Anti-racist Mentoring:

For White Faculty Who Want to Engage in Black Mentorship

Timothy J. Lensmire

Univeristy of Minnesota

and

Brian D. Lozenski

Macalester College

To appear in B. Butler, A. Farinde-Wu, & M. Winchell (Eds.), *What White Faculty Need to Know to Recruit, Retain and Sustain Black College Students*

Abstract

Written as a dialogue, this chapter is grounded in Lozenski and Lensmire's recognition of the anti-black machinery of the university that, among other things, always already positions black students in a space of precarious reliance on the mentor for access to the racialized cultural and intellectual norms of higher education. Drawing on their own mentoring relationship, the chapter challenges individualistic notions of mentorship and trust, as well as goals of access and survival. The authors emphasize the intersectional quality of anti-oppressive action in order to put forward a conception of black mentorship.

Dear Brian,

I hope you are well.

I am glad that we decided to write this chapter as a dialogue. I think this form will enable us to express not only commitments and concerns that we share, but also to express different perspectives and strengths that we bring to the topic of anti-racist mentoring. I am excited to reflect on anti-racist mentoring with you, both because I have, in the past, acted as a mentor to you (while you were pursuing your doctorate) and because you have made working with and supporting black youth and students the center of your scholarship and teaching and activism in the community. In other words, I am an old white guy and you are a (relatively) young black man, we have worked and learned together, we are dedicated to anti-racism and anti-capitalism, and we both think and worry quite a bit about how we are moving among and impacting the people around us.

I thought I would start with two stories that we can then interpret and draw some morals from. The first is maybe less a story and more just a moment. It was fairly early in our relationship and we were walking together to get lunch in Dinkytown, near the University of Minnesota. I remember saying that I could help you with certain critical traditions, but not others. I said that you would need to connect with others on campus—I mentioned Rose Brewer, I think, in our university's African American and African Studies department—to further your grounding in the black intellectual tradition.

The second story takes place later, perhaps in the second year of your program. You had been doing a fair amount of study and writing with two other Ph.D. students, Shannon McManimon and Zac Casey. Being the clever (and old) person that I am, I wrote an email to the three of you and said that you should call yourselves the Mod Squad, after the TV show from the

late 60s and early 70s. That show featured three hip undercover police officers solving crimes—and the lame joke I was making was, of course, that the racial and gender identities of those three hip characters matched those of you and Shannon and Zac—a black man, a white woman, and a white man. A less-lame joke was that the three TV characters "represented mainstream society's chief fears involving youth in the 1960s" (Baugess & DeBolt, p. 629)—so I was also complimenting, if obliquely, the critical and oppositional positions that the three of you were staking out in your work.

Minutes after I sent that email (maybe it was only seconds later), I received an email response from you, Brian, with an attached photo from The Mod Squad TV series. Along with the three main characters, that photo featured a fourth character from the series that I had forgotten about—the police captain in charge of the Mod Squad. Your email said something like, "If we're the Mod Squad, then I guess you are that old white police captain."

If I were to draw some morals from these stories, especially for white professors mentoring black students, the first would be that white professors need to have an honest sense of themselves and recognize limits to their own knowledge and networks. I encouraged you to connect with black professors and their knowledges despite the fact that my own work on race in education is grounded in a Du Boisian tradition of theorizing whiteness and draws on Ralph Ellison's writings on how white racial identities are grounded in scapegoating rituals and on the Reverend Thandeka's psychoanalytic and historical account of how white people learn to be white.

A second moral, drawn from across both stories, would be that we need to challenge the image of mentoring as an isolated and individualistic activity. Too often mentoring is imagined as a private interaction, behind a closed office door, between the knowing mentor and the

unknowing mentee (is 'mentee' even a real word?). The first story points to my knowing that mentoring would require a larger community of scholars who knew and who had experienced things that I didn't and hadn't. The second story suggests that my mentoring of you would include the ways that I tried to support Shannon, Zac and you in your collective study and writing.

The final moral I will draw, for now, has to do with humor and laughter. Our relationship has, from early on, involved teasing and trying to make each other laugh. In previous scholarship, I have explored the importance of humor for challenging dominant ideas and for creating alternatives (see, for example, Lensmire, 2011). An important part of my mentoring, I think, is that we laugh with each other.

What do you think, Brian?

Peace.

Tim

_____

Dear Tim,

Thank you for starting us off on this project. I'm also excited to write this chapter as a dialogue. It provides a unique and probably more appropriate medium for us to consider the complex terrain of interracial mentorship. As with all things dealing with race, there exists some absurdity that we even need to derive meaning from this notion of 'interracial mentorship,' as though it is a natural fact of the academy. I guess an initial consideration, that I always have to remind myself of, is that these racialized relationships are still created and maintained for the purpose of social stratification. The premise of this entire book and our chapter, which we cannot

lose track of, is that the construction of the white mentor and the mentee of color is based on the accumulation of historical practices, political decisions, attitudes, and the distribution of economic and intellectual resources. If we are not paying attention to the structures that continue to reify these social, political, and economic arrangements, then whatever interpersonal meaning we make from our own experiences together will be moot because the onus will be on individuals or dyads to solve the problems that are much larger than us. Perhaps this does not need to be said, yet, in my experience it is an assumption that I cannot make. So, in our writing I will try to do some shunting from the micro elements of our fun, loving, and supportive mentoring relationship to the macro university context that necessitated our navigation of an institution based in supremacist notions of social hierarchy, erasure, and credentializing, about which you, as a white faculty, were supposed to have some insight.

I prefaced my response to the important stories you retold because I don't want to get caught in the circle of access and opportunity. Success in the academy is not merely a navigational issue. Like Bettina Love (2019) argues in her book *We Want To Do More Than Survive*, we must stop the focus on giving strategies and tactics necessary to merely survive the academy and start eliminating the policies and practices that necessitate these survival tactics. This is one of the presuppositions to mentorship; that the white mentor is already actively working against the anti-black machinery in the university as an ongoing project. This could be questioning the mechanisms for tenure that discriminate against POCs, critiquing curricula and exposing the gaps that leave out particular traditions and theories, or it could be advocating for additional resources to try to address racialized wealth gaps faced by students, among lots of other examples.

AND, at the same time there are some very real and practical things that mentors of students of color can do to help them survive the immediate stressors they may face on a daily basis. Certainly, and this may be ironic given my overly long preface, we can't put the weight of social transformation in the academy on the backs of students, although they are most subject to its detrimental impacts. Sometimes just helping people live a somewhat carefree college life is the most immediate need. Reflecting on the two stories you shared can illustrate my point.

I remember talking with you in Dinkytown early in my grad school career. We were just talking about our lives, how we arrived in this place together, and where our interests intersected. I remember discussing my undergraduate experience where I minored in Africana studies, which greatly impacted how I understood my educational endeavors. You immediately recommended I take classes in the African & African American Studies Department, specifically naming Rose Brewer as a "must experience" faculty. To this day, Rose and I are wonderful colleagues, doing educational justice work and trying to expand ethnic studies offerings in Minnesota schools, Pre-K through Ph.D. Your suggestion that "white professors need to have an honest sense of themselves and recognize limits to their own knowledge and networks" resonates with me. No one can be expected to know ALL of the intellectual traditions, although whiteness as a construct suggests that white faculty do. Your point that white faculty knowledge is not total critiques this construct. So, yes, white mentors need to interrogate their own traditions, recognizing that they are often steeped in histories of white dominance. Part of being a good mentor is connecting their mentees of color with faculty of color, but more specifically faculty of color situated in critical traditions. It was not the fact of Dr. Brewer's race that was of most importance; rather, it was her capacity to socialize me further into the black radical tradition and black feminism specifically.

Allow me to back out to a structural critique now. I was lucky that you, as a mentor, were well versed in certain aspects of the black radical tradition. The vast majority of white faculty are not. Having the African American and African Studies Department (AFRO) as part of the University of Minnesota is critical. I'd argue that AFRO is the conscience of the University, reminding it of its imperfection (Brewer, 2019). And yet, AFRO is somewhat ghettoized on campus in terms of its isolation. It is an under-resourced department. It is precarious, constantly having to justify its survival. The necessity of you recommending I take classes in AFRO speaks to the absent narratives and erased histories in our home department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I). Other than in your classes, I was not able to access the black radical tradition in C&I. This illustrates my point that our interracial mentoring relationship also can potentially do the work of masking the broader structural issues on campus.

Before I got to know you as a mentor, I saw how you were operating at the university. You were willing to risk your status and popularity among the faculty and specifically with the deans for racial justice. You were willing to call out certain practices that were detrimental to students like me, and you realized that the curriculum in C&I was lacking. I believe this is why you told me to seek out classes in other departments like AFRO. You were engaged in a serious interrogation of whiteness in your scholarship and also at the institution. All of this predated our mentoring relationship, and I believe it laid the necessary foundation for it. I knew you were someone who I could trust to even come to with issues dealing with race that I may have only felt comfortable coming to faculty of color with. I don't think it's a stretch to say that as a recommendation any white faculty who is interested in mentoring black students must be a critical whiteness scholar, even if that is not the focus of their scholarship. If white faculty don't

have a sense of how they became *white faculty* then they will most likely be offering survival tactics as the end game and not as a means to a race abolitionist end.

My sense is that the interrogation of whiteness and knowing one's limitations as a white mentor is directly connected to the second story you shared. The Mod Squad label stuck with Shannon, Zac, and me for our doctoral careers. I remember finding it hilarious the first time you mentioned it because it was so ridiculous that our independent study on Marxism was being paralleled with a group of undercover police (I'm still chuckling as I write this). I've always appreciated your Bahktinian analysis of education. Perhaps you can elaborate more on the meat of your analysis, but on a psychological level it allowed us (the Mod Squad) to engage with our material in a space of silliness and mockery. Although we were reading the Frankfurt School, Bourdieu, and Althusser, we were having fun with the theorizing. It seems to me that this play is an under-theorized aspect of intentional, serious study. This play allowed us to strip down the airs the academy puts on, making these complex texts more accessible.

I also wonder how I would have responded to other faculty, who were not doing the work of interrogating whiteness, referring to us as the Mod Squad. I remember that the name even evoked some eye rolls from other faculty who got the joke, but missed the direction of the mockery. I don't think I would have taken the racial reference to the Mod Squad well from a mentor who was not interrogating their whiteness and trying to get smarter about race. It's not a far jump, then, to suggest that if white faculty are getting smarter about their racialization then they can also help black students get smarter about their racialization. I think this connects to your point about laughter. The idea of race is so absurd that sometimes you need to laugh to keep from crying about it. When we venerate race and place it on a pedestal it becomes this overwhelming concept. You somehow found a way to mock race in a way that it's deserving of.

But this mockery came with a deep understanding of racialism and white supremacy. It all goes together. There are white mentors who don't want to talk about race because they are afraid of their black mentees and making a mistake. Fear cannot be part of a healthy mentoring relationship. The fact is that black people still need to interrogate race. Living as a negatively racialized person is not sufficient to understand race. You can know race as a POC and not understand it. The interracial mentoring relationship provides a unique instance for two people to work through the tensions of race and the depths of racism.

Another story that comes to mind is from a conversation we had in your office. I remember that I was struggling with the nature of my dissertation and feeling pressure to move away from the marginalized methodology of participatory action research. You asked me questions about why I was feeling pressure and pushed me to think about my larger purpose in the academy. I remember leaving your office feeling empowered to make my dissertation what I wanted it to be. I think the word 'permission' is problematic in this context, but I do feel as though you gave me permission or perhaps just support in doing a study that was a bit different. Connecting back to the idea of laughter and mockery, I feel like there was also a permission given to engage with the academy in ways that were less formal. Again, this is a critique of whiteness, where the performance of formality is based in a subjectivity of hierarchy and normality. I'm wondering what you think about this idea of permission; not in its restrictive sense of needing to ask to be able to do something, but in a more freeing sense of breaking the norms of formality and power that often mediate mentorship.

In solidarity,

Brian

_____

Dear Brian,

As usual, I am blown away by your intellectual, moral, and political clarity. Your reminders and explanations of how, when discussing our experiences with mentoring, we cannot forget about the "structures that continue to reify these social, political, and economic arrangements," are crucial for this chapter. They are crucial, especially, if we reject the idea that access and survival exhaust our goals for mentoring relationships. Instead, as you make plain, these relationships are part of and need to be pursued, with intention, in relation to the larger ongoing project of "actively working against the anti-black machinery" that characterizes our colleges and universities.

Your brilliance, throughout the above, performs another crucial point about mentoring that I hope potential mentors will find reassuring: that good things can happen even in situations, as in ours, where the *mentee* is clearly more intelligent and talented than the *mentor*. (I know that 'mentee' is a real, actual word, and I promise, in the rest of the chapter, not to comment on this again—but I must say that I dislike the word 'mentee' and wish it were not so convenient to use with 'mentor.' Unfortunately, my dislike of the word is not grounded in anything profound. Rather, the sound of 'mentee' conjures 'manatee' for me, and this is simply not helpful when trying to think deeply about anti-racist mentoring.)

In order to discuss your questions about permission-giving in relation to your dissertation research, I need to first attend to something you said earlier, about trust. Often, trust is imagined as developing, as being created, within the space and time of a relationship. But you pointed to something different, to knowing ahead of time, before we got to know each other, that you could

talk with me about things racist and racial; and that you knew this because you had been watching how I was "operating at the university." Similar to how we've argued that mentoring should not be conceptualized without reference to larger structures and to other people, here you are expanding the mentoring relationship to include what happens before that relationship even begins. In this case, what this means is that our mentoring relationship might never have happened or have been successful if I had not already, before we met, been fighting the anti-black machinery of our university. This suggests a different sort of test or criterion than is usually applied for determining the fitness of a white professor for mentoring black students.

It also raises the question of why or how I came to be "operating" the way that I was. You noted that I was "well versed in certain aspects of the black radical tradition" and that I was "engaged in a serious interrogation of whiteness" in my scholarship and at our institution. I have tried, in previous writing and in various ways, to make sense of how I came to be living the particular life I am living as a scholar and professor. For the purposes of this chapter, I will point to three aspects of my past that contributed significantly to how I was "operating" when you came to study in our C&I department.

The first is that, from kindergarten on, I hated school. (Yes, my children and other loved ones tease me regularly about how silly I am, to hate school and then decide to work in schools for the rest of my life.) The immediate occasion of my hatred was the tight control schools attempted to exert over my body and its movements. Later, as I studied education and varied critical traditions, and as I reflected on and tried to make sense of this hatred, I came to interpret it as grounded in the fact of my working-class upbringing in rural Wisconsin. In an early, autoethnographic chapter of my most recent book, I described

> The struggle that has defined my life in school, all the way from elementary through graduate school, and on into my life as a professor. I was struggling with the offer, made by school, to join the middle class. I was struggling with its demand that I remake (or at least hide) my working-class insides. (Lensmire, 2017, p. 17)

An experience (actually, a series of experiences) I had when I was an assistant professor at Washington University in St. Louis is a second crucial contributor to how I have come to orient myself toward and move within the university. During my third year there, in the early 1990s, my friend and colleague, Lauren Sosniak, brought a gender discrimination case against the university after it denied her tenure. There was no question Lauren deserved tenure (her case was ridiculously strong) and I was persuaded that gender discrimination was at play. Soon enough, I found myself preparing to testify against the (all male) tenured faculty in our small education department—men who would be considering and voting on my own tenure case in a few years.

The third and final circumstance that I will point to also occurred while I lived in St. Louis. I had black mentors. The most important were Emmanuel Harris II ('Manny' to his family and friends) and Garrett Duncan. Manny and Garrett were not official, institutional mentors—Manny was pursuing his Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literatures and Garrett joined the education department as an assistant professor a few years after me. They were friends. But they were also mentors. Both engaged me in long conversations about how race and racism worked in the United States. Both gave me books (and then more books) to read. With Manny, I also played basketball three or four or five times a week, and when we played on the outdoor courts in St. Louis, I was usually the only white person around. So that meant I was learning about what it meant to be a white man among black men, as I tried to coordinate the

movements of my white body in close relation to black bodies. Garrett is, among other things, a Freirean scholar, so he tutored me in Freire's work and helped me connect it to the black radical tradition in which he was also grounded.

I will draw two conclusions from these narrations of my past. First, I was never comfortable (and remain uncomfortable) in schools, including the university. Much of this discomfort springs from the control these institutions have attempted to wield, not just of my body's behaviors and movements, but also of my insides, my head, my heart. Second, I do not trust these institutions. I know that—sometimes dramatically, sometimes quietly, but always continuously—bad things happen in our places of work. For the last two decades or so, I have focused my scholarship and action on understanding and opposing how race and racism play out in classrooms and schools and universities, with particular attention to whiteness and white racial identity.

My response to the discomfort and lack of trust inspired in me by the university—my way of "operating" there—has included not only criticism and opposition, but also play and laughter. I learned to laugh in rural Wisconsin, from my dad, John Lensmire, who laughs loudly. My dad is also often heard singing tunes from the Great American Songbook, except that he makes up his own lyrics (which are, sometimes, just a wee bit off-color). I do this, too, so, naturally, at the small gathering we held for Lauren after the university admitted its wrong-doing and gave her a lot (a lot) of money—they wouldn't, of course, agree to the one and only thing she actually wanted, which was to be a tenured professor at Washington University in St. Louis—so, naturally, for this small gathering, I wrote and then sang my own version of Nat King Cole's "Unforgettable." My version started like this:

Untenurable

That's what you are

Untenurable

You're no rising star . . .

Bakhtin (1984) explored medieval folk humor and popular festivals because he saw in them lessons for how to oppose an oppressive social order and official ideology. Bakhtin thought that official truth was held in place, was secured, by fear. Thus, he was interested in how that fear might be weakened or countered. He thought that sitting with friends and eating, drinking, and laughing together might provide for moments of fearlessness—and in these moments of fearlessness, counter-truths might be perceived and expressed.

When you came to my office to discuss your dissertation research and shared that you were feeling various pressures to pursue research that was somehow more conventional or "official," the danger was what Bakhtin (1984) called *false seriousness*. False seriousness results from fear and reproduces things as they are, because everything seems heavy and already-determined and unavoidable. Bakhtin helps us understand that this wrong kind of seriousness actually undermines the pursuit of truths; he helps us understand that laughter and play might be required in order to do serious work, to criticize and re-imagine ourselves and the world in powerful ways. Our scholarship, teaching, and mentorship must, as Bakhtin put it, engage in a "gay and free play with objects and concepts, but it is a play that pursues a distant, prophetic goal: to dispel the atmosphere of gloomy and false seriousness enveloping the world and all its phenomenon" (p. 380).

What I needed to do that day with you, in my office, was to help you to continue being fearless. I admired you and the rest of the Mod Squad, in part, because you had been practicing Bakhtin's laughing fearlessness for some time already—when, for example, the three of you

published that article tracing current classroom management techniques back through history to their origins in the control of black bodies during slavery (Casey, Lozenski, & McManimon, 2013). I remember almost barking with laughter when the three of you told me about that piece, because what was playing out in my mind were scenes of all these panicked, wide-eyed, fearful teacher educators reading your piece and wondering what in the world they were going to teach their future teachers now.

So you are right that "giving permission" doesn't exactly capture what was happening that day. It was more just that I needed to remind you of who you were and how you wanted to move in the world.

Any final words, Brian?

Peace.

Tim

_____

Dear Tim,

As always you are able to bring me to a place of audible laughter (the academic equivalent of LOL). (I cannot believe that you have me searching 'manatee' on Wikipedia. But it turns out that manatees live largely solitary lives, which speaks to the isolation of the academy; and like the ocean our academic institutions are quite polluted. So, whether you knew it or not, you are on to something here.)

You provide so much to chew on in your above passage. Certainly the construction of trust, the challenge to individualistic notions of mentorship, and the intersectional work of anti-

oppressive action are all deeply important to how we might continue this dialogue. The biographical tracing of how you became a particular kind of actor in the academy is fascinating. This kind of self-interrogation is another component of deep transformational mentorship. Unlike you, I kind of enjoyed school. I found it somewhat easy and I learned early on that I liked the external affirmations that came with good grades and being told I was smart, although it came with plenty of the bodily disciplining that you experienced. I received messages when compared to my friends, who were mostly African American, that I was "different" and somehow "special". It was not until I was an adult and a teacher myself in Philadelphia that I recognized the educational social capital that, unlike you, was part of my family. Both of my parents were teachers in the School District of Philadelphia. A moment that sticks out to me, upon reflection, that has utterly reframed my positive memories of my schooling happened when I was going into 7th grade. In the school I attended, 7th grade was when another, more rigid layer, of "ability" tracking kicked in. My class was separated into five sections that ranged from advanced to remedial across the entire curriculum. So if a student was placed into an advanced section they would take advanced Algebra, English, Social Studies, and Physical Science. Over the summer I was placed into a middle track—the grade level track—along with most of my friends. My parents were upset. They thought I should be advanced; at least that's what I believed. In reality, they knew that I would be relegated to that middle track for the rest of my academic career. I'm sure they believed I was capable of "advanced" work, but their concern was more material than academic. Working in schools for their entire adult lives, they knew that school wasn't just school. It was scalar. There are schools within schools, and they needed me to be in the best school so that I could continue to be in the best schools.

I remember them taking me to a meeting with the principal to demand that I be placed in section 7-3. This was the advanced section, but the school thought they would outsmart everyone by mixing up the numbers one through five. Thinking back, I remember the pretense of sitting in Ms. Felix's (the principal) office. The only time I had ever spoken to her before then was in regard to my behavior. She stared at me and asked if I thought I could do advanced work, to which I responded that I could. It was pretense because all of us knew that my mother, Gail Lozenski, would not be leaving that office without me being placed into 7-3, and so it was done. Ironically, although I liked the elite status of section 7-3, I was hurt by not being with my friends. I became racially isolated in that section, where I was the only person of African descent except for a girl who was a 2nd generation immigrant from Zimbabwe, I think. It was there where I learned to be a racial chameleon so that I could get along with my white peers, with whom I spent ninety percent of my day. Like you, after school playing basketball was where I was able to connect back with my friends, my social group; some of whom would facetiously tease me that I was "too smart" to hang with them. We all knew it was bullshit. This was my story of coming to not trust these institutions. School literally took my friends away as it was molding me to fit neatly into the kind of student of color who could be in a doctoral program. Similar to Dumas's (2014) exceptional metaphor of schooling for black children being like losing an arm, I learned that the very process that would eventually lead me to graduate school was simultaneously taking something precious from me. Yes, I succeeded, but at what expense?

Dumas writes, "Informed by a theory of suffering, our analysis moves beyond simply acknowledging racism, or bemoaning racially imbalanced outcomes, to deeper social explanation of how racialized subjects make meaning of the confluence of school malaise and racial melancholia" (p. 4). It seems that our mentoring relationship was fruitful not only because of the

trust we were able to place in each other, but also the distrust of the institution. Perhaps a generative interracial mentoring relationship must ultimately be distrustful of institutions and cognizant of black suffering. How do we begin to construct and theorize mentorship that does the work of moving beyond the acknowledgement of racism? I feel like this is what we have been speaking to in our exchange. Mentorship that seeks to be agentic and offensive to racialization must explicate the mechanisms of racialization. Ultimately our mentorship was not between you and me, it was between you, me, Manny, Garrett, my parents, Rose, your dad, the Mod Squad, and so many others who we did not name here. I think it is appropriate to name this mentorship network (maybe even as a recommendation) because we are dealing with institutions created to dispossess and isolate (manatee-like) black people.

In my earlier writing I began referring to you as the "white mentor", I guess making me the "black mentee". I'm beginning to rethink these labels now because what I think we are talking about is not interracial mentorship, but *black mentorship*. Black mentorship must be framed as antithetical to the white institution. It must take as its starting point Dumas's notion of black suffering. Cornel West (see Taylor, 2008) suggests that this suffering, or what he calls "catastrophe," is a space of truth in the Adornoian (2003) sense that "the need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth" (p. 17). If we construct the *mentorship of black students as a space for truth-telling coming out of social suffering mediated by schooling*, it illustrates some of your earlier ideas. For instance, black mentorship would need to emerge from a mentoring fabric made up of caring people who can see through the guise of the institution—who literally distrust the university. As opposed to white mentorship, which would be connected to an atomized set of credentializing criteria (i.e. "did you follow the dissertation proposal format correctly?"), black mentorship would engage in a Bahktinian mocking of the social order and "oppose an oppressive

social order and official ideology" (i.e. "You should know that the dissertation proposal format reproduces supremacist constructs of official knowledge. Now let's figure out what you actually want to do."). Black mentorship would recognize the notions of "untenurability." Here, in addition to your story of Lauren at Washington University in St. Louis, I am thinking of all the black academics, especially black women academics, who did not receive a Ph.D. or tenure because they were denied access or could not formulate a committee that could evaluate or even comment on their research in the black intellectual tradition. If white mentorship is about tradition, deference to authority, and false seriousness, then black mentorship is about expression through laughter and tears, recognition of eldership, and the pursuit of truth, no matter who it offends.

As I write I can already feel the white gaze (Esposito, 2011) on me asking if I truly care if we increase scholars of color in the academy, or if I am being too radical in terms of what I am suggesting. To be clear I am suggesting the eradication of the "white mentor" in the ways that mentorship reifies the structures of whiteness. Obviously I want to see diversity in academia. I am a professor at a selective private liberal arts college. I am part of the academy. I also come from the black radical tradition, and thus, my defining purpose in the academy is one of insurgence. Through this framing, the purpose of credentializing more scholars of color must be to create a polar shift in society. The academy does not need more scholars of color who are wedded to the white institution. It needs more scholars of color who know and can articulate their asymmetry to a structure built on the social hierarchy that demands their marginalization. I have been theorizing and writing about this understanding:

> As scholars of color we are often born into and shaped by communities that have been historically marginalized by postsecondary institutions. Our native communities nurture

> us with the knowledges of survivance, cultural pride, and ingenuity amidst a dearth of access to material wealth. As children, we are sent into schooling systems that seek to strip much of this knowledge from us and repackage us in the model of our colonizers, replete with colonial thinking. Many of us resist this repackaging, yet our success in these schooling systems is contingent on our ability to either disguise our resistance or acquiesce to the colonial desires and bury our cultural heritage in the depths of our subconscious. The few of us who "succeed" in these structures, then, are positioned as leaders of our native communities and used to rationalize the entire process of cultural stripping. (Lozenski, in press, p. 11)

Here, I am working through a metaphor of faculty of color being the trains that are used to carry the extracted wealth from communities (knowledge systems) to the universities for their benefit as hoarders of knowledge. Black mentorship must first name, and then resist this project.

If black mentorship is what I am suggesting as the goal of mentorship, then a simple question that may be asked is: "Who can participate in black mentorship?" I would suggest that black and white mentorship are not simply about individual racial identity, but more so about the goals of mentorship. A text that has really pushed my thinking regarding racial configurations and the academy is la paperson's (2017) *A Third University is Possible*. la paperson writes,

> Regardless of its colonial structure, because school is an assemblage of machines and not a monolithic institution, its machinery is always being subverted toward decolonizing purposes. The bits of machinery that make up a decolonizing university are driven by decolonial desires, with decolonizing dreamers who are subversively part of the machinery and part machine themselves. These subversive beings wreck, scavenge, retool, and reassemble the colonizing university into decolonizing contraptions (p. xiii).

la paperson is interested in how we can craft a decolonial (third university) space from the very parts of what they call “first and second” universities. These are the universities that you and I inhabit, Tim. The first being the research-based institution and the second being the progressive liberal arts institution. Mentorship can be seen as a technology of the institution that perpetuates its desires for disciplining and manufacturing scholars of any racial or ethnic background to continue the work of maintaining social hierarchy. Yet, as a technology, mentorship can be used to disrupt this colonial desire if the person(s) wielding it as a tool have a different desire. As such, the racial identities of the people involved in the mentorship become less important, although they still matter. What matters more are the aims and goals of those engaging in mentorship.

If mentorship is simply about credentials, then it is doing the work of the institution, and thus it is not to be trusted. If mentorship is about solidarity and the breaking of the traditions of the institution, then it is doing the work of truth-telling. I don’t know if we can boil any of this down to a recommendation, but it seems that we are describing a set of relationships: interpersonal mentoring relationships situated within institutional relationships. It is not possible for the interpersonal relationship to supercede the institution, however the interpersonal mentoring relationship can greatly impact how scholars, and particularly scholars of color develop their ongoing relationship to the academy.

In solidarity,

Brian

_____

Recommendations for white faculty who want to engage in black mentorship

1. Take an action within your university that opposes its anti-black machinery. The action could be a small one, but should be big enough to disturb or anger someone above you in the university's hierarchy.

2. In making sense of what happened after you took action (see #1), explore your own relationship to whiteness by reading:

- Chapter 12 of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*
- Toni Morrison's *Playing in the dark*
- Thandeka's *Learning to be white*
- David Roediger's *Wages of whiteness*
- and 50 additional books and articles on the topic

3. In making sense of what happened after you took action (see #1), explore your university's anti-black machinery by reading:

- Craig Wilder's *Ebony and ivy*
- la paperson's *A third university is possible*
- Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*
- Fred Moten & Stefano Harney's *The undercommons*
- and 50 additional books and articles on the topic

4. Form or join a collective of people working to dismantle the anti-black machinery of your university and continue taking action.

5. As you begin an actual interpersonal mentoring relationship, take time to map out networks of influences and knowledges, together, in order to situate your work in historical and contemporary contexts.

References

Adorno, T. (2003). *Negative dialectics*. New York: Routledge.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world*. (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University.

Baugess, J., & DeBolt, A. (2012). *Encyclopedia of the sixties: A decade of culture and counterculture.* Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood.

Brewer, R. (2019, April 19). Demanding relevance: 50 years of Black Studies and protest [blog post]. Retrieved from https://fmfp.org/2019/04/afro-50-black-studies-and-protest-at-the-university-of-minnesota/

Casey, Z., Lozenski, B., & McManimon, S. (2013). From neoliberal policy to neoliberal pedagogy: Racializing and historicizing classroom management. *Journal of Pedagogy, 4*(1), 36-58

Dumas, M.J. (2014) 'Losing an arm': schooling as a site of black suffering, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17:1, 1-29, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2013.850412

Esposito, J. (2011). Negotiating the Gaze and Learning the Hidden Curriculum: A Critical Race Analysis of the Embodiment of Female Students of Color at a Predominantly White Institution. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* (JCEPS), 9(2).

la paperson (2017). *A Third University is Possible.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Lensmire, T. (2011). Too Serious: Learning, Schools, and Bakhtin's Carnival. In E.J. White & M. Peters (Eds.), *Bakhtinian pedagogy: Opportunities and challenges for research, policy and practice in education across the globe*. New York: Peter Lang.

Lensmire, T. (2017). *White folks: Race and identity in rural America*. New York: Routledge.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom.* Beacon Press.

Lozenski, B.D. (in press). From consumption to refusal: A four-part exploration of the dilemmas of black academics and radical knowledge. In R. Endo and V. Chhuon (Eds.) *Optional Dis/Illusions: Scholars of Color 'Flip the Script' in Colleges and Schools of Education.* New York: Peter Lang.

Taylor, A. (Director). (2008). *Examined Life* [Motion Picture]. Canada, Zeitgeist Films.