

chapter two

HOW EDUCATION ADVANTAGES WHITES

John Dorhauer

This section is an exploration of the notion that whiteness has a cash value.

In his landmark book on this subject, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz writes:

Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educations allocated to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations. (p. vii)

He goes on to write: “I contend that the artificial construction of whiteness almost always comes to possess white people themselves unless they develop antiracist identities, unless they disinvest and divest themselves of their investment in white supremacy” (p. viii).

Education is an economic tool. Our government and our society recognize that investing in the education of our children and youth fuels a strong economy and provides the country and its businesses with skilled laborers. The better one’s education, the greater one’s earning potential over a lifetime.

A recent study done by the Center on Education and the Workforce by Georgetown University, entitled *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, and Lifetime Earnings* (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf>) reports that the average lifetime income for a graduate with a Bachelor’s degree is \$2.7 million (in 2009 dollars), 75% higher than a worker with only a high school diploma.

This raises the question: is the American educational system as we know and experience it today, given that it is a principal driver of economic outcomes and benefits, in any way affected by a culture of white privilege that consistently advantages those with white skin over those with darker skin?

There is evidence that strongly suggests that race plays a significant role in determining what educational opportunities are available to you, and how much education you can afford to acquire before leaving

school to enter the workforce. This evidence will not suggest that race is the only factor, nor will it suggest that race is the primary factor. But it will be hard to deny, given current data and research in the field, that race is a neutral factor when it comes to determining both the quality and the quantity of education available to anyone in America. It is also important to note that this will have a significant economic impact, as education affects earning potential. This data, and current research in the field, supports the statement that whiteness has a cash value attached to it.

Let's look at what we know before we discuss what knowing calls us to do.

- From a recent study (<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar01/vol58/num06/Closing-the-Achievement-Gap.aspx>) done by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a global community dedicated to excellence in learning, teaching, and leading comprising 125,000 members made up of superintendents, principals, teachers, and advocates from more than 138 countries:

In every subject area, students in high-poverty schools are more likely than other students to be taught by teachers without even a minor in the subjects they teach; only about half the teachers in schools with 90 percent or greater minority enrollments meet even their states' minimum requirements to teach those subjects—far fewer than in predominantly white schools.

- That same website reports that:

In just one academic year, the top third of teachers produced as much as six times the learning growth as the bottom third of teachers. In fact, 10th graders taught by the least effective teachers made nearly no gains in reading and even lost ground in math.

- The NAACP Fact Sheet on African Americans and Education (<https://www.naacp.org/page/-/education/documents/AfricanAmericansAndEducation.pdf>) reports that “greater percentages of African American (33%), Latina (35%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (25%) students attend high-poverty schools than did white (4%) or Asian/Pacific Islander students (13%).”
- In 2007, the immediate college enrollment rate was 70% for white high school graduates and 61% for Latino high school graduates, compared with 56% for African American high school graduates.
- African Americans trail other ethnic groups in terms of college completion. Based on the most recent college completion data, Asian/Pacific Islanders had the highest six-year graduation rate (67%), followed by whites (60%), Latinos (49%), African Americans (42%), and American Indians/Alaska Natives (40%). This pattern held at public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions, with African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives having the lowest graduation rates of the five racial/ethnic groups.

I want to pause here. That only 56% of black high school graduates start college, compared to 70% white students, and that of the 56% who enroll, only 42% end up with their Bachelor's degree means that only about 23% of all black students will achieve the lifetime earning potential of a college graduate. That is almost exactly half of the proportional number of white laborers who enter the market place with a college degree.

These last items that we will look at come from U.S. News and World Report: "U.S. Education: Still Separate and Unequal" (<http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2015/01/28/us-education-still-separate-and-unequal>):

- Disparities in discipline begin in preschool and continue through every level of schooling. While blacks make up 18 percent of students in preschool, they account for 42 percent of students with an out-of-school suspension and 48 percent of students with multiple out-of-school suspensions.
- Black Americans are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students. They make up 16 percent of school enrollment, but account for 32 percent of students who receive in-school suspensions, 42 percent of students who receive multiple out-of-school suspensions and 34 percent of students who are expelled.
- Black children are less likely than white or Hispanic children to live in households where at least one parent has secure employment, and

black children have the greatest rate of any race for families with children living in homeless shelters. Nearly 25 percent of black parents report that their children live in unsafe neighborhoods, compared with 7 percent of white parents.

- Fewer black students graduate from high school (16 percent of blacks drop out compared with 8 percent of whites), meaning fewer are eligible for college enrollment from the beginning. Yet, disparities continue to snowball at every level.
- Of individuals aged 16 to 24 who completed high school or earned GED certificates in the last year, 56 percent of black students enrolled in a two or four-year college compared with 66 percent of whites. Fewer black students make it from enrollment to graduation, and, for the ones that do, graduating takes longer. For the class starting at a four-year college in 2006, only 20 percent of black students graduated in four years versus more than 40 percent of white students. Within six years, 40 percent of blacks finished, but 60 percent of whites did.

These are sobering data.

They demonstrate that skin color impacts educational quality and access, disciplinary protocols, dropout rates, and overall ability to navigate what can be a very challenging and expensive undertaking.

None of the subjects that we discuss in this section on Whiteness as Cash Value are independent of one another. Incarceration rates that find black males disproportionately picked up, arrested, convicted,

and serving longer sentences have a direct impact on educational outcomes. Housing values that decline, regardless of one's economic status, in any neighborhood with more than a 9% non-white makeup affect both tax bases built to support public education as well as a family's ability to fund a child's education. Inheritance laws that distribute wealth accumulated during slavery to succeeding generations also give whites a greater ability to fund expensive college degrees. The same can be said of white families who earn tens of thousands of dollars a year more than racial minority families working the same jobs. The single greatest factor in finishing college once one is accepted and enrolls is ability to pay. That a far higher percentage of black college students fail to complete college than their white counterparts is mostly due to the lack of a sufficient financial safety net for either the student or their family.

This all amounts to an environment where whiteness remains an economic, financial, and cash advantage. Over a lifetime, that difference is profound.

When it comes to education, statistically whites have greater access to schools with higher tax bases to support them. Because of that, their teachers get paid more and have, on average, much better education themselves in the courses they teach. White students

have more electives and accelerated programs to choose from during their secondary education, making it even more likely that they will succeed once they decide to pursue a higher degree.

This all amounts to an environment where whiteness remains an economic, financial, and cash advantage. Over a lifetime, that difference is profound. Over generations of tens of millions of lifetimes of white students advantaged by factors beyond their personal control—the difference is incalculable and indefensible.

America's schools remain, as the U.S. News and World Report study concluded, separate and unequal. The inequalities and inequities have a clear, direct, and lasting impact on the earning potential of an entire generation of minority students. Legislation and regulations written to remedy this have proven to be ineffective in a culture that continues to maintain its possessive investment in whiteness.

This is what we know. What does knowing this call us to?

That is an important question.

What do white leaders of white churches have to say about the discrepancies that race engenders in educational opportunities and outcomes between whites and students of almost every other race?

What actions can be taken by committed community leaders to create educational opportunities that don't

disadvantage racial minority children and youth?

Some Affirmative Action policies designed to level the playing field in college admissions, to respond to and minimize the inherent advantages that white students assume upon application, were ruled unconstitutional in *Gratz v. Bollinger*, decided by a 6-3 vote of the U.S. Supreme Court. White leaders in white churches can both learn more about the effectiveness of Affirmative Action policies, and be strident vocal supporters of such policies. White silence on this matter not only casts doubt on their public commitments to racial equity, but also enables predominantly white legislative and judicial bodies to perpetuate their own inertia on these matters.

In a brilliant article written for the *Harvard Law Review* entitled “Whiteness as Property,” UCLA law professor Cheryl I. Harris distinguishes between corrective and distributive justice. Without getting too distracted by the subtleties of law that most of us will struggle to understand, suffice it to say that corrective justice seeks to remedy an imbalance created when one individual acts in a way that harms or disadvantages another individual. Corrective action is sought by a court to restore what was illegally deprived of another.

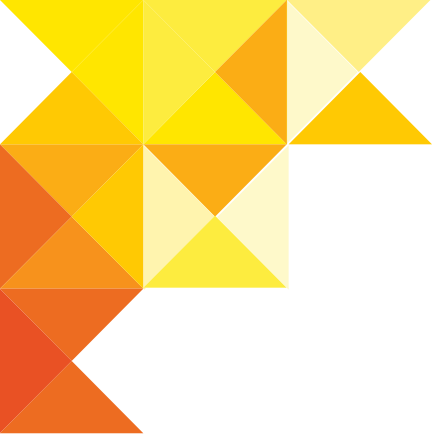
The challenge comes when systems exist that advantage one race over another. Because those systems of privilege were constructed over centuries of commitments to whiteness, entire populations are advantaged without active agency while simultaneously other communities are collectively

disadvantaged. When courts are restricted to identifying a single person who is accountable for the damage done, much of the injustice perpetrated by privilege must go unchallenged and unpunished. As Harris points out:

The focus on innocent whites changes the affirmative action inquiry from one of rectifying harm to Blacks to invoking legal protection for the rights of whites who are innocent to discriminatory acts, although they have benefited from prior discrimination. (*Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 106:1707, p. 1782)

Affirmative Action as Distributive Justice is the remedy to that. It is a way of ensuring that all individuals receive their share of the benefits they would have secured in the absence of racism. It changes the lens of inquiry from “what did any individual do to create the harm” to “. . . what would have been the proper allocation of resources in the absence of the distortion of racial oppression.” (*Harvard Law Review*, p. 1784).

An unfair distribution of educational resources remains one of the most entrenched impediments to racial equity in America.



chapter five

HOW THE MEDICAL AND HEALTH INDUSTRY ADVANTAGE WHITES

Da Vita D. McCallister

I grew up watching sports. The best way to spend time with my Dad was to place yourself on the family couch in front of the TV during a sporting event. We were blessed to live in a community that had teams for all of the major sports: The Washington Bullets (now the Wizards), the Baltimore Orioles (before we added the Washington Nationals) and the professional football team in Washington, D.C. (I remain a diehard fan of the burgundy and gold but REFUSE to say the team name.)

We watched boxing matches during the time of boxing greats like ‘Sugar Ray Leonard,’ ‘Marvelous Marvin Hagler’ and ‘The Hitman Tommy Hearns.’ The love of sports extended beyond watching TV and into our day-to-day lives. As children we played outside from sun-up until sun-down during the summers. Part of our commitment to sports was connected to my father’s almost obsession with weight. You see, the men in my family are all athletic and they take great pride in their appearance.

I can fill my Facebook page with photos for “Throwback Thursday” for years with photos of my Dad, my uncles and my male cousins’ commitment to the physical form. We have a body-builder, a

professional boxer, pee-wee football players and a host of weekend warriors on the basketball court. As a “Tomboy” growing up I took after the men in my family. I played football with my brother and the neighborhood kids as often as I could. I parroted my father, practiced my tennis stance in our carport, challenged him to basketball games on the local court and did my best to outlast every member of my family when we walked the track for laps. I wanted to be like my Dad and my Uncles. They were strong and playful. I always felt safe in my Uncles’ care; they could fix cars, had muscles I could see and seemed to be able to pick up me and my siblings, at the same time, no matter our age. My Dad and my Uncles took pride in the fact that they could give their sons and nephews a run for their money physically.

Yet, for the majority of my life, each of them has almost steadfastly refused traditional medical care. It has required the women in my family to spend significant amounts of time cajoling, arguing, crying and imploring them to receive medical treatments. Even after my father was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease my Uncles argued that he should not take the medications prescribed by his physician. They were convinced that the medicines were poisoned and did more harm than good. One of my Uncles became an expert in alternative medicine. I chalked it up to

his lifestyle on the farm. I assumed that he simply believed in all things natural, but something else was happening and it was heartbreaking to contemplate.

My mother called me with an “Aha” moment, as she too was struggling to make sense of the sharp declines in health among the men in our family and the reticence to seek medical care. She recalled the Tuskegee Experiment: the intentional withholding of medical treatment for Black men with syphilis for over 30 years¹². My mother, father, step-parents, uncles and aunts were in their twenties when the truth of the study was revealed. They grew up in the South and were well acquainted with the way physicians and health care professionals treated men and women of color in examining rooms. My mother wondered aloud if this event in history had robbed the men in her life of the ability to trust the health care industry in America. And if that were the case how the trauma of that moment might still be claiming victims all these years later.

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Her realization reminded me of the work of Dr. Joy DeGruy, the author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. Dr. DeGruy, a trained Social Worker and Clinical Psychologist with a Ph.D. in Social Work Research¹³, lectures on the lingering psychological impacts of systemic racism on Communities of Color. I had read about the Tuskegee Experiment in my high school classes but never considered the wide range of impacts that a single study could have on an entire population. Imagine having no confidence in the professionals that are supposed to insure your health and offer you medical care. How would that affect your quality of life? How sick would you have to be in order to push against your concerns for your safety to risk the possibility of wellness?

Dr. DeGruy’s lectures and videos opened my eyes to the invisible trauma that many People of Color endure on a daily basis. The “Strong Black Woman” who appears to be invulnerable to any and all assaults on her personhood, beauty and body. The “Big Black Buck” who is able to withstand bullets and turn in agitation toward a frightened police officer who is forced to use lethal force. I had heard all of the statistics on life expectancy and have seen the graphs on health disparities but I had never considered the psychological health of People of Color and the diminishment of the quality of life due to fear and oppression. The difference in life expectancy between Black and White people is 4.9 years¹⁴. Yet, I

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website on the “U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee.” <http://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm>

¹³ Joy DeGruy website <http://joydegruy.com/>

¹⁴ Disparities in Healthcare Quality Among Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups: Selected Findings From the 2010 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports <http://archive.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrd10/minority.html>

can't help but wonder what the last decade looks like for those two groups.

How many white seniors have benefited from health care provided by individuals who reflected their cultural and ethnic heritage? How has that access to health care impacted their overall health into retirement? How many white seniors have had to travel to another town to find a clinician of the same race? How many white seniors have not seen images of themselves on the walls of the doctor's offices they visited or received the statistics for health risks associated with another race because no comparable studies were done for their community?

Now assign a numeric value to the psychological cost . . . is it 3 years of wellness; 10 years of good blood pressure? Is it an additional million dollars in revenue earned over a lifetime? How do we calculate the true benefit of Whiteness in health care and medical treatment and the real cost of systemic racism for Persons of Color? I count it with the lines of worry on my mother's face . . .

Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *How many physicians of color are available in your community? How many dentists of color are available in your community? How many surgeons of color are available in your community? (Your answer maybe a rough estimate based on available information.)*
2. *Imagine that you became aware that the hospital in*

your town knowingly misled patients and withheld treatment for years. Consider that physicians and hospital administrators from other towns knew of this policy and said nothing for over 25 years. Describe your level of trust in the health care industry after this is brought to light. What would you teach your children about traditional medical care and health care providers?

3. *How many sick days do you use per year? How would this number change if you did not seek medical care? If you believe this would increase the number of sick days consider the financial and emotional costs of this increase. How might this impact your ability to remain employed and your earning potential?*