occupy mankind today, can be reduced to a single one: To find a new equilibrium of liberty and equality compatible with the new age: to guide the peoples and nations into a form of socialism that will honor the right of the individual."

Will Durant later explained, "Our main task is to reduce the causes of racial animosity. First, by recognizing that we are all guilty ... Which of us has never uttered a word of racial hostility? Let us resolve never to do it again. Let us watch our own conduct, and by our moderation, our modesty, our good will, given no handle or excuse to racial division. Let us bum the second half of this Declaration into our hearts, and make a sacred vow, here and now."

Today, The William and Ariel Durant Foundation is engaged in revitalizing the Declaration of Interdependence through four pursuits: it is being taught in college classes; copies are placed in schools and places of worship throughout the United States and abroad; statements of support are solicited from individuals who share its vision; and they promote multicultural events that will foster an environment of mutual appreciation and openness to new experiences. The resurgence of the Declaration of Interdependence is promising. However, some of its language would be considered out-dated and less than inclusive of women and the LGBT community. Diverse groups of coequal campus voices charged with the task of revising Durant's Declaration and taking his "sacred vow" could serve as a crucial step toward promoting multiculturalism today.

IMAGINING AN INTERSECTION DAY

Following the lead of Will Durant, Thomas Mann, and Bette Davis, it may be beneficial to commemorate a revised campus Declaration of Interdependence by creating an Intersection Day event. Intersection Day would be a day to bring all of the campus organizations together who serve the particular needs of a given race/ethnicity, gender, and social class group. I imagine the groups coming together annually in the spring to name joys and concerns, as well as current and potential opportunities for liberation and collaboration. Intersection Day would differ from an already established Interdependence Day, which is held on September 12 and commemorates the 2001 attacks on the U.S. World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The knowledge gathered through an Intersection Day would speak to the notion that all adult stakeholders on campus have a particular intergroup orientation and ethno-cultural identification that drives and informs us. The day could offer counter-evidence to be considered by supporters of the "post-ism" illusion. Information shared during this revised campus-wide event could advance the opportunity for a diverse group of faculty, staff, students, the media, and other stakeholders in the university to illustrate a diverse array of critical purviews and lived experiences with one goal in mind - to equalize the opportunities to pursue happiness and harmony, peace and liberty, wellness and inclusion. I envision such a publicly diverse crowd that will increase face validity, credibility, and audience participation, and potentially boost efforts to diversify recruitment and retention. Groups could discuss how they intend to use our critical thinking, and shared and differentiated lived experiences as a foundation from which to seek additional pockets of generative knowledge. I imagine such a diverse array of campus colors and representatives that could serve from traditional and new Black, White, Latino, Asian, Native American, and Jewish organizations; to LGBT organizations, Women's Studies, and the voluntary support of faculty, staff, and administrators. I imagine a shared commitment to the validation of campus community members that are the least protected and to feeding noble struggles for hope that consider race, gender, and class issues without a prerequisite for weighing them.

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AuthorAffiliation

Sherick Hughes
Department of Curriculum &Instruction
University of Maryland

AuthorAffiliation

Sherick A. Hughes is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Maryland, College Park. His scholarship centers are (a) urban teaching and teacher education (b) marginalization and response bias; (c) applied qualitative and mixed methods, and (d) applied critical theory, pedagogy, and analytic frameworks.
Address: Department of Curriculum &Instruction, College of Education, The University of Maryland, 2311 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742. Ph.: (301) 405-5783(o), Email: shughesl@umd.edu

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