Black Metropolis and Mental Life: Beyond the "Burden of 'Acting White' " Toward a Third Wave of Critical Racial Studies

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In this article, I reflect on Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu's classic research on the "burden of 'acting White' " to develop a long overdue dialogue between Africana studies and critical white studies. It highlights the dialectical nature of Fordham and Ogbu's philosophy of race and critical race theory by locating the origins of the "burden of 'acting White' " in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, who provides some of the intellectual foundations for this work. Following the work of F. W. Twine and C. Gallagher (2008), I then survey the field of critical whiteness studies and outline an emerging third wave in this interdisciplinary field. This new wave of research utilizes the following five elements that form its basic core: (1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression; (2) challenging white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and other dominant ideologies; (3) a critical reflexivity that addresses how various formulations of whiteness are situated in relation to contemporary formulations of Black/people of color identity formation, politics, and knowledge construction; (4) innovative research methodologies including asset-based research approaches; and, finally, (5) a racial elasticity that identifies the ways in which white racial power and pigmentocracy are continually reconstituting themselves in the color-blind era and beyond (see A. A. Akom 2008c). [oppositional identity, Black student achievement, youth development, acting white, Du Bois, critical whiteness studies, critical race theory, race, Black metropolis, double consciousness, twoness, hip-hop]

This theoretical article grows out of a four-year comparative ethnographic research project on forms of racial domination in the San Francisco Bay Area. Over the course of four years various issues emerged and subsided. I came to focus on the role of race in the negotiation of public and private space: How is race a part of the daily experiences of Black students inside and outside of school?[1] What does it mean to be Black in different neighborhood contexts? How does living in an urban environment, yet attending school in a suburban environment, modify how Black youth think, behave, and negotiate public and private space? Given that cities and schools are two of the central institutions involved in the drawing and redrawing of racial lines (Lewis 2003), how is race lived, loved, navigated, negotiated, resisted, and transformed in and out of educational space? What kind of nonverbal messages do Black youth give and receive? How do well-meaning white adults, and other adults of color (teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents) ignore racial inequities without any awareness they are doing so and what impact does this have on Black mental health and well-being? And finally, what kinds of institutionalized cultural practices and social structures lead to differences in educational outcomes for Black students?

To gain perspective, I spent many hours in different neighborhoods talking and listening to people in schools and on the street. As my understanding of youth

participatory action research evolved, I democratized the research process by creating research questions in collaboration with the young people and the communities we were working with. Together we photographed the urban environment, made documentary films of urban and suburban educational inequality, and recorded the prescriptions and proscriptions of public behavior on the block and the street corner. In doing so, we got to know all kinds of people from teenage pimps and prostitutes, to middle-class white teachers, to Asian police officers, and Black community activists (Anderson 1990).

As our research project became more refined, what emerged over time was the question of Black mental health and well-being, more specifically the questions of Black insanity and how to define it and redefine it. Whereas youth violence has become a problem of national scope (Anderson 1999), the impact of white supremacy on Black mental health and the negotiation of educational space has received far less attention. Many scholars argue that the U.S. metropolis (both cities and suburbs) foster depression and mental distress, but researchers have not sufficiently compared the psychological well-being of urban and suburban residents in a sufficient or rigorous way. The few studies in environmental psychology and sociology that examine place-level social contexts have focused largely on comparisons between urban and rural communities (Hoyt et al. 1995) or focused on just place size alone (Fischer 1982; Rodgers 1980), almost always ignoring race as an independent variable (Oliver 2003). The other characteristics that distinguish both cities and suburbs from each other, such as racial isolation or degree of racial and class composition, have not been examined even though we know from school shootings, drug usage, depression, racial pathology, and other sociological variables that psychological distress may be linked to suburban environments and skin color advantages and disadvantages that emerge from the relationship between race, space, and place (Oliver 2003).

The goal of this article is to more directly examine the impact of the Black metropolis on mental life. More specifically, I draw on the work of Fanon, Du Bois, St. Clair Drake, Horace Cayton, Joyce E. King, Beverley Tatum, and Antonia Darder, as well as critical whiteness scholars such as Georg Simmel, Judith Butler, Peggy Macintosh, David Rodieger, Noel Ignatiev, and Pamela Perry to develop an existential analysis of racism in the United States that is based on three preliminary points. First, that oppression of Blacks by whites in the United States was achieved through slavery and deterritorialization; second, that deterritorialization was central in creating a Black diaspora and paradoxically is a source of group identity and strength (Blau and Brown 2001); and third, I argue that the transformation from de jure segregation to pseudo-integration rearranged not only the materiality of Black life in the United States but also altered the cultural practices, public policies, psychology, institutional arrangements, and social discourses that directly and indirectly impact the locally specific ways in which Blackness is negotiated, navigated, performed, policed, and resisted in the color-blind era.

The overall purpose of this article is threefold: (1) to develop continuity between Black historical and contemporary experiences with the "burden of 'acting White' "; (2) to summarize the evolution of the "burden of 'acting White' " in relation to "double consciousness," "twoness," and "code switching," as important links in the chain of Pan-African cultural identity formation, accessing institutional resources and privileges, and the negotiation of public and private space; and (3) to distinguish third-wave studies from earlier studies by demonstrating how the possessive invest-

ment in whiteness goes beyond institutional form and force, beyond the epidermal reality of white skin, beyond complex economic and political practices, to embody what Du Bois referred to as a compensatory and public psychological wage that enables whites (or those who can pass for white) to negotiate a social status distinct from that of Black people/people of color (Du Bois 1935; Lipitz 1998).[2]

I begin this article by documenting how first-wave critical whiteness studies incorporate and build on existing scholarship with a particular focus on how Black identity has historically been defined, deployed, destabilized, performed, policed, and reinvented in the context of global white supremacy. This is followed by a brief account of the second wave of critical racial studies, including Fordham and Ogbu and critical race and feminist scholars, who continue in the Du Boisian tradition of challenging and making white supremacy and institutional racism visible (Twine and Gallager 2008:10). Finally, I conclude by suggesting that future third-wave perspectives should decenter whiteness by examining it in relation to other racial identities in more nuanced and locally specific ways that emphasize the situational, relational, and historic contingencies that are reshaping and repositioning racial identities within the context of contested racial hierarchies (Twine and Gallager 2008).

The First Wave of Critical Racial and Critical Whiteness Studies

Long before the recent discourse of critical race theory and critical whiteness studies, W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1970), provided a scathing critique of white supremacy, white invisibility, and the ways that white racial power masks as race neutrality and universality (Rabaka 2007). In *The Philadelphia Negro,* Du Bois argues that the mechanisms and processes that operationalize white supremacy are overt and covert forms of discrimination, institutional racism, color prejudice, and the material deprivation of Blacks, a state of affairs that "the majority of whites were unconscious of, or do not care to see" (Twine and Gallagher 2008:8). Du Bois goes on to argue that for whites color prejudice "is not today responsible for all or perhaps the greatest part of the Negro problems; or of the disabilities under which the race labors . . . they cannot see how such a feeling has much influence on the real situation or alters the social condition of the mass of Negroes" (Du Bois 1970:322). By chronicling the problems of Black integration in a white-dominated society Du Bois's contributions not only reveal how racialized social and institutional practices maintain white supremacy but also suggest that the problems of Black Americans are not rooted in their heredity, but, rather, in their environment and the social conditions that confront them (Anderson 1996).

Du Bois's work is important to those interested in the relationship between race and mental health precisely because his training as a sociologist together with his own personal and political experiences enabled him to develop a detailed analysis of the relationship between oppressive social and political forces and the mental health of individuals. Thus, his unique contribution to critical racial studies has been a theoretical and empirical analysis of the nature of white supremacy, how it is sustained and reproduced, the detrimental effects it has on the self-esteem and self-image of both the oppressor(s) and the oppressed, as well as a brilliant analysis of some of the mental health challenges produced by racial stratification.

A central theme of Du Bois's work is how to preserve a positive Black identity in a white-dominated society. To better explain the impact of white racial power on the

Black psyche he introduced the term *double consciousness* to suggest a tension between multiple selves and multiple communities, between bodily and spiritual selves, between rationality and emotions, between sanity and insanity—as well as to illuminate the dialectical tensions that impeded fluid participation in Black world(s) and white world(s). According to Du Bois, Black personhood was existentially divided in at least two, perhaps more, selves—between the subjective, self-determined, agential Self and the objectified, exoticized, excluded Other (Blau and Brown 2001). These existential circumstances produced another sociopsychological condition that Du Bois termed *twoness,* "an American, a Negro, two soul, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (1965:5).

Twoness, for Du Bois, was rooted in the "belief that whites have limited understanding of people of color whereas the latter have a profound understanding of the cultural frameworks and the institutional barriers that whites employ to oppress them" (Blau and Brown 2001:221). As a result, Blacks bear the burden of twoness but whites also suffer a social cost. Psychologist Beverley Tatum speaks to some of the financial costs of racism for white people and Black people/people of color in her book *Why Do All the Black Kids Sit Together in the Cafeteria* when she states: "Whether one looks at productivity lowered by racial tensions in the workplace, or real estate equity lost through housing discrimination, or the tax revenue lost in underemployed communities of color, or the high cost of warehousing human talent in prison, the economic costs of racism are real and measurable" (1997:22). But there are also other less easily measured cost for white people: for example, fear, alienation, moral trepidation, loss of relationships, and constricted perception. Obviously, the cost is not as high for white folks as it is for people of color, but an invisible price is still being paid (Tatum 1997:14).

Over the years, Black culture has developed complicated psychological and performative practices to facilitate the negotiation of public and private space in the context of global white supremacy (Mills 1997). Together, both Du Bois's historical delineation of twoness and double consciousness and today's contemporary terms *code switching* and *acting white* embody the strategic use of social psychology and cultural practices to manipulate social identity, often in an effort to gain access to institutional resources and privileges. The linguistic, psychological, and behavioral skills required to navigate global white supremacy involve adept observations of selves and others, racial performativity tied to class(ed) behaviors (dressing, walking, talking, etc.), and a complex understanding of social roles (Jackson 2003). Collectively then, it may be useful to consider "twoness," "double consciousness," "passing," "code switching," and "acting white" in a constellation of cultural survival strategies linked to the common denominator of overcoming historic and contemporary formations of white supremacy.

In the end, critical racial theory and critical whiteness studies owe their greatest intellectual debt to the work of Du Bois (Twine and Gallager 2008:7). His work anticipated other sociological contributions to first-wave critical whiteness studies by years. Although there are evident parallels between Du Bois's work and George Herbert Mead's "account of the development of the self," published in 1934, Cooley's "looking glass self" (1964:184), and Simmel's "blasé attitude" (1903), Du Bois's work highlights those aspects of the Black metropolis that were neglected by white male researchers. More specifically, the study of white racial identity and whiteness for Du Bois revealed some of the mechanisms through which white people both come to

understand and experience their own Americanness and racial privilege in opposi-tion to Black people/people of color and "frame America as a racial signifier that had come to 'mean' only white" (Morrison 1992:47; Twine and Gallagher 2008:11). As Raka Shome points out "whether it was the physical travel of white bodies colonizing 'other worlds' or today's neocolonial travel of white cultural products—media, music, television products, academic texts, and Anglo fashions" (1999:108), white racial and cultural hegemony continues to shape what Du Bois identified over 100 years ago as the problem of the 20th century—the color line.

The Second Wave of Critical Racial and Critical Whiteness Studies

Following the important work of Du Bois, a central focus of second-wave critical whiteness studies is the way that Black people/people of color have been "Blacked out" of history (Fordham 1996), how immigrants and nonimmigrants "become White," act white, assimilate, or participate in what Noel Ignatiev otherwise calls "race traitoring" (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ignatiev 1996), and the role of class, culture, and gender in rethinking the history of working-class struggle as a means to forging new cross-racial alliances (Wiegman 1999).

Drawing on the seminal works of Du Bois, Fanon, St. Clair Drake, Horace Cayton, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Ella Baker, Gunnar Mydral, Paul Willis, and Peggy McIntosh (to name a few), second-wave whiteness examines how white-ness and white supremacy frame and rework racial categories, hierarchies, and boundaries. Three main intellectual arteries form the heart of second-wave whiteness studies, all of which take social constructionist renderings of race as their theoretical point of departure: (1) the "race-traitor school" (which advocates the abolition of whiteness), (2) the "racialization of whiteness school" (which seeks to avoid essen-tializing whiteness by locating race and class as two of many social relations that shape individual and group identity; see Twine and Gallagher 2008), and (3) the "class-solidarity school," "which rethinks the history of working-class struggle as the preamble to forging new cross-racial alliances" (Wiegman 1999:5).

In the post–WWII era, a great deal of intellectual work has occurred through second-wave whiteness studies. For example, Lopez (1996), Twine (1996), Warren and Twine (1997), Lipitz (1998), Shome (1999), Frankenberg (2001), Rasumussen et al. (2001), Wellman (1993), Winant (2001), Gallagher (2003), and others explore the ideo-logical and cultural practices that render white privilege visible. Historians, anthro-pologists, and sociologists such as Dominguez (1986), Roediger (1991, 2005), Allen (1994), and Jacobson (1998) all examine the cultural production of whiteness and the strategies and policies used to protect, secure, and legitimate White privilege (Twine and Gallagher 2008). "Feminist scholars address how whiteness and gender shape racialized identities and how identity construction and patriarchy are linked to racism, nation and class location" (Twine and Gallagher 2008:6; see also Frankenberg 1993, 2001). And critical race theorists "examine how the law came to define non-white and white status and the implications this definition has had for citizenship" (Twine and Gallagher 2008:11–12).

These and other second-wave researchers, by focusing on the active unraveling of whiteness as a structure of power and privilege, have begun to distinguish them-selves from earlier studies that documented the formation of racial identities, ideolo-gies, labor practices, and cultural norms that buttressed white supremacy.

Furthermore, many of these studies began to chart new ground by documenting the historical elasticity and contemporary transformations of white supremacy through not-yet-white ethnics, whose experience in the new world they characterized as not "being" but rather "becoming" white (Wiegman 1999:123). In particular, the work of Fordham and Ogbu not only continues on in the Du Boisian tradition of examining the relationship between race, mental health, and social mobility but is arguably one of the paradigmatic studies in second-wave studies because of the way that it highlights how whiteness is "learned, internalized, privileged, institutionally reproduced, performed," and resisted in and outside of educational space (Carter 2005; Lewis 2003; Perry 2002; Twine and Gallagher 2008:6).

Although the study of globalization of white supremacy and racial identity now includes many books, articles, ethnographies, and reviews, particularly in the field of education, the fact remains that in some respects Fordham and Ogbu have been "the Cassandras of their time," providing detailed accounts of the impact of racial inequality on educational achievement while at the same time having to endure the meaning behind the "burden of 'acting White,' " often being misinterpreted, appropriated, and distorted, and as such, lending itself to a wide range of political positions and agendas (Twine and Gallagher 2008:10). In the following section, I discuss how the "burden of 'acting White' " has been read or misread by admirers and critics of Fordham and Ogbu's work. I then go on to ask in the broader scheme of theorizing race, how should we situate the "acting white" thesis in relation to critical whiteness studies, colorblind studies, and beyond? Is the "burden of 'acting White' " another version of whiteness studies that simply calls attention to white superiority? Or is it exploring what Du Bois and Fanon wrote about as the contradictory, dualistic nature, of the psychological worldview of oppressed people across the diaspora (D. Foley, personal correspondence, January 16, 2008).

Some Observations on the Strange Career of Coping with the "Burden of 'Acting White' "

What is the number-one challenge threatening the survival and social mobility of Black Americans? If you listened to the legion of responses from researchers, journalists, and pundits over the past two decades since the initial publication of Fordham and Ogbu's "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the 'Burden of Acting White' " (1986), your response might range from the culture of poverty, the structure of Black families, rampant consumerism, or anything and everything except institutional racism, media-generated violence, the prison-industrial complex, the school-to-prison pipeline, and systemic structural disparities in health and education fueled by a legacy of White supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

Moreover, if you were narrow-minded enough to listen to Bill Cosby, whom I respect as a philanthropist but don't feel nearly as comfortable supporting as a "prophet of the hood" or a social scientist,[3] then the answer is even simpler: lack of interest in education, style of dress, the names Black people give their children, backward speech, consumer habits, lack of work ethic, or bad parenting and child-rearing practices (Cosby and Poussaint 2007; Dyson 2005:4). What is amazing about the meta-analysis of Cosby, McWhorter, Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and others is how little discussion there is about environmental racism, the present effects of past discrimination, and the sociopolitical conditions that define the contours of U.S. racism (Akom 2007, 2008a).

Over 20 years after its initial publication, the "burden of 'acting White' " is still one of the most often-cited hypothesis in the field of education and beyond. The public is fascinated with the topic, and some scholars have made entire careers by addressing it in relation to Black educational achievement. In many respects the "acting white" hypothesis asks the same old question that Du Bois posed over 100 years earlier: how to preserve a positive Black identity in a white-dominated society. To better explain how racially, culturally, or phenotypically identified Black youth cope with the impact of white racial power on educational achievement, Fordham and Ogbu introduced the term the *burden of "acting White"* to suggest a dialectical relationship between "Black citizenship" and white citizenship, "gender insufficiency" and gender sufficiency, stigma and privilege, and between being simultaneously erased and embraced (Fordham this issue).

According to Fordham:

> At the core of acting White, as I initially envisioned it, is the idea of behaving as if one were entitled to what is considered integral to being a U.S. citizen: living in any neighborhood one desires; matriculating at the school of one's choice; being able to obtain the job that one desires and that meshes with one's skills; marrying the person of one's choice without regard for his or her racial identity; voting without any additional qualifications beyond residence and citizenship. In short in the context of U.S. racism and stratification, "acting White" was an act of collective self-assertion, claiming as rights what has previously been reserved as privileges for Whites only. For African Americans, it means unconditionally embracing the institutions and practices that were treated as the prerogative of White Americans and declared off limits to enslaved Africans and their descendants. [this issue]

In many respects, Fordham and Ogbu's central argument that the institutional arrangements, ideological beliefs, mass-mediated images, and state practices that maintain white privilege force racialized and gender performance from Black people/ people of color is persuasive, if not strikingly obvious for any amateur student of U.S. history (see Du Bois 1965, 1970). Additionally, Fordham and Ogbu are right, we need to seriously reexamine the mental and cultural havoc Black youth have to endure in the late 20th-, early 21st century, with respect to what Du Bois referred to as "double consciousness" and Fordham calls "dual citizenship" (this issue): the "fight to retain citizenship in the Black community while concurrently seeking acceptance by the hegemonic White society" (Fordham this issue). Indeed, Fordham and Ogbu over the last 20 years through the use of ethnography, history, psychoanalysis, and community studies have provided important understandings of some of the racial, gender, cultural, and structural constraints that impact Black educational achievement.

However, even though Fordham and Ogbu have detailed some of the racial, cultural, and structural obstacles that impede Black social mobility, critics from all sides of the political spectrum have misinterpreted, misread, and distorted the "acting white" hypothesis. In some cases, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, psychologists, educators, public intellectuals, and a vast array of journalists and everyday people have even debated whether acting White, or what Fordham calls "race as performance," exists at all and whether and how it functions as a deterrent to Black students' success (Fordham this issue).

Two factors have lead to the misinterpretation of Fordham and Ogbu's original hypothesis. The first is descriptive and has to do with the ways social scientists and journalists define the *burden of "acting white"* itself. For example, some researchers use the *burden of "acting white"* universally in reference to "blacks who use language or

ways of speaking; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engage in activities considered to be white cultural norms" (Tyson et al. 2005:583; see also Bergin and Cooks 2002; Neal-Barnett 2001; Perry 2002; Tatum 1997). However, other researchers have a more particular understanding of the *burden of "acting white,"* suggesting that it may vary by region, class, age, or even school (Bergin and Cooks 2002; Neal-Barnett 2001; Perry 2002; Tatum 1997).

Either way the problem is that by not constructing empirical models that capture the relationship between the universal and particular characteristics of the "burden of 'acting White' " researchers and journalist (often however not always) have failed to account for the contradictory formation of white racial power that enables its historical elasticity and contemporary formations (Wiegman 1999). As a result, even though the forms of racism are changing over time because of historical elasticity, so too should the operational definition of the *burden of "acting white"* change in some ways while remaining constant in others (Tyson et al. 2005). This lack of definitional clarity is one of the main reasons for contradictory findings of the pervasiveness of the "burden of 'acting White' " in the Black community.

The second factor leading to the misinterpretation of Fordham and Ogbu's "acting white" hypothesis is methodological. According to Fordham, "Economists such as Darity at North Carolina and Ferguson and Fryer at Harvard are actively seeking ways to quantify what it means to act White or to be perceived as acting White" (this issue). In particular, Fryer claims "by using network analysis, he discovered that when Black students' GPAs rise above 3.2 their popularity falls precipitously, a response not found among similarly situated White students" (Fordham this issue). Fryer, Darity, and other researchers who use quantitative large-scale surveys—even in conjunction with in-depth interviews—misinterpret the "burden of 'acting White,' " in part because some of these researchers have no real conceptualization of the power of autonomous, situational, microanthropological ethnographic analysis.

On the contrary, quantitative researchers—and some forms of qualitative research—are limited, at times, when it comes to making sense of cultural codes. With limited ethnographic experience in the Black community, many researchers substitute theoretical notions of "culture" to explain the everyday workings of Black urban communities. Some even make the mistake of confining the "burden of 'acting White' " to simply a school-based phenomenon, ignoring its relationship to historical and contemporary forms of racialized trauma (Pierre 2004). For instance, Tyson and colleagues conclude, "the burden of acting white cannot be attributed specifically to black culture. Rather, it appears to develop in some schools under certain conditions that seem to contribute to animosity between high- and low-achieving students within or between racial and socioeconomic groups" (2005:583).[4]

Unfortunately, researchers claiming that the "burden of 'acting White' " is a school-based phenomenon fail to understand that what happens outside of schools impacts what goes on inside of schools—in other words community forces matter. For example, what happens to young people when they get jumped on their way to school? What happens to young people's notions of sanity and insanity when they see their homies murdered right in front of them? What happens to young people's mind-set, their intellectual thoughts, when they see homicide victims lying in garbage dumpsters or empty parking lots sometimes rotting until the city decides to come "pick 'em up" like they're a piece of trash. What happens to the mind-set of

communities when they feel they can't call the police, because from their perspective the police do not serve and protect their community but, rather, harass and abuse some communities and serve and protect others? What happens to young people when they watch the nightly news and see "nameless black men, lying lifeless behind yellow tape, get carted away in body bags—images accompanied by statistics about the life expectancy of young black men . . . and a long pause" (Kelley 1994:353). These are the questions that Fordham is grappling with that a microanthropological approach can address and quantitative surveys, even in-depth interviews, can't necessarily get at. What Black communities/communities of color need (and white communities too) are researchers who care about the community, real people who want to work collaboratively with the community instead of continuing the age-old academic tradition of exploiting the shit out of it.

Some Fresh Critiques of Fordham and Ogbu

The "burden of 'acting White' " is an important concept; Fordham and Ogbu are powerful thinkers (Foley 2005). However, the "burden of 'acting White' " concept, as well as Fordham's article in this issue, do have some important flaws that are worth pointing out. Part of the problem is that Fordham and Ogbu collectively (as well as Fordham individually) fail to understand or take popular culture seriously. Allow me to explain.

When the concept of the "burden of 'acting White' " first appeared in 1986, hip-hop was in its so-called golden age, although you wouldn't know it from reading Fordham and Ogbu's "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White.' " This is not a major critique, but the point is that hip-hop was well on its way then, and is certainly now, the voice of youth culture (not just the voice but damn near the whole body). As such, hip-hop in the 21st century arguably evokes a postracial society and new forms of white innocence that in some ways change the meaning, complexity, and directionality of the "burden of 'acting White' " as a form of racialized performance. Key questions that future scholars interested in researching the "burden of 'acting White' " should ask are: If hip-hop is the "new multiculturalism," how has it impacted young peoples understanding of the "burden of 'acting White' " as a form of racialized performance? How have race traitoring, code switching, self-presentations, and what Fordham calls "identity-migrations" been impacted by white appropriations of both sociopolitical conscious hip-hop and more commercialized forms, and what impact does this have if any on educational achievement (Goffman 1959; Fordham 1996:14)?

Part of what Fordham and Ogbu miss, and the appropriation of the hip-hop aesthetic demonstrates, is that there is a difference between identity and identification (Chang 2006). Nowadays, White youth are "passing for Black" perhaps as much as Black youth are "acting white" (Fordham this issue). For a classic example read Adam Mansbach's *Angry Black White Boy* (2005). Such identity migrations where white youth distance themselves from white-supremacist practices and disavow the ongoing reformation of white power, on the one hand, while at the same time benefiting from white privilege, on the other hand—is part of what Howard Winant refers to as "white racial dualism" (1997:40).

What is interesting about this racial dualism is how white youth are able to identify or "act Black" in some social settings while retaining full access to their "possessive

investment in whiteness" in others (Lipsitz 1998). This is one of the central ways in which white supremacy has morphed into identity politics and speaks to the ways that the transformative and always changing multicultural space of hip-hop has simultaneously helped whites become widely represented and in tune to important racial narratives about social justice (as well as consumerism and commodification) while at the same time cloaking white supremacy in a new form of invisibility that aids its ability to aggressively solidify its privilege and advantage. Another way to say it is thugged-out white boyz or white girlz become bank managers and senators, whereas thugged-out Black youth/youth of color are targeted by police, schools, teachers, and counselors for the fast track to the prison-industrial complex.

With the rise of hip-hop in popular culture there appears to be an increasing trend whereby some white youth "act Black" or appropriate Black cultural and linguistic styles in their youth while "becoming white" as they get older. Part of the reason for this sociological phenomenon is that the racial tax or what Du Bois refers to as the "psychological wage" for "being Black" or hangin' out with Black folks who embody a "hood habitus" increases with age (Akom 2006:81). The shame in all this game is that there is genius in the hood—it is lovely to be Black, act Black, and think Black in a multiplicity of ways. Which leads to my final critiques of Fordham and Ogbu's 1986 article as well as Fordham's article in this issue, the most critically important of which include (1) both articles fail to demonstrate the ways in which Black people differentially make sense of and enact what it means to be Black that challenge previous binary or dichotomized accounts of Black oppositional social identity (in other words, Fordham and Ogbu tend to homogenize Black culture [see Akom 2008a]);[5] (2) both articles present an underdeveloped theory of action and vocabulary for agency, and as a result, posit the agency of Black people/people of color as an effect of their marginalized social positions, rather than as a result of their own "centeredness," "groundedness," and "self-determination" (Asante 1995; Nobles 2006).

In short, perhaps what is most disturbing about the "burden of 'acting White' " thesis is the ways in which white identity goes unproblematized as the correct identity to adopt or to aspire toward, whereas Black culture(s) are socially exoticized and characterized (at times) through atypical negative behaviors (Pierre 2004). For the record, academic and professional excellence, seeking and obtaining national office, and sitting in the front of the class or the front of the bus are not white standards; rather, Black people have developed indigenous theories of knowledge and philosophies of education that emphasized Black educational and employment excellence independent of any notions of oppositional cultural identity (Anderson 2008; Obenga 1995; T'shaka 2004).

The cumulative effect of each of these analytical missteps is that Fordham and Ogbu—like much of second-wave research—are unable to generate an antiracist, antipatriarchical, antisexist, antihomophobic, political project articulated from sites of Black cultural production. Here, we can learn from nonessentialist or "strategically essentialist" African-centered thinkers who suggest Black cultural production can be used as a vehicle for transference of Black diasporic culture and transcendence and transformative resistance of historic and contemporary formations of white supremacy (Akinyela 1995; Collins 2000; Danius et al. 1993; Pierre 2004).

In the end, second-wave critical whiteness studies tend to examine the role that white supremacy and "white identities play in framing and reworking racial catego-

ries, hierarchies and boundaries" (Twine and Gallagher 2008:5). However, in recent years a new wave of research has emerged that goes further by examining "how racial identities frame and are framed by nation, class, gender, and immigration" (Twine and Gallagher 2008:5). These new empirical studies not only examine whiteness and white identities but are often comparative and pose innovative questions that challenge existing historical and contemporary accounts of racial identity formation in at least two critical ways. First, they "begin to dismantle the popular trope of *Black people/people of color* as socially isolated, socially disorganized, and socially detached from the values of the so called 'mainstream' " (Gregory 1998:6, emphasis added). "Popularized in the mass media, this racialized discourse on *Black people/people of color* depoliticizes the problem of poverty and related social inequalities by locating their origins in the moral economy of isolated Black and Latino households, rather than in the political economy of the greater society" (Gregory 1998:6, emphasis added). Second, by focusing on agency, community assets, and political mobilization this new wave of research begins to challenge prevailing stereotypes depicting the poor as collectively weak, ineffective, and incapable of organization, planning, and sustained purposeful action. It is to this new wave of research that I now turn.
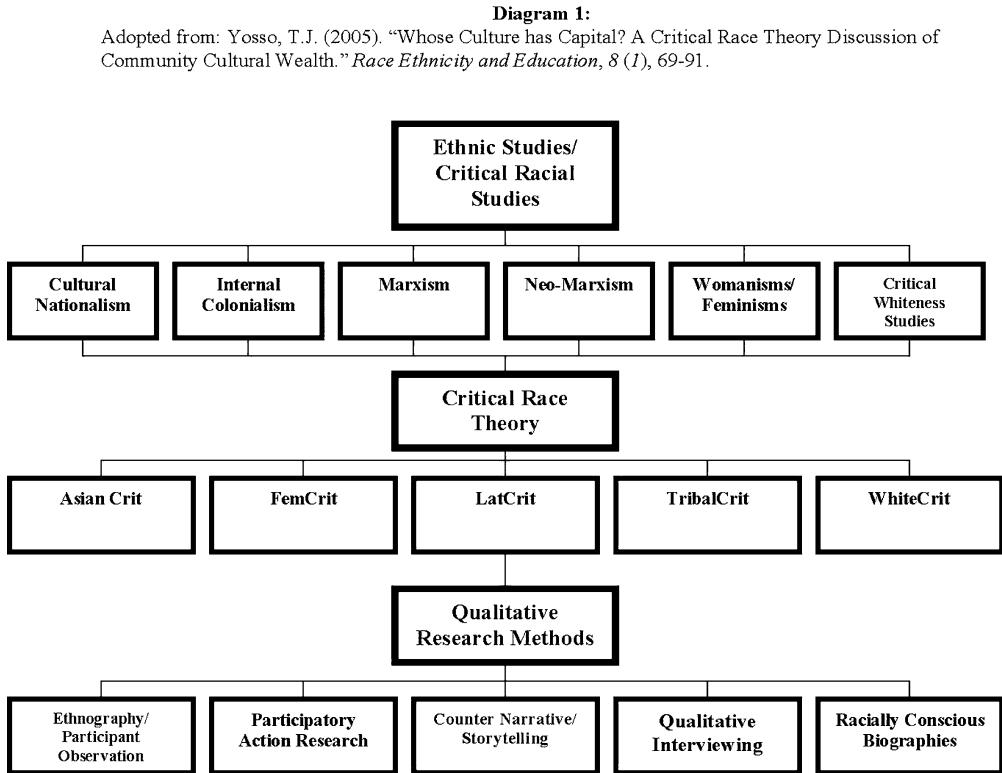
Toward a Third Wave of Critical Racial Studies and Critical Whiteness Studies

One of the goals of this article is to provide a preliminary chart of what Twine and Gallagher provisionally call a "third wave" in critical whiteness studies. Although I build and expand on Twine and Gallagher's previous work, my work is distinguishable from their work in several critical ways. First, in an effort not to reproduce the ideology that whiteness is somehow outside of critical racial studies or beyond race, I do not separate critical racial studies from critical whiteness studies. Rather, I see white folks as a race just like everybody else and I see whiteness studies as an outgrowth of critical racial studies or, more precisely, ethnic studies (see Figure 1).[6] Second, whereas in Twine and Gallagher's work three characteristics distinguish third-wave research form earlier studies, in the following model, which builds from Yosso and Solorzano's work (2002), five elements form the basic core.[7] Although none of these elements is new in and of themselves, collectively they represent a challenge to existing modes of scholarship (Yosso and Solorzano 2002:27). I briefly present the five elements below.

Intersectionality of Race and Racism with Other Forms of Oppression

A third-wave approach views race at the intersection of other forms of oppression such as class, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and special needs, by illustrating how these forms of oppression interlock creating a system of oppression (Collins 2000). Thus, informed by the intercentricity of racialized oppression third-wave studies challenge traditional claims toward objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, and neutrality and illustrate that traditional research methods often mask self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups (Solorzano 1997).

Figure 1.
This flowchart is adopted from a figure in Yosso 2005.

Diagram 1:
Adopted from: Yosso, T.J. (2005). "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth." *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8 (1)*, 69-91.

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                        Ethnic Studies/
                        Critical Racial
                            Studies

Cultural    Internal      Marxism    Neo-Marxism   Womanisms/   Critical
Nationalism Colonialism                            Feminisms    Whiteness
                                                                Studies

                         Critical Race
                            Theory

Asian Crit   FemCrit      LatCrit     TribalCrit   WhiteCrit

                         Qualitative
                       Research Methods

Ethnography/ Participatory  Counter Narrative/ Qualitative   Racially Conscious
Participant  Action Research Storytelling      Interviewing  Biographies
Observation
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Challenging Dominant Ideology

A third-wave perspective challenges traditional claims that institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equity while also offering a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Yosso and Solorzano 2002:26).

Innovative Research Methods: Including an Asset-Based Approach

In an effort to challenge traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color, a third-wave perspective seeks to expose "deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the experiences of people of color" (Yosso and Solorzano 2002:26) and instead focuses on an asset-building approach that views the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of Black people/people of color as a source of strength (Ginwright et al. 2006; Yosso and Solorzano 2002:26). In an effort to accomplish this goal, third-wave studies employ a variety of innovative research methodologies including (but not limited to) participatory action research (Akom 2008b; Torre and Fine 2006), racially

conscious autoethnographies or biographies (Knowles 2006; McKinney 2005; Twine 1999a, 1999b, 2004), music (Mann 2008), and video elicitation (Twine and Steinbugler 2006).

Critical Reflexivity

Critical reflexivity is characterized by the need to consider how various formulations of whiteness (as mobile class identification, as self-consciousness, as identity marker, and as the "new minority") are situated in relation to contemporary formulations of Black/people of color identity formation, politics, and knowledge construction. Critical reflexivity shifts the analytical lens away from European immigrants and begins to ask questions such as what is the meaning of whiteness in relation to Latina/o populations as it intersects with age, class, phenotype, color, region and generation in the United States (Twine and Gallagher 2008:14)? How is whiteness continuing to expand in the United States and beyond and incorporating "ethnics of multiracial, Asian, Mexicans and other Latinos of non-European heritage" (Twine and Gallagher 2008:14)? The goal of critical reflexivity is to decenter whiteness by examining it in relation to other racial identities in more nuanced and locally specific ways that emphasize the situational, relational, and historic contingencies that are reshaping and repositioning racially identities within the context of contested racial hierarchies (Essed 1991; Twine and Gallagher 2008).

Racial Elasticity

Racial elasticity is informed by the view that race is a social construction, a function of how particular racial groups are valued or devalued by society and that racism is characterized by historical elasticity and contemporary transformations. Specifically, racial elasticity encourages researchers to examine how cultural practices and discursive strategies are employed by white people, as well as people of color, as they struggle to reconstitute, support, and maintain forms of white supremacy. Reconstitution of whiteness, as well as how white supremacy is resisted, has been a central focus of third-wave studies (see Gallagher 1997, 2006; Knowles 2006; Nayak 2002; Weis 2004).

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to facilitate a dialogue between Africana studies and critical whiteness studies to map out new empirical approaches to the study of racial inequality and racial identity formation in the 21st century. Third-wave studies begin to answer this call by offering new ways to understand critical whiteness studies as a subset of critical racial studies. Part of the innovation of a third-wave methodological approach is that it "generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered" (Yosso and Solorzano 2002:36). Third-wave research distinguishes itself from earlier waves by challenging researchers to "develop theories of social transformation wherein knowledge is generated specifically for the purpose of addressing and ameliorating conditions of oppression, poverty or deprivation" (Lincoln 1993:33). The ultimate goal of third-wave analytical approaches is to transform established belief systems, open new windows

into reality that were previously invisible or systematically ignored, and to look toward "responses to racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in and outside of schools as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data" (Yosso and Solorzano 2002:37) that can help spark a social movement that generates new antiracist identities. As always, I am hopeful.

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Notes

1. Although it is not AAA style, I capitalize the word *Black* as both a stylistic and symbolic innovation to challenge historical power hierarchies.

2. Throughout this article, I use *Black people/people* (and its variants) of color fully aware of the complexities associated with racial identity. My reason for choosing to do this is not to suggest that the historical experience and social position of Americans whose ancestors were enslaved is the same as that of the descendents of immigrants who have suffered from exclusion and discrimination—because although there are important commonalities there are also important differences (see Fordham this issue). Rather, my goal is to begin to shift the conversation of race in the United States and beyond from one of solely race and racism toward racism, colorism, pigmentocracy, and other intersections of social difference in the context of global White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalist hegemony.

3. By *prophet of the hood,* I mean a person who works collaboratively with the community. In particular, working with the most marginalized members of a community (who are often young people), in an effort to build the capacity of communities of color and break systemic cycles of oppression and poverty.

4. I have a great deal of respect for the work of Karolyn Tyson and her colleagues. However, their article in the American Sociological Review (Tyson et al. 2005) relies heavily on interviews with middle school students (although they do include high school students as well). The problem with relying on middle school students is that the process of identity formation is a social construction, a "production," which is never complete and is always in process (Wexler 1992). As a result, young people's racialized, gendered, and sexually oriented performance pressure escalates in high school compared to middle school. When we view in this manner it becomes clear that Tyson and her colleagues slightly removed the "burden of 'acting White' " thesis from its original cultural and social context, which explains, in part, differential findings.

5. For example, one way that Fordham and Ogbu collectively, and Ogbu in particular, tend to homogenize Black culture is through the use of the concept of "collective identity." Ogbu defines collective identity as, "people's sense of who they are, their 'we-feeling' or 'belonging.' People express their collective identity with emblems or cultural symbols which reflect attitudes, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and language or dialect" (2004:3). Whereas in some situations I do agree with Ogbu's operational definition of collective identity, my research has shown that it is more accurate to speak of collective identities (see Akom 2003) with respect to the Black community that vary depending on age, religion, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, language, and so forth.

6. Acknowledging that white folks are a race just like everyone else is not ignoring white racial power. Rather, following Yosso, the diagram begins the important work of illuminating the ways in which white racial power reconstitutes itself in the color-blind era and how various formulations of whiteness (as mobile class identification, as self-consciousness, as identity marker, or as the "new minority") are situated in relation to contemporary formulations of Black/people of color identity formation, politics, and knowledge construction.

7. Of course there is overlap and fluidity within and between waves.

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