

Why the Post-Racial Is Still Racial: Understanding the Relationship Between Race and Education

ADRIENNE D. DIXSON

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

JAMEL K. DONNOR

The College of William & Mary

REMA E. REYNOLDS

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Scholars who study educational equity and inequality in education, academic achievement gaps, and educational opportunity offer a variety myriad of explanations as to how or whether race has any role or impact on educational experiences, access, or opportunity. Indeed, race has been an abiding question in the social sciences and education for several decades. Despite the debates within both fields regarding the meaning of race, the current popular sentiment among the lay public and many educational practitioners is that on November 4, 2008, America reached a post-racial moment with the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States. In other words, according to the post-racial discourse, race no longer matters, especially as it relates to people of color. The editors and contributors of this volume challenge this rhetoric and examine how and whether race operates in understanding how issues of access to productive opportunities and quality resources converge and impact experiences and outcomes in education. Hence, the purpose of this NSSE Yearbook is to explain how and why race is a “dynamic system of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices” shaped by myriad forces (e.g., power, gender, language, class, and privilege), which determine the quality of educational opportunities, experiences, and resources for people of color in the United States.

We believe this topic is significant because despite decades of research to understand the social and educational differences and discrepancies between racial groups, very little information exists explaining the “doings” of race in education. Meaning, in thinking beyond simple examinations of the achievement gap, this volume uses race as an analytical lens to explain the cumulative interplay between the legal, ideological, spatial, and organizational barriers that impact students of color and the schools they attend. For this yearbook we bring together a collection of scholars from the broad field of education who draw on various social scientific disciplines and scholars from the humanities to offer a holistic and nuanced understanding of race and education.

We divide the yearbook into three sections: the context of education and post-racial discourse; teachers, curriculum and the post-racial discourse; and working with students in a post-racial context.

In section one, three chapters provide what we describe as “the context of education and post-racial discourse.” The scholars who contribute chapters to this first section of the yearbook examine the post-racial discourse from four perspectives: history, philosophy, curriculum studies and higher education. Christopher Span historicizes the concept of the post-racial by tracing its usage in discourses and policies that pertain to educating African Americans. Drawing on the scholarship of W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson, philosopher Tommy Curry, traces the relationship between liberal ideology, whiteness as property and the post-racial discourse on what constitutes the appropriate education for African Americans. Lorenzo Baber contemporizes the historical and philosophical work offered by Span and Curry. In his chapter, Baber argues that the “continued retreatment from race-consensus admissions policies and the persistence of race-neutral,” contributes to the perpetuation of the post-racial narrative that frames higher education discourse. These chapters help to frame the historical, philosophical and contemporary context for the post-racial discourse that spans the continuum of U.S. education.

Section two, titled, “Teachers, curriculum and the post-racial discourse,” features three chapters that examines the post-racial discourse and its impact on education in the U.S. through teacher education, school curriculum and education policy. Vanessa Dodo Seriki, Cory T. Brown and Kenneth Varner draw on Derrick Bell’s notion of the permanence of racism and use the CRT’s chronicle tradition to illustrate the ways that racism is endemic to teacher education programs. The authors in this chapter examine and analyze what they describe as the “normativity of Whiteness” in teacher education by using the experiences of fictional characters, Ebony, Jamal and Todd. Anthony and Keffrelyn Brown focus on the ways that school curricula reflect the ideological and racial beliefs of the power elite. In their chapter

they demonstrate how children are indeed socialized and educated into understanding race and racism as a result of state-sponsored and in the case of Texas, state-authored, post-racial narrative. In the closing chapter in this section, Janelle Scott takes on examining charter school policy and its impact on civil rights and democratic education. Scott's work takes a critical look at how charter school policy, premised on narratives that purport to address educational inequity—which happens to disproportionately impact students of color—complicates efforts at racial equity and in many ways reinforces a post-racial narrative that presents educational inequity as a decontextualized outcome of “bad teachers” and “bad schools.”

In section three, “Working with students in a post-racial context,” we look more concretely at how the post-racial discourse impacts students and families directly. Rema Reynolds' chapter examines the post-racial discourse and the experiences of middle class Black families in public suburban schools. Reynolds' chapter makes visible the ways in which race and class intersect and impact the ways that Black families navigate public schools on behalf of and to advocate for their children. Adrienne Dixson's chapter illuminates the challenges of teaching graduate courses on race and education in a large Midwestern Research I university. In particular, Dixson's chapter examines white graduate students resistance to examining race and the ways that Black women professors are particularly vulnerable to their collective actions of resistance despite being majors in a multicultural and equity studies program. Taking a slightly different look at the impact of the post-racial discourse on students, Jamel Donnor's chapter examines the *Fisher vs. University of Texas* lawsuit. Specifically, Donnor analyzes the brief filed by counsel for Abigail Fisher and the racial tropes her lawyers used to craft a case designed to effectively dismantle Affirmative Action in higher education. The chapters in this section provide an insight on how the post-racial discourse impacts a diverse group of actors. Similarly, these chapters speak to the ways in which families and faculty of color navigate racially charged contexts in which Whites who are both in the majority and who wield significant power, deny and dismiss their privilege and racism.

Taken as a whole, the chapters in this volume demonstrate the vast impact the post-racial discourse has on the broad continuum of education in the U.S. We are hopeful that this book will inform our colleagues across the p-20 spectrum. We are also hopeful that this volume will inspire scholars to help create and advocate for higher education admissions and academic programs that can redress historical and institutionalized racial inequity. Similarly, we are hopeful that this volume will inform researchers and practitioners in K-12 policy and curriculum to also craft and advocate for educational policies and programming that will help us realize the goal of educational equity for all students.

ADRIENNE D. DIXSON is an associate professor of critical race theory and education in the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests include educational equity in urban educational contexts primarily in the urban South. Her recent publications include *Researching Race in Education: Policy, Practice and Qualitative Research* (Information Age Publishing, 2014) and the *Handbook of Critical Race Theory and Education* (Routledge, 2013).

JAMEL K. DONNOR is an assistant professor in the School of Education at The College of William and Mary. His research interests include examining the interrelationship between educational quality, life opportunities, and life experiences according to race. His research areas are threefold: theory, policy analysis, and the education of African American males. The common threads woven within these three areas are race and inequality. He is the coeditor of *The Resegregation of Schools: Race and Education in the Twenty-First Century* and *Scandals in College Sports: Legal, Ethical, and Policy Case Studies*, both published by Routledge.

REMA REYNOLDS is an assistant professor in the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A former teacher, counselor, administrator, and parent organizer, her research is centered in urban schools serving culturally diverse students and families. Her recent article, "Is this what educators really want? Transforming the discourse on Black fathers and their participation in schools," was published in *Race Ethnicity and Education* in 2013.