

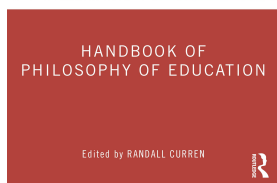
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Randall Curren

### **Racial Domination in Education**

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# RACIAL DOMINATION IN EDUCATION

*Quentin Wheeler-Bell*

Racial domination within society greatly impacts racial domination in schools, and vice-versa. Understanding the nature of racial domination or injustice in education thus requires a more general understanding of racial domination in the society and how it shapes education. To understand what racial justice in education would be also requires a more general understanding of what racial justice or non-domination in the society would be and how education could promote it. In this chapter, I will address the nature of racial domination and three misconceptions about racial justice and how education can promote it. I will then present a critical approach to addressing racial domination in and through education.

## **What Is Racial Domination?**

We need to begin with a clear definition of race. *Race is a symbolic category of domination based on false or misrecognized ideas of racial phenotype or ancestry that is socially mobilized to undermine a racialized group's democratic social power.* This definition is dense, so let me unpack the four distinct features of race. First, race is socially constructed, which means the symbolic categories defining “race” are not natural attributes but human creations. Second, racial categories are embedded within sociohistorical contexts, so they will differ from one sociohistorical period to another. Third, racial categories operate by being misrecognized as natural attributes. Finally, race is fundamentally a form of domination because it operates by creating norms, habits, and institutional arrangements that misrecognize racial groups, limiting the democratic social power of some groups while giving other groups power over them. Each of these features of race requires some explanation.

## ***Race as a Social Construct***

Saying that race is socially constructed means the ideas, notions, and values that define a racial group are human creations, rather than natural attributes. This implies that race categories are given meaning through human activities; our individual and collective activities create and recreate racial categories. In this sense, we should not view racial categories as natural. Instead, race categories are based upon false distinctions between individuals that become socially misrecognized as natural. The naturalization of racial categories is one of the distinct ways in which false racial distinctions are produced and maintained. As Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer explain, the invention of “whiteness” in North America began to form out of a group of Europeans who had never before

seen themselves as having anything in common (Desmond & Emirbayer 2009; Emirbayer & Desmond 2015). This formation was not a natural process; it was a deliberate racial project. The early racial project of white supremacy aimed to create an imagined white and black identity wherein Europeans became classified as “white” and Africans, who represented hundreds of different tribes, were classified as “black.” The purpose of these racial classifications was to construct a system of racial domination that would justify treating “non-whites” as less than human and would seem like a “natural order.”

### ***Race and Social-Historical Context***

Since race is a social construct, racial categories are always embedded within a sociohistorical context, and they differ across different sociohistorical periods. Racial identities gain meaning only within a larger system of racial classifications in a specific sociocultural context. Consequently, understanding racial classifications requires analyzing what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call *racial formations*, which are “the sociohistorical process[s] by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi & Winant 2014: 109). Because racial identities are defined within larger systems of racial classifications, racial identities are always *relationally formed*. This means that racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed within a system of racial supremacy. For example, the creation and formation of racialized identities in the U.S., such as Native American, Latinx, Black, and Asian-American, mutually depend upon the creation and formation of whiteness. These racial identities only have meaning within a larger system of racial domination and white supremacy. Thus, we have to analyze the socio-historical circumstances that create and reproduce a system of white supremacy in order to understand how these racial identities are created and recreated.

### ***Race and Misrecognition***

What makes race a unique social construction is that it depends upon a system of racial misrecognition. *Racial misrecognition* occurs when symbolic categories are created and reproduced through social, material, economic, political, and psychological practices that attribute false phenotypic and ancestral attributes to racialized groups. As Desmond and Emirbayer argue, “racial domination survives by covering its tracks, by erasing its own history. It encourages us to think of the mystic boundaries separating, say West from East, white from black, black from Asian, or Asian from Hispanic, as timeless separations – divisions that have always been and will always be” (Desmond & Emirbayer 2009: 51).

To explain why race requires misrecognition, let us look at the conservative culture of poverty thesis. This thesis claims that poor people – people of color – perform less well in school owing to cultural attributes, such as poor family structures, poor study habits, or oppositional cultural norms (Moynihan 1968; McWhorter 2000; Wax 2008). This thesis exemplifies racial misrecognition because it attributes a gap in academic achievement to cultural attributes, without acknowledging the circumstances of poverty and racism to which the attitudes and behaviors of members of black communities are adaptive or rational (Fordham & Ogbu 1986; Anderson 2012; Lewis 2012; Morton 2022). This exemplifies racial misrecognition because it falsely attributes phenotypic or ancestral attributes (i.e., the culture of poverty) to a racialized group. What gets misrecognized in this assessment is the nature of the individual attributes involved and their relationship to poverty; attributes that are rational adaptations to the conditions of poverty are misidentified as causes of poverty, and this misrecognition is integral to a system of racial domination that has disproportionately and unjustly locked people of color into poverty with little prospect of escaping it.

## Race and Domination

The construction of racial categories is inherently the construction of a system of domination, so domination is an essential feature of race. Racial categories and symbols are fundamentally categories that place individuals within an oppressive hierarchical system. This means racial categories *only* gain meaning because of how they operate within a system that misrecognizes the equal moral standing of racialized groups. Race thereby entails forms of misrecognition that prevent racialized groups from having the democratic social power to create non-dominating conditions. Clarifying this point requires an explanation of the connections between three ideas: *justice as a right to justification, democratic social power, and racial domination*. In brief, racial domination involves unjust violations of a racialized group's equal right to justification, robbing it of democratic social power.

Justice is about ensuring all social practices and power relations affecting an individual's life are reasonably justified to the individual affected, and democracy is the process through which these justifications are established. Justice rests on a *right to justification*. As Rainer Forst explains, "the demand for justice is an emancipatory demand . . . Its basis is the claim to be respected as an agent of justification, that is, in one's dignity as a being who can ask for and give justifications" (Forst 2011: 2). This emancipatory demand aims to ensure that all social relationships affecting an individual are democratically determined, and all individuals are able to take part in civic dialogues that respect their right to justification. Racialized others would thus be treated as moral equals when they are given equal standing within the democracy.

Erik Olin Wright describes *social power* as "power rooted in the capacity to mobilize people for cooperative and voluntary collective actions of various sorts in civil society" (Wright 2010: 121). Such power is implicitly democratic, in being cooperative, voluntary, and as such predicated on mutual justification and agreement on common goals. *Democratic social power* is thus essentially the ability to democratically organize collective efforts to secure common goods, such as creating non-dominating conditions of life or ensuring that social institutions and practices are justly structured to promote human flourishing.

One reason justice and democracy are coextensive is that both require establishing relations of non-domination. As Forst (2008) explains, "justice is first and foremost about ending domination and unjustifiable arbitrary rule, whether political or social in a broad sense" (Forst 2008: 315). *Domination* exists when individuals are subjected to the arbitrary rule of power, which occurs when the principles of *generality* and *reciprocity* that should govern processes of public justification and exercises of authority are systematically ignored or undermined. These principles (*generality* and *reciprocity of reasons*) ensure that the diverse members of a society have adequate grounds for accepting as authoritative the reasons that count as providing justification, and (*reciprocity of content*) require that everyone accept what those justifying reasons demand of themselves while expecting no more than they demand of others.

*Racial domination* occurs when people of color are subjected to a system of white supremacy or, in other words, an arbitrary rule of power that systematically privileges whiteness and disadvantages people of color. This means that *white supremacy* is the arbitrary system of racial categories that ensure whites and whiteness receive unjustifiable recognition and advantages, while people of color are systematically misrecognized and disadvantaged in ways that prevent them from using their democratic social power.

For brevity, I will focus on two aspects of the complex process through which racial domination prevents people of color from exercising democratic social power: *democratic exclusion* and *democratic disempowerment*. *Democratic exclusion* occurs when unjust laws, social practices, and institutional arrangements are designed to systematically exclude people of color from participating in a democratic society as moral equals and from securing acceptable living conditions. For example, in *Unjustifiably Oppressed*, Roderick Van Daniel explains how Mississippi, and other southern states of the U.S.,

established Black Codes in the 1860s that limited the freedom of African Americans and ensured their availability as a cheap labor force after slavery was abolished during the Civil War (Van Daniel 2018). Under Black Codes, many states required Black people to sign yearly labor contracts; if they refused, they risked being arrested, fined, and forced into unpaid labor. Black Codes are an example of democratic exclusion in two respects. First, the creation of Blacks Codes was unjust and undemocratic because blacks were excluded from the democratic processes through which the Codes were created. Second, by excluding blacks from the democratic process, white southerners were able to construct labor laws that further excluded blacks from participating as equals in the labor market. The construction of an unjustifiable system of white supremacy was thus facilitated by denying people of color their right to justification and limiting their democratic social power.

Another way in which racial domination is (re)produced is through *democratic disempowerment*. This may occur even when people of color (and others) are not categorically excluded from participation in democratic processes but lack real and effective opportunities to advance their collective well-being or transform the system of racial domination. For example, one aspect of Black Codes is that they prevented blacks from acquiring wealth, land, and other forms of capital, and an enduring effect of these laws – and a host of other unjust practices – is the current black-white wealth gap in the United States. One measure of this is that the net worth of a typical white family in the U.S. in 2016 was \$171,000, which was nearly ten times greater than that of a Black family (\$17,150) (McIntosh, et al. 2020). This wealth gap has consequences for opportunities, including the relative social power of groups to advance their well-being. It is an ongoing aspect and consequence of the ways people of color have systematically been denied the democratic social power needed to overcome a system of racial domination, even as they are no longer categorically excluded from participation in democratic processes.

### Three Misconceptions about Racial Justice in Education

Having explained what racial domination is, I want to critique three misconceptions about education and racial justice. These misconceptions are that: 1) *Multicultural* education is the key to racial justice in and through education; 2) *Equal Educational Opportunity* is the key to racial justice in and through education; 3) *Integrating schools* is the key to racial justice in and through education.

#### ***Multicultural Education Is the Key to Racial Justice in and through Education***

One educational misconception about race is that multicultural education is the embodiment of racial justice in education. Multicultural education in the U.S. has been based on the idea that schools should respect the various ethnic cultural traditions present in the society and not seek to assimilate all students into a homogenous American culture, suppressing or extinguishing their distinctive cultural heritages. The focus of multicultural education initiatives has often been the correction of curricular omissions and misrepresentations in order to accurately represent the contributions that different ethnic cultural groups have made to the society and world, and to encourage tolerance of, or respect for, cultural differences (Banks 1995; Lopez and Vogel 1979; NCSS 1976). Understood in this way, multicultural education is fundamentally opposed to such practices as the coercive education for cultural extinction that was long imposed on Native Americans (Blum & Burkholder 2021: 23–31, 64–73; Adams 1995; Subcommittee on Indian Education of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare 1969). It may also have some value in correcting negative cultural stereotypes or prejudice.

If false or misrecognized ideas of *racial* phenotype or ancestry are *cultural* stereotypes, and these ideas are an aspect of racial domination, then multicultural education might have some value in addressing racial domination. Nevertheless, the assumption that multicultural education is the key to

racial justice is misguided. It relies on the premise that race can be equated with ethnicity or culture, and it is at best a partial remedy for racial domination. As Charles Mills argues,

Replacing race by culture, or assuming that race and a particular culture are always linked, is problematic for the simple reason that there is no essentialist one-to-one correspondence between the two. Race has been historically created through discriminatory legislation and social custom, but this does not mean that people uniformly categorized across different regions, classes, and educational levels as members of one “race” are similarly uniform in their cultures, even if they are similarly structurally subordinated.

(Mills 2007: 100–101)

We can see the problem with equating race with culture or ethnicity by looking at the term “Asian” or “Asian-American.” No “Asian culture” exists. Instead, the concept “Asian-American” is an externally imposed grouping of Chinese, Japanese, Cambodian, Indian, Laotian, and other peoples under an invented category “Asian-American” that is presumed to be justified by similarities of culture or ethnicity. This category only has meaning within a system of racial domination, and the creation of this racialized group is a non-voluntary imposition on the disparate peoples who did not choose to be grouped together in this way. Claiming to create an education that respects “Asian-Americans” is problematic because it is the very creation of this subordinating category that is the problem. It is not a problem that can be rectified by encouraging respect for an “Asian” culture that does not exist.

Before proceeding, let me address two potential misconceptions. First, I am not saying that cultures and ethnicities cannot exist within systems of racial domination. Chinese, Japanese, Cambodian, and other peoples all have cultures before (and after) being racialized. Racial domination does not inherently erase culture, rather one way it operates is by reconfiguring how we define various cultures to make it seem they are all the same. Second, I am not saying that cultures cannot develop within a system of racial domination. For example, the African-American culture developed within a system of racial domination, such that blacks now have a unique history, tradition, and body of cultural practices. What ties African-American culture together (and other cultures that developed within systems of racial domination) are the various ways people make sense of themselves and their world within a system of white supremacy.

I note these misconceptions to help distinguish a broadly multicultural education from an anti-racist education.<sup>1</sup> Multicultural education focuses on pluralism, i.e., on respecting different cultures and ethnicities. An anti-racist education, on the other hand, focuses on oppression – i.e., analysis of the complex relationships between a system of racial domination, the formation and reformation of racial categories and how these categories are treated as natural or cultural attributes. Multicultural education could present actual cultures of members of racialized groups (not generic non-cultures) in a positive light – a good thing, if done well – but this is no substitute for the analytical insights about racial domination that anti-racist education should convey. Multicultural education is not equivalent to education that promotes racial justice because race is not culture and presenting diverse cultures in a positive light is not sufficient to overcome racial domination.

Multicultural education is focused on tolerating and respecting different cultures, but race is a system of domination that should not be tolerated or respected. Instead, race must be dismantled and transformed. While a multicultural education might assume we should teach students how to respect “Asians,” an education focused on racial domination would focus on the system of racial domination (i.e., white supremacy), rather than distinct cultures and ethnicities. It would teach children how a diverse group of people from different countries are even classified as “Asian.” Such an education might focus on issues like: “What are the historical and current reasons for constructing the term “Asian”? Why are people who are classified as “Asian” targeted for specific harms and injustices?

And how are these harms, injustices, and racial classifications operating within a larger system of white supremacy?

### ***Equal Educational Opportunity Is the Key to Racial Justice in and through Education***

Another misconception is that racial justice in education is equivalent to equal educational opportunity and racial justice would be achieved if people of color were provided with equal educational opportunity. *Equal opportunity* is an ethical ideal concerning the *fairness of competitions* through which valuable things are distributed. It is an ideal of distributive justice concerned with who gets what, when, and why. *Equal educational opportunity* is a complex and disputed form of equal opportunity because it pertains both to access to education – opportunities to be educated – and to the role of education in selection for jobs and other roles through which further goods are distributed (Jacobs 2016; Jencks 1988; Coleman 1968; Coleman, et al. 1966). Racial domination has involved both denying people of color access to education essential to competing for positions in the society (Blum & Burkholder 2021; Darby & Rury 2018) and violating the ideal of equal opportunity by denying people of color equal access to positions for which they are qualified. Against this background, it is not surprising that struggles for racial justice have often focused on the provision of equal educational opportunity and regulation of employment practices to ensure as far as possible that hiring is strictly on the basis of *bona fide* job qualifications, i.e., ones that are relevant to job performance (Ezorsky 1991).

Nevertheless, it is a mistake to equate equal educational opportunity with racial justice in education or to think that racial justice would be achieved if people of color were provided with equal educational opportunity. As important as equal opportunity is, a singular focus on it obscures essential aspects of racial domination. For example, racial domination has prevented, and continues to prevent, people of color from democratically determining answers to the following questions: How are the relevant goods produced, and by whom? Who determines the structures of production and distribution? Who determines what counts as a good, and why? These questions precede concerns about fairness in competition-based distributions because they are questions about democratic social power – i.e., the right to collectively determine how to structure all aspects of our lives. A distributive justice focus on the fairness of competitions undervalues these questions and does not fully engage the injustices resulting from people of color lacking the democratic social power to reasonably shape the society they live within.

A fundamental limitation of the ideal of equal educational opportunity is that it takes the nature of basic institutions, such as the economy, more or less for granted, and focuses primarily on *procedural fairness* or what would be fair principles for determining winners and losers in competitive struggles to secure favorable outcomes, such as opportunities for more advanced learning or for jobs. Such fairness might require that all children within a local school district receive instruction in the same curriculum by equally qualified teachers, regardless of race or family resources, it might require equalization of the quality of instruction across the entire society (Wheeler-Bell 2018a), or it might require differentiated instruction to better meet students' individual needs (Coleman 1968). Since the 1960s, and especially since the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in (Rawls 1971), concern for procedural fairness has been supplemented by concern for *background fairness*, or the importance of creating a "level playing field for all competitors" (Jacobs 2016: 325). Rawls frames this in terms of *fair equality of opportunity*, which requires that all children have equal chances (not just at school but in their lives as a whole) to develop their talents and qualify for higher learning and the most coveted occupations and positions (Rawls 1971: 83–90).

As difficult as achieving fair equality of opportunity might be, it would not create a just society or eliminate racial domination. One reason it would not is that it is consistent with competitions being

structured in ways that put most people at great risk and ensure they will lose. Equal opportunity regulates the fairness of competition for whatever positions in society there are, not the quality of the positions themselves or how much of what people need is only accessible through paid employment. It is silent as to whether (capitalist) labor markets are a justifiable way of distributing what people need to live good lives, and it is silent as to what may be needed to overcome racial domination. Instituting equal educational opportunity of the kind that would be required for fair equality of opportunity may be helpful to reducing the gap in democratic social power, but education focused on labor market success would not directly challenge racial domination.

The misconception that racial justice in education is equivalent to equal educational opportunity may rest on the assumption that racial injustice is primarily a matter of people of color lacking equal access to (capitalist) labor markets. If so, this misconception rests on two questionable ideas. The first is that capitalist labor markets are justly structured, relatively speaking. The second is that having equal access to capitalist labor markets is desirable and feasible. Advocates of racial justice have developed critiques of capitalism that are reasonable enough to warrant consideration. While one might not agree with these critiques, a theory of racial justice must adequately address their concerns. For example, radicals, like Adolph Reed Jr. and Angela Davis, argue that equalizing opportunity within capitalism is morally undesirable, because it presumes that racial justice is about ensuring the capitalist class structure is diverse (Reed 2001; Davis 1998). However, the capitalist system is based upon class domination and exploitation, so racially equalizing capitalist class structure is simply trying to prove that people of color have an equal opportunity to compete in a capitalist system of domination and exploitation.

### ***Integrating Schools Is the Key to Racial Justice in and through Education***

The final misconception is the belief that racial justice is achieved through the *racial integration* of schools. In the U.S., this belief has been associated with the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that the system of racial apartheid in schooling that existed at that time could not be justified as “separate but equal” schooling, because the education of those forcibly separated from the “mainstream” of society was inherently unequal. Separate schooling was understood to be an impediment to both economic and civic equality, and integrated schooling was understood to facilitate both forms of equality, as explained in a 1967 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report, *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools*:

The public schools traditionally have provided a means by which those newly arrived in the cities – the immigrant, and the impoverished – have been able to join the American mainstream. The hope for public education always has been that it would be a means of assuring equal opportunity and of strengthening and unifying American society.

*(Commission on Civil Rights 1967: 1)*

This reference to public schools being a means of joining the “mainstream” implies that integrated schooling has often sufficed to enable those outside the “mainstream” to achieve *civic equality* or truly equal citizenship in the society as well as equal (economic) opportunity. The report proposes steps to racially integrate public schools, and it is reasonable to interpret this as implying that racial integration of schools would constitute racial justice with respect to education and would go a long way toward establishing racial justice in the society. A view widely held by liberal educational theorists is that integrated schooling would facilitate civic equality both by reducing racial prejudice through inter-group contact in schools and by elevating people of color to high-status professions.

Elizabeth Anderson prioritizes civic equality (also known as *democratic equality*) in her contemporary defense of integrated schooling, but she echoes the 1967 Commission’s view of



integration in closely linking the achievement of democratic equality – the ability to function as a fully equal citizen – to economic opportunity and to integrated schooling’s potential to shift the beliefs about people of color held by those in the “mainstream” (Anderson 2010).<sup>2</sup> The goal of racial integration of schools, as she describes it, is to provide blacks with “opportunities for human, social, and cultural capital formation needed to compete on a par with whites” (64) and to foster inter-racial ease, cooperation, and friendship. Regarding the former, success in competition for high-status positions in the society is seen as instrumental to being able to function as civic equals. Regarding the latter, Anderson describes the stages of integration as moving from existing “on terms of equality” in the same space (*spatial integration*), to accepting ground rules that require cooperation as equals (*formal social integration*), to inter-racial friendships, trust, and cooperation that go beyond what the ground rules require (*informal social integration*) (116).

This view of racial justice has at least two shortcomings. First, to the extent that it envisions the path to democratic equality running through equalization of economic opportunity, it replicates one of the shortcomings of the second misconception about racial justice in education. As already noted, black Marxists claim that integration into the “mainstream” is undesirable because capitalism is inherently a system of exploitation and domination. A second shortcoming is that the integrationist view fails to consider alternatives to integration and the concern that integration may deny people of color the advantages of educational self-determination, as it did Native Americans. The fact that ethnically integrated public schools were a traditional path to economic and civic integration into the society is not a sufficient ground for assuming that it the only or best remedy for racial injustice.

The integrationist view dismisses the argument made by people of color that racial separation and social transformation are required to achieve racial justice. For example, black nationalists argue that white supremacy is built into the basic structures of society, and whites have too much of a vested interest in its preservation. Consequently, integration is not a viable means, and separation is the only means, for achieving racial justice.

A related argument is that integration reinforces white supremacy and Eurocentrism. By Eurocentrism I mean the belief that the European and American modernization project would have been organized as currently structured even without racial domination. An example of Eurocentrism is the idea that the educational system would have been organized in relatively the same manner even if people of color had been given the power to collectively determine how the educational system developed. The integration approach reinforces this Eurocentrism by assuming that the “mainstream” institutions that people of color should integrate into are (or would have been) justifiable to people of color. However, people of color have questioned this Eurocentric view of schools and society. For example, the independent school movements led by African-Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans advocated for collective self-determination over their own education, not for integration into pre-established schools.

Collective self-determination concerns the democratic right to determine how schools are structured, what counts as an educational good, who gets to determine what is an educational good, and how to structure the relationship between schools and the larger society. The radical independent schools movement was concerned with educating children in the *face of oppression*, not integrating pre-established systems. In fact, the educational radicals leading this movement argued that the basic structure of education was designed to reproduce racial domination. Again, integrationists may disagree with this charge of Eurocentrism. The point remains that racial domination has prevented people of color from having the democratic social power to reasonably participate in structuring the educational system. Therefore, when scholars equate racial justice with integration, they presume people of color find (or would have found) the current structure of the educational system justifiable. Consequently, integrationists inadequately confront a fact about racial domination: people were denied adequate democratic power to structure or restructure the institution they assume should be integrated. Therefore, they are unable to explain why the institutions they hope to

integrate are democratically justifiable to people of color. A viable account of racial justice in education must begin from a well-developed and thorough critique of racial domination.

### **Racial Domination Within Education: A Critical Approach**

A critical approach to racial justice in education differs from traditional distributive justice approaches in two key respects. First, the critical approach focuses not on multiculturalism, equal opportunity, or integration, but on democratic empowerment. Second, this focus on democratic empowerment involves equipping students with morally reflective understanding of structures of power and how to deepen democracy (Wheeler-Bell 2018b). As a form of critical pedagogy, the critical approach to education for racial justice is focused on promoting conversations and inquiry concerning the nature of power and oppression and advancement of human emancipation. This involves cultivating students' autonomous capacities of diagnostic understanding and moral reflection, which would ideally be grounded in moral philosophical principles (Wheeler-Bell 2018b, 2020). Children should learn to diagnose and accurately frame moral judgments about racial domination, and they should learn to identify effective approaches to building democratic social power and advancing social transformation. A critical approach does not neglect students' capabilities and opportunities of access to "mainstream" institutions, but it equips them with the understanding and capability to use the forms of capital they acquire in the cause of democratic empowerment.

As noted above, justice as justification involves democratic processes predicated on a right to justification – a right to participate in processes of public justification guided by principles of *reciprocity* (regarding what count as justifying reasons and regarding obligations to provide justifications and accept what they demand of one) and *generality* (regarding the justifying basis for basic norms) (Forst 2011). *Reciprocity of reasons* entails that no one may simply assume that others have the same values and interests as oneself or make recourse to "higher truths" that are not shared, and *generality* requires that reasons for generally valid basic norms must be shareable by all those affected.

Racial justice requires that people of color have real, effective, and equal possibilities for assuming active roles in directing the social affairs in which they take part. This means that racial justice requires racialized groups to have the democratic social power to determine: (1) what ought to be the purpose(s) of education; (2) what educational goods should be valued, and why; (3) how the school system is structured around said educational goods; (4) how resources are constructed and distributed.

### ***Educating for Racial Justice***

Educating for racial justice is primarily focused on the content of the curriculum, specifically what students need to understand and be able to do to challenge racial domination. A philosophical example of educating for racial justice is recounted by Lawrence Blum in *High School, Race, and America's Future* (Blum 2012). In this book, Blum reflects upon his teaching of race in a multiracial high school classroom. He tackles a number of issues related to race, including the historical construction of race, morality and racism, complications around racial identities, and white supremacy. A key aspect of Blum's approach is the importance he places upon morality and racism. This is essential because race is a form of domination; therefore, to teach children about race we also need to help them understand what makes race and racism immoral. Blum's attention to the construction of race, white supremacy, and morality make it an example of a critical approach to racial justice education that equips students with diagnostic understanding of race and domination and related capacities of moral judgment, though it does not address approaches to overcoming racial domination and achieving democratic disempowerment.

Other examples of educating for racial justice could be offered, but this example is sufficient to make the point that a comprehensive critical approach to racial justice education would require

teachers to have expertise that many do not have. It would be unfair to expect teachers to be well-versed in the philosophical and sociological complexities of racial domination. The ideal teacher would have the education and professional development needed to adequately teach about race, but this is not the reality we live within. Therefore, I believe it's best to encourage teachers to begin having discussions about race with their students, even if these are imperfect.

The more students are used to talking about race, in various classroom and educational settings, the more they will learn how to think more critically about the complexities of race. Educators should not think about "getting the racial discussion right," but rather about getting the racial conversation started. As teachers and students become more comfortable with an education for racial justice, they also learn more about race, how to discuss the complexities of race, and hopefully will desire to learn more about race themselves. This desire to learn more about race is what will help individuals develop the intellectual tools to think through the complexity of racial domination.

### ***Structuring Education for Racial Justice***

Structuring education for racial justice concerns the democratic process of organizing the educational system in a way that advances racial justice. When focused on the structure of education the central concern is *democratic empowerment*: empowering racialized groups to have more democratic social power to define what counts as educational goods, how goods are distributed, and by whom. The critical approach focuses on democratic empowerment, avoiding the three misunderstandings discussed in the previous section.

The critical approach avoids the problem of equating race with culture and ethnicity by focusing on power. Race is inherently a system of domination, so advancing racial justice requires more than respecting cultures or ensuring that racial groups are adequately represented in the curriculum. While racial representation matters and cultures should be respected, neither of these goals sufficiently challenges the system of racial domination. Challenging the system of racial domination requires transforming power relationships, dismantling the social norms and institutional arrangements that prevent people of color from democratically determining how to (re)structure the educational system. This involves a focus on power, which is to say the social norms and structures that limit racialized groups from having real and effective opportunities to participate in the democratic process and determine how the school system is structured and how other institutions function.

One aspect of the structure of the school system to which the critical approach is relevant is the racial diversity of the teaching force. When race is equated with culture, a racially just teaching force is interpreted as one in which all racial groups are equally represented. From a critical perspective, this approach leaves unquestioned what knowledge is taught and who would be most qualified to teach. A requirement that all students receive an anti-racist education would transform what knowledge is taught, who is qualified to teach, and how they become qualified. Moreover, with such a change in the curriculum it might be the case that people of color are more qualified to teach and should therefore be overrepresented within the teaching profession.

Neoliberal restructuring of school systems provides another illustration of how a critical approach to structuring education would differ from other approaches. Consider that after the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans had an opportunity to radically restructure how it organized its school system. As Kristen Buras illustrates, instead of restructuring the governance structure to provide the black community with more democratic control, schools were restructured along neoliberal lines (Buras, et al. 2010). This neoliberal restructuring had the negative effect of further excluding the black community, including black teachers and activists, from the school governance process. The adoption of a neoliberal model decreased the social power of the communities of color, while racial justice in education would demand the opposite.

A third illustration of the structural distinctiveness of the critical approach is how it avoids the problem of racial essentialism, which is the belief in an essential nature that defines all members of a racial group. One kind of belief or tacit assumption about a shared racial nature is that a particular racialized group shares (or ought to share) the same beliefs or desires. For example, the integrationist approach may be seen as essentialist, if it assumes all blacks want (or ought to want) to integrate – i.e., that they share a common desire to belong to the same “mainstream” that whites want to belong to. The critical approach avoids this problem through the principle of reciprocity. This democratic principle states that no one may simply assume that others have the same values and interests as oneself or make recourse to “higher truths” that are not shared (reciprocity of reasons). This principle is respected by creating more inclusive democratic deliberations. Rather than assuming that individuals within the same racial group hold the same values and principles, it is through the deliberative process that we learn about the diversity of opinions and perspectives within a racial group, while respecting each individual’s opinions and perspectives.

## Conclusion

This chapter has defended an account of race as a socially constructed form of domination that involves misrecognition of racial groups, and that limits the democratic social power of some groups while giving other groups power over them. This understanding of race implies that none of the three common understandings of racial justice in education is adequate; multicultural, equal opportunity, and integrationist approaches all fall short of directly addressing the realities of race as an unjust system of domination that can only be remedied through an equalization of democratic social power. I have sketched all too briefly the critical alternative to these familiar approaches, outlining its aims of democratic empowerment and social transformation, its essential content, and some of its challenges and implications for how education is structured. A critical pedagogy of racial justice must provide students with the sociological and moral understanding essential to autonomously navigating unjust institutions and working collectively to advance democratic equality and human flourishing.

(Related Chapters: 2, 15, 21, 23, 25, 31, 32, 35.)

## Notes

- 1 In distinguishing anti-racist education from broadly multicultural education, I do not mean to deny that anti-racist education has been embraced as a focus of multicultural education by some prominent advocates of both. James Banks argued in 1977 that multicultural education should be focused on “groups which experience discrimination in American society” (Banks, 1977: 3), and Sonia Nieto later argued that “Antiracism ... [and] antidiscrimination in general, is at the very core of a multicultural perspective” and requires “teaching young people skills in confronting racism” (Nieto 2000: 305, 307).
- 2 For more on the centrality of economic opportunity to Anderson’s defense of integration, see Wheeler-Bell 2018b.

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