

Somebody is Lying to Me! **Antebellum Politics of Admiration in an Anti-Woke & Anti-Black Era**

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[Abstract] The election of former President Barack H. Obama allowed for the false ideology of post-racialism to become mainstream. Fast forwarding to 2016, many thought we were thrust backwards into time. The reality is that racism and anti-Blackness have been mainstays in the American fabric and remain a constant even when people pretend to be unaware of it. What we have learned is that racism is as essential to the United States as oxygen is to humanity. *If we truly reside in a time where we have surpassed race and racism, why are there are so many racists?* I am not referring to faux reverse racism or equating anti-racism or naming racism as racism. I am specifically referring to actual racism which is rooted in and maintained by whiteness as an American system. Bonilla-Silva (2010) once asked how it were possible to have such a high degree of racial inequality in America where most white people claim that race/racism is no longer a problem. *The answer?* Racism never left us, and it is waging war in every aspect of our democracy from education to politics and healthcare.

[Keywords] anti-Blackness, anti-racism, higher education, post-racialism

Somebody is Lying to Me!

Stephan James uttered these words in the series drama *Homecoming*. I find both humor and community within these five words. As a disruptor, critical race scholar, descendant of the enslaved, and as an African American, I am angry. Gaslighters will try to convince you that being angry distracts you from doing the work, I disagree. For me, being angry is what fuels me to keep going and to be fearless in my truth telling. Telling the oppressed not to be visibly angry or rage-filled is a core tenet of white supremacy. As we witness the constant attack on education, democracy, and healthcare for members of marginalized communities it is inadvisable to tell people not to be angry. We are living during a time where systemic inequality remains the standard and rejecting it is read as anti-patriotism. One of the most apparent aspects of this time is the ignorance of many Americans. Be it ignorance of choice or ignorance due to lack of awareness, it exists, and it is pervasive. States like Texas, Florida, Mississippi, and Tennessee are using anti-Blackness as a political mechanism to steamroll the oppressed into silence. Our educational systems are being overhauled and not to better them but for the sole purpose of whitewashing them.

First, They Came for K-12

When the anti-CRT and anti-woke movements began among white parents in white-run school districts, the response was lackluster. People shared their immature and at times violent behavior across social media networks, but it still did not do enough to prompt higher education to prepare. Many of my colleagues in the academy, who do not study higher education or are not scholars of critical race or social movements, did not see the disaster headed our way. As such,

many institutions did not heed the warnings or do what was necessary to prepare. White professors are now suing their employers or former employers for requiring that they be intentional about using diverse texts, inviting diverse speakers, and being anti-racist. They are suing for their ability to be discriminatory and racist. *Whew!* The issue with all of this is just as I have always called certain aspects of DEI in higher education—performative. It was performative because it always centered the feelings of those very same stakeholders and reduced the voices of the marginalized substantially all for the purpose of not offending whiteness. DEI has now been bulldozed out of institutions who actually needed marching orders to do and be better. Performative DEI is just as violent as the absence of it (Engram & Mayer, 2023).

Now They've Come for You!

Anti-Black racism does not have the ability to stop itself from causing harm. In fact, the only goal that anti-Black racism has is to eliminate Blackness from its line of sight. It is all of our responsibility to behead white supremacy, racism, whiteness, and anti-Black racism literally and figuratively. It is the only way for us to reimagine a world where our skin does not automatically criminalize us, shorten our life span, impoverish us, or intentionally under-educate us. This approach is the only brand of DEI that is acceptable to me.

For far too long we have operated in all aspects of education from K12 to higher education and within aspects of educational leadership with fear. *Fear of what or whom?* White retaliation and backlash are chiefly present whenever a white person is feeling skipped over, ignored, or challenged. What I do not understand is why this act of tyranny is okay with so many of you. We make do with presidential hopefuls arguing that police officers should have the right to have absolute immunity. While also calling ourselves a nation of law & order just as long as those who are ordered to engage with the law are not white, wealthy, cishetero, and racist.

Adult Education

As a professor, I am often surprised when I engage with adult learners who are completely unaware of how racism works. When working with undergraduates who recently left their parents' home and were a bit sheltered regarding the realities of race and racism this is to be expected. Working with adults who are careered professionals, faculty, and senior level administrators? *Not so much.* There certainly exists a learning gap regarding this necessary discourse but one has to inquire about the intent of a career higher education professional who has not intentionally engaged with DEI efforts at a minimum.

The concern is because the same adult learners who are unaware are also the adults' making decisions on college campuses regarding what the undergrads should learn or be exposed to. How can we expect someone who has not done their own unlearning and relearning to be the decision maker or deciding factor for the rest of us. Watching STEM colleagues push back on intentionally including diverse readings is offensive. Especially when Charles Drew, Henrietta Lacks, Katherine Jackson, Mae Jemison, Benjamin Banneker, and George Washington Carver are all key STEM figures and important to know. *Somebody is Lying to Me*, and they are also lying to you if you believe that their lacking effort is unintentional and not racially charged.

References

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