Making Monsters:
The Myths in Teaching About White Supremacy

Rasul A. Mowatt
Indiana University

Abstract: Instructors have critically sought ways to embody the theories and ideals espoused in radical texts and work to better force changes in the type of students we produce. What is presented here is an honest reflective dialogue, based on a reflexive critique of 17 years as a professor and the students I have encountered. But more importantly, this is also based on an equal set of years studying the aftereffects of White supremacy, the "candy wrapper" left on the ground at a campsite that informs someone was present, insinuates what may have been done, and eludes a sense of disregard while foreclosing any understanding of what it will go on to do next. Those candy wrappers are the "mild" subjects of the legacy of lynching, colonialism, and state-sanctioned violence. So, in the context of being a faculty member engaged with students, I pose a question to you, for us, from me: What if instead of "transgressing" White supremacy, we are in fact maintaining it? Many of us in higher education have come to an understanding that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is insufficient for college teaching and student learning to positively move forward through the 21st century. If we are to understand White supremacy not as a societal add-on that has corrupted the world around us but instead as the actual world around us, how do we properly contextualize this in a course or class? How do we foster experiences that deepen an understanding of a systemic reality? This essay challenges reductionist understandings of White supremacy as a matter of privilege that are reflected in DEI, culturally responsive teaching, dismantling, antiracist, invisible-knapsack-based approaches. Could it be that through this reduction we are instead producing "monsters"?

Keywords: decolonizing, dismantling, antiracism, diversity, DEI, critical pedagogy.

This is not a hopeful essay. There will be no promise or solution at its conclusion. This is me, being honest with you, offering a true critique of years in academia. But more importantly, this is based on an equal set of years (or more) studying the aftereffects of White supremacy, the "candy wrapper" it has left on the ground at a campsite that lets you know that it was there, that it did what it wanted to do and is now off to do some more elsewhere. Those candy wrappers were light things such as the legacy of lynching, colonialism, and state-sanctioned violence. So, in the context of being a faculty member engaged with students, I pose a question to you, for us, from me: What if instead of unpacking White privilege or "transgressing" to practice freedom, we are doing the opposite? What if instead of "dismantling" White supremacy or "decolonizing" our syllabi, we are in fact maintaining such realities and structures? And if what the realities of these question pose may be unpleasant truths, who are we producing as students?

Instruction has critically sought ways to embody the theories and ideals espoused in radical texts and work to better force changes in the type of students we produce. What is presented here is an honest reflective dialogue, based on a reflexive critique of 17 years as a professor and the students that I have encountered. Many of us in higher education have come to an understanding that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is insufficient for college teaching and student learning to positively move forward through the 21st century. Additionally, higher education is particularly facing criticisms by elected officials, boards of trustees, university presidents, parents, and some students for becoming so-called hotbeds of identity politics, "wokeness," cancel culture, social justice warriors, critical race theory, and ideology monsters. The criticisms leveled in this essay do not fall within those camps of

dominant ideological forces. Instead, the dialogue here is to suggest that our desire to tackle serious social issues in the form of trending ideas and concepts fails to grapple with the historical conditions that are truly associated with those ideas and concepts. So instead of making our classrooms more "just" and our students more "socially conscious," we instead produce monsters of a different sort. With a degree in hand and the knowledge gained from our classrooms, students become elites who will capture attention and resources from the very populations that those classes taught about. If we are to understand White supremacy not as a societal add-on that has corrupted the world around us but instead *as* the actual world around us (Ansley, 1997; Fields & Fields, 2012), how do we actually dismantle it within one small space? How do we properly contextualize this in a course or class? How do we foster experiences that deepen an understanding of a systemic reality (Freire, 2000)? This essay challenges, in particular, reductionist understandings of White supremacy as a matter of privilege that are reflected in approaches based on DEI, culturally responsive teaching (Matias, 2013), "dismantling" (Haynes, 2017), decolonizing (Asher, 2010), antiracism (Miller & Tanner, 2019), and "unpacking the invisible knapsack" (McIntosh, 1988). Could it be that through this reduction we are instead producing "monsters"?

Unpacking Transgressively Dismantled Antiracist Decolonization

Many of us mean well with our attempts to change our methods of instruction to be responsive to both our students and the times that we live in. Either because the content that is taught requires us to engage subject matter that focuses on race and racism or because the field and discipline that we teach from have never quite fully reckoned with their role in maintaining race and racism, we are compelled to scramble and look for tools to make the necessary adjustments. Certain ideas from scholars, concerned with pedagogy, have conceived of criticisms and approaches that in turn become trending concepts. Among many other concepts that could be added, the invisible knapsack (McIntosh, 1988), teaching to transgress (hooks, 1994), antiracism (made more prominently known by DiAngelo, 2018, and Kendi, 2019), and dismantling White privilege (Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000) each represent an idea or concept that has been latched onto and then likely started intended or unintended in-vogue trends. In addition, misreadings of Gurminder Bhambra, Della Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu's (2018) *Decolonizing the University* and even more so, Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as well as the uncited misuses of the ideas of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) *Decolonizing the Mind*, have also contributed to what is being challenged here.

In no way is this essay serving to be a detailed criticism of these works, but some of the mainstream ways that they have been read and then incorporated into the realm of pedagogy have core problematic issues. In hope of investing in our students the capacity and mission to be change agents in a fraught society, we have potentially latched onto ideas and concepts as well as recommended approaches to hopefully ensure the production of such students. Shifting from an instructor-centered to a student-centered approach to teaching was meant to be a way to amplify the student voice, perspective, and process of learning. This alternate tangible approach to teaching did less to emphasize the content and more to emphasize the ways that the students' themselves become their own teacher under the guidance of the instructor. Although texts such as Carl Rogers's (1983) *Freedom to Learn* (originally published in 1969) were noteworthy in illustrating how instructors could build core skills through specific practices, student-centered approaches were at the core of John Dewey's experiential learning model at the turn of the 20th century. Self-discovery was and still is key. Placing students in the role of researchers offered a chance to create such change agents from self-discovery, but across multiple years of the application of this approach (Fielding, 2001). As students come to understand themselves as leaners, more specifically, continuous learners, the skills they also develop the ability to manage the ambiguous encounters that come with life in general but the tackling

of injustices. As Dewey (1963) reflectively questioned, to "what avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his [or her] own soul." (p. 49) To know enough about one's self gives students the opportunity to navigate the unknown and uncertainty of facing those who produce injustice.
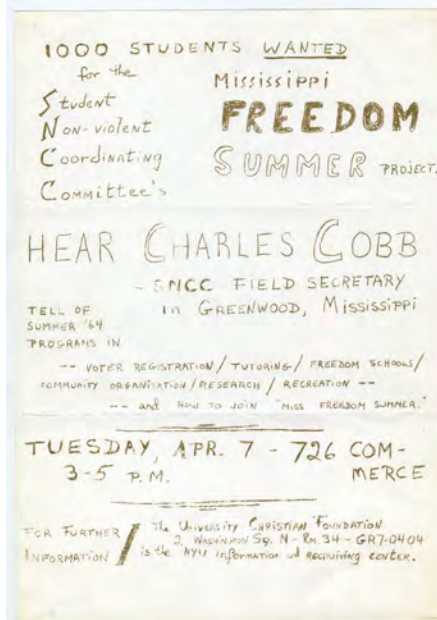

Figure 1. 1000 Students Wanted for the SNCC Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. The Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee recruitment poster. (Mississippi Department of Archives and History/Public Domain)

Amid the political realities of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and beyond, educators took this grounded approach and applied it to creating nonoppressive forms of education. Instructors sought ways to tangibly affect the world by stepping out of traditional classrooms and working with communities of people seeking to struggle free from the injustices they were experiencing. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was known for aiding in populations with high illiteracy rates through the translation of texts into pictures and creating free community classrooms for reading and reading comprehension (Ransby, 2003). Literacy was key not only for being able to read voting ballots but also for self-organizing as a class struggle against the issues that they were experiencing and yet did not have the evidence to prove were there. Labor relations, environmental racism, and land theft were just some of the issues that the now literate sharecroppers, domestic servants, and other members of the predominantly Black working underclass took on. Just as Ella Baker inspired such work in the Southern United States, Paulo Freire found himself in a similar role as he worked with the rural poor of Brazil. While he taught adults the basics of reading, they in turn taught him how colonized people could take this basic skill and apply it to waging struggle against oppressive regimes. They taught him how State forces work to dehumanize a population, to dispossess them. And they taught him how struggle and rebellion were the work of regaining one's dignity through self-determination.

But we, meaning college professors as instructors, ignored this context and took it to mean that learners should be seen as cocreators of knowledge. We rid ourselves of classroom rows of chairs with the instructor in the front and formed a circle with our students, all the while citing Freire (as if that was enough). But context is key, and what was done in the bush, the woods, and forest away from

the surveillance of the State cannot/should not be appropriated to a high school and college classroom. The work of the SNCC, Freire, and Walter Rodney in 1969's *The Groundings With My Brothers* was a particular type of *emancipatory education*. Emancipatory education for mass organizing against oppression should not be confused with emancipatory education to enlighten and transgress normative State thinking. As well, using such texts for activism in teach-ins and sociopolitical organizational trainings is radically different from using such texts as content in learning about a subject in a university. Again, context is key. The overlooking of the context here is an example of how we are not quite doing the work we think we are doing with our students in the education centers of the State. Even the important and noble work of applying *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) by cooperating with public health, nursing, and other allied health professional students' much-needed community programs still misses the point of fighting against oppression (Brouse et al., 2010; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988).

Community-based empowerment is not the same as liberation. Nor is discrimination a stand-in for oppression. There is no question that many of us who engage in the high-impact practices of field experiences, (community) project-based learning, and service learning do not even come close to the creation of temporary health clinics and screenings over the course of a semester; this work is still not quite the context that Freire was speaking from, about, and for. While this may successfully change a discriminatory policy that has enacted great harm on a community, this is not liberation from oppression. What is oppression? It is that thing, that lived condition that is produced by domination—authoritarian, undemocratic rule over people that subjugates them to a life of dispossession and extraction. This is why Freire later followed up *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, with the aid of his partner, Nita Freire, with the often-overlooked *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1996). For us, we then stumble on differentiating freedom from dispossession and extraction on the one hand from freedom from disrespect and lack of representation on the other.

The visceral realities of living under an imperial, totalitarian, or colonial state regime is so immense that one's identity becomes entangled with the needs of that state over one's own. The native becomes subject of empire. Thus, Indigenous populations wishing to end their oppression are placed in a position to take up anticolonial stances. This was what Frantz Fanon's (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, the book that inspired Freire, Rodney, and wa Thiong'o's works, among many others, served. The denial of educational opportunities and the making of a designated ethnic group into the lower classes that would be illiterate served a particular purpose in colonization in maintaining subjugation. But also, the provision of educational opportunities to designated members of an ethnic group of the native population also served a purpose by creating "middle managers" to corral the lower classes and implement the practices of subjugation. This was the creation of an elite with the aim capture (Táíwò, 2020). A liberatory anticolonial education would then counter both of these efforts to wage a successful struggle against colonial rule. Such a struggle would hasten decolonization, the "spectacular flight of capital" as corporate interests leave the former colonies after governments have acquiesced to independence (Fanon, 1963, p. 103). For us, while this struggle can be exceptional content for learning within the traditional classroom, the traditional classroom is not the site of that struggle.

The long work of decolonizing the former colony started first and foremost with mind. wa Thiong'o (1986) thus reflected on Fanon's work in this postcolonial reality and said that decolonization had to continue. He then declared his intention to no longer write literature in English but instead in his indigenous Gĩkũyũ, for:

> language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. (p. 16)

Even hooks (1994) took up wa Thiong'o's point (to some degree) in noting that, "standard English is not the speech of exile. It is the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues" (p. 168). But hooks's context is not wa Thiong'o's context. Language and writing are not the same, but there is an important relationship here that we Thiong'o is invoking. Language, the Indigenous language of the writer that has been resurrected from its colonial rule, contained the possibility of truly decolonizing the former colonial subject and the territory that they inhabited. Writing, therefore, in this case, was the necessary practice of not only keeping that language alive but returning life to colonialized.

wa Thiong'o's remarkable yet uncited work in the initial era of "decolonizing" "this" and "that" continues to further highlight that context is key. The incorporation of authors of color into a course and the alteration of a curriculum to have a greater representation of marginalized perspectives are important endeavors that should be employed, and why not? But they are not doing the work of decolonizing, especially of the (settler) colonial State that still exists. The academic rebranding of diversification into "decolonization" is troubling in its appropriation and obscuring of the political context of the concept. Asking ourselves in our classrooms how geography and authorship shape perspective still operates in the same society that is built on top of another society, and it does not return that land back to its original native custodians. As Tuck and Yang (2012) articulated as "settler moves to innocence," the appropriation of decolonization in this reductionist lens serves to "relieve the settler[s] of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power…without having to change much at all" (p. 10). Our missing the point inside the colonial seats of power that we are situated within also makes us ignore the ongoing challenges in former colonial States in their actual decolonizing work within the bounds of education (Bhambra et al., 2018; Kester et al., 2021; Mahabeer, 2020) while also avoiding the *academic extractivism* of forms of research in neocolonial universities of the former colonizing force (Bhambra et al., 2018; Cruz & Luke, 2020). By no means am I suggesting that the idea of "decolonizing" a curriculum, course, and syllabus are settled bad teaching from those instructors outside the United States, but I am saying that the context of colonialism, anticolonialism, and thus actual decolonialization in postcolonialism is lost to us in the common form of reductionist appropriation.

Decolonized Antiracist Dismantled Transgressive Unpackings

In the small space of higher education, colleges and universities cannot somehow be distinct from the society that they were birthed within, the cities that they are situated in, and the laws and resources that continuously make them viable institutions. Phillip Jackson's (1968) seminal (and criticized) text *Life in Classrooms* introduced the concept of the *hidden curriculums* that work to undermine the abilities and possibilities of students. But these hidden curriculums are still a part of the "seen" curriculum and cannot be severed. The notion of "dismantling" seems to allude to an idea that White supremacy is not a fundamental part of society but an insidious outside ideology that somehow taints higher education's mission and the various disciplines of study. As if through some improved non-White representation, redistributing the power dynamics would not mean a new set of actors would be engaging in the same life-threatening and not life-sustaining endeavors as the previous actors. This trending effort in "dismantling," however, was preceded by checking one's privilege in the classroom, White privilege most prominently.

Anyone who teaches about the inequalities in society is probably familiar with the challenging work of getting students to identify with the various oppressions that exist. It is often a source of dismay for students to learn that social locations/social class affects everyone. Typically, in teaching about social inequalities, we focus on those who fall on the less dominant side of each category. Inspired by McIntosh's (1988) article "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," instructors created

activities, assignments, and lectures devoted to McIntosh's list of 50 examples that showed aspects of racialized privilege. We thought that once they had read McIntosh's article, that they would be overwhelmed and start to become aware of the realities of privilege and oppression, and in our classroom and before our very eyes they would begin to unpack their own invisible knapsacks. Intended as simply a tool for self-reflection, particularly for the instructor, the article remains today a fixture in teacher trainings, resource guides, and sixth-generation crooked photocopies assigned as readings. But is our reality governed by privileges? The "knapsack" was to get us to understand a racial consciousness that is shaped and formed in society by White supremacy and that is often articulated as privilege. How one's Whiteness impedes one's teaching and how one's non-Whiteness restricts one's learning were the things to confront in the small classroom (Haynes, 2017). To be more culturally responsive teachers and to be on guard against how such efforts can be redirected away from their original intent (Matias, 2013) were the mere aims of the "unpacking."

But mass incarceration, precarity to selective State violence, and being a part of surplus populations are not matters of privilege. There is no knapsack that they can be stuffed into. White privilege as the primary concept in the teaching of racism confuses the purpose and scale of social issues. Further, teaching from a focus on race and not racism instinctively limits our concepts to individuals. McIntosh's (1988) goal in "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" may have been taken way further in explaining social issues in our classroom and contextualizing the reality that is actually existing. Remarkably relevant course activities such as walking field experiences that focus on environmental injustice can be reduced to the individualized White privileged actions of those in authority (Milstein & Griego, 2017). Although individuals in authority positions can discriminate, bad actors do not produce true oppression—only a State can. Once again context is key, but so is scope. White privilege cannot be a synonymous placeholder for White supremacy. And White privilege's literature and trainings, like its intellectual "child" antiracism, ignore the long history of race scholarship since the early 1800s. Any engagement with race and racism must consider those historical and theoretical contributions (Strmic-Pawl, 2014). The moral superiority of working on one's White privilege is a caution (Margolin, 2015), but so is the moral superiority in taking on the abuse of criticism of that privilege as antiracist work (Di Angelo, 2018). And this work is not for institutional structures or the State but is the work of the individual through repeated workshopping and trainings (Kendi, 2019). All the while, White supremacy continues to move forward.

But what actually is White supremacy? Is it just the years of gross misconduct that allowed racial discrimination to thrive in the sum total of all employment, housing, and other such opportunities? This seems like a form of reductionism being integrated into the vast amount of scholarship on White supremacy. Is it just racism, the systemic antagonism of so-called and so-deemed inferior racialized populations? And this seems far too insufficient, for if White supremacy is merely racism, why give it a new name? In particular through the years of studying racial violence, I have always taken White supremacy to mean the "political, economic and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, [and] conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread" (Ansley, 1997, p. 592). But even more critical attempts at addressing shortcomings in antiracist instruction still fall into the trap of individual behaviors and the "problems of White people's" racialization that is in the way of a better learning environment, much less world (Miller & Tanner, 2019). White supremacy, then, is still something that is somehow learned from family as opposed to being a socially constructed system of the State for the purpose of organizing, relegating, and extracting labor (see Du Bois's 1897 seminal work "The Conservation of Races"; DuBois, 2006). White Supremacy is merely comprised of bad teachers, bad students, and bad actors.

A system alludes to more than a series of "evil" actors denying academic employment. A system alludes to a self-generating culture that both produces the "right" people to always to do the

"right" thing and ensures that even the "wrong" people will always do the "right" thing to maintain the system. We envision a racialized White group of people that controls and receives entitlements, but we would be remiss in not recognizing that racialization is simply a process and not a natural fact. Race or racialization creates a system to better manage salary differentials, promotional disparities, and occupational segregation in both academic and administrative roles because resources are finite, not because of some "skin stigma." White supremacy should push us to see that White is a thing to be done, and not a group of people that are. The division and access to resources, the seats of decision making for that division and access, and the education to understand one's role in that process is doing *White*, which is beyond the sole workings of people racialized as White. But when we peer through the veil, we will see a host (through history, in many more cases than usual) of people from a swath of racialized identities servicing the division, sitting in those seats, and perpetuating that particular type of education of others—another capturing by a new elite (Táíwò, 2020). As Baldwin (1970) noted, "[racialization] color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality" (p. 70).

Further by extension looking at state-sanctioned violence, the "relations of White dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (Ansley, 1997, p. 592). So, it is not enough to exist as a racially designated White "being"; White or Whiteness is fundamentally about domination and subordination. White supremacy is a cultural value that places these two realities as paramount for society. Someone must dominate and someone must be dominated. Without the apparatus of racialization, racism would not be as successful as a system within White supremacy (the basis for *racecraft* according to Fields & Fields, 2012). This is why seeing racial discrimination as synonymous with White supremacy is an act of reductionism and seeing racism as White supremacy is insufficient. Either view captures only one contributing process in an array of processes. Ironically, McIntosh (1988) ended her seminal essay with "What will we do with such knowledge?" (p. 19). But the vagueness in "unpack" and "antiracing" never fundamentally deals with the context of material conditions of our students in the state institutions of higher educations or community members we encounter through course partnerships. The idea of "dismantling" seems never to be clear on how to do so, even if it is not fundamentally clear if it is something we should be focusing on in our pedagogical practice, not because the social issues that necessitate "dismantling" are not important, but because our classrooms are not the spaces for finding such a focus and acting upon it. No, if we truly understand White supremacy then we must face the honest fact that it cannot be dismantled in one classroom in one semester nor in one hundred classrooms over hundreds of semesters. In many ways, our adventure into these ideas and concepts that stem from a student-centered approach have reverted to a teacher-centered approach disguised as student centered. We have ultimately abandoned asking, "what are the learning needs of our students?" and we turned our attention to "what do I want my students to do?"

Returning to Critical Pedagogy

The dialectic between theory and practice involves the dialogue between student and teacher, a real dialogue. What is our relationship to the world around us and how do we critically and consciously come to understand that relationship? And what is our awareness of ourselves in the context and condition of being a human in that world? The dialogue that comes from these two questions sets into motion the tools, postclass and beyond the class, for how to change it. But instead, our current focus seems to place within the class the work to change that world, for a grade, for a reading, for an assignment. And so, such reductionism of White supremacy within higher education results in a discourse of "dismantling" that could falsely create lines of thinking among students that the acts they engage in, the words that they craft, and the ideas that they formulate can somehow scare away the "monster" in the bell tower, or topple the very tower, itself. White supremacy is not a separate tower

among the other towers on a campus. Antiracism is not really attacking racism. It is instead "fighting" the feint of race that only results in any of our racialized selves becoming more comfortable on a college campus that still pays low wages to its unseen workers in the kitchens, among the pipes, and near the massive machines that wash the endless yards of linens and sheets for banquets, soirees. "Decolonizing" is absent of colonized countries and peoples. We cannot dismantle that. It is an empty cause that actually creates a net of "racially diverse" neocolonial social media influencers who personally benefit from the self-branding exercises of syllabi construction bereft of actual care of and action regarding off-campus residential displacement, the construction of substandard student housing, and general student and staff homelessness. The "monsters" we create vie for fights for media representation during moments of state-sanctioned violence. Since they have no reference point for the material conditions (or, to eliminate those conditions) of those most affected by the social issues that they have learned, they capture these moments for individual gains, and this is *elite capture* (Táíwò, 2020). In our zeal to "dismantle" we may be in fact assembling newer forms of White supremacy. Although Frankenstein's monster represented the rewards of knowledge to Frankenstein, to the reader the monster is presented as a representation of the doubts of those rewards of knowledge. Now some readings of Shelley's *Frankenstein* have depicted the monster as being a force to shake up the status quo established by elites (Halberstam, 1995), but other readings do acknowledge that ultimately the titular character's monster wreaked havoc upon all, as the monster never was a champion for the poor and suffering (Sterrenburg, 1979). This makes me at least ponder that what is created can be in our image, but do we have a complete and honest sense of our "social justice-ly inclined" selves? Ultimately, what is created can wreak havoc on the world we unleash our creations upon. And just as the monster of the Frankenstein mythos has come to reflect its creator, so too can the "monsters" we create serve as a metaphor for us as teachers.

What is our purpose then if we cannot "unpack," "dismantle," or "decolonize"? hooks (1994) stated clearly that academia should be "a place of challenge, dialectical interchange, and growth" (p. 165). Our charge as faculty engaged in teaching and research on pedagogy is to counter the new illiteracy, which according to Henry Giroux (2011), is more about "learning how not to read the world" (p. 87), by assisting our students in their process of "unlearning those modes of learning that internalize modes of ignorance based on the concerted refusal to know, be self-reflective and act with principled dignity" (Giroux, 2011, p. 87). The classroom of the university is particularly where students enter an interactive space with the instructor in order to articulate in their work Giroux's "language of critique" alongside a "language of possibility" (Giroux, 1988). What is the learning outcome for such dismantling? Do we incentivize (with an A) or penalize (with a F) students in their struggle or resistance to learning in this type of an environment? Does an intensive writing assignment or in-class presentation even suffice as a marker or assessment to decolonizing? The ability to be free in one's— for lack of a better term—stupidity may create just the right opportunity to push a student to dig deeper. Students need an outlet to discuss this newfound knowledge, and we can give them one. This work is difficult enough to pursue in a group, but alone, it may feel nearly impossible.

Why consider a return to a focus and use of just plain old critical pedagogy? Giroux (2004) opined:

> One of the central tasks of any viable critical pedagogy would be to make visible alternative models of radical democratic relations in a wide variety of sites. These spaces can make the pedagogical more political by raising fundamental questions such as: What is the relationship between social justice and the distribution of public resources and goods? What are the conditions, knowledge and skills that are a prerequisite for political agency and social change? (p. 34)

Educating students about White supremacy is not "dismantling" if that is central to the focus of the class or is somehow incredibly useful in delivering the content in a way that can create a space for thought. To teach and to learn about the social construction of various processes of domination and subordination require a great degree of avoidance of dogma and hegemony of a new type that limit our understanding of social realities (Carrim, 2017). But as it has been alluded across various publications, much of the discussion and use of these ideas and concepts lacks the centering of conceptual context or the expansiveness in scope. It is a tall order to take this on and requires a command and knowledge of the content of that context and scope.

The philosophical foundation of "unpacking the invisible knapsack of White privilege," transgressive teaching, "dismantling White supremacy," antiracist teaching, and "decolonizing the curriculum" has been at question in this reflexive essay. Can a course or series of courses fully define oppression in order to end it? No. Can this even be the function of a traditional course in a university or high school setting? Likely not. How do these conceptual endeavors actually take away from the type of theoretical learning and praxis-based action that is necessary for these ideas? What students will do with this knowledge beyond the classroom is up to them. So why abandon "simple" critical pedagogy? Is it really insufficient if "we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we're automatically challenging the way power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalized space" (hooks, 1994, pp. 136–137)?

Is the creation of semester-long health clinics, engagement in pro bono legal work on cases, Inside-Out prison exchange programs, and disaster relief, adoption of Reacting to the Past pedagogy, development of science, technology, engineering, and math learning communities between college and high students, and many other innovative learning approaches and activities insufficient? Do they need to be contextualized in reductionist ideas and concepts that do not consider historical conditions? What role can we play in guiding and "forcing" students to be more critical in their reading of all information?

What if instead of preparing a new set of social agents to change reality for the better, we are preparing new "monsters" to fill those towers with new skills and tools that only succeed in fortifying that tower with better bricks and mortar? As a location of possibility, what if we returned to just critical pedagogy? These new "monsters" come to serve as a metaphor for our personal political beliefs rather than students who reflect their own growth and development as people with souls. And with this perspective, this essay is merely a humble attempt to force ourselves to confront the innate desire of producing individuals rather than instilling students with the hunger that comes from an environment that emphasizes teaching to learn, because monsters "are things that should not be, but nevertheless are—and their existence raises vexing questions about humanity's understanding of and place in the universe" (Weinstock, 2014, p. 1). The words, concepts, and theories of transgressing, unpacking, dismantling, and decolonizing become words deprived of any degree of action, while the idea of action brought forward in the classroom, that makes use of those words, is absent of serious reflection. And this brings a link to the technical meaning of the word activism, action for only action's sake and action in absence of theory. This absence is much like the original 1818 publication of Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which the actual process that created the monster is never depicted or explained (Baldick, 1987).

"The" White supremacy of higher education is not special, nor are we special in its towers. In our academic vocations, we cannot be so pompous as to think what exists on campus does not exist in the warehouses of shipping companies, factory floors, steel mills, public school classrooms, hospital beds, dock ports, and prison cells. And in our academic vocations, we have to operate with humility, understanding that the material reality of those who must live, work, dwell, and die in it is not something to be appropriated onto a syllabus, in a classroom, throughout a curriculum, and within an entire university. A kind of change is an insufficient response to the actual change that must occur. A

basic aim in academia should be becoming "good" teachers, "good" administrators who attend to our responsibilities responsibly. In this day and age, just answering emails and responding to students has become almost "revolutionary." To teach a class on time, all the time, with a syllabus before the first class has become "liberating." They are not either, but they illustrate things that are missing. On our watch, they are the absence of a negative; they are a good moment. A broader struggle has to go on beyond the limited scope of academia. And this is the most fundamentally and terrifyingly significant challenge that students must face not as students but as a people within the State.

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