Engaging Jim Crow Education: Who is Allowed to Learn and Why?

Joy Williamson-Lott
College of Education
I was playing Uno last night on Xbox Live and these two Black guys were cracking me up.

WHOA! Hey! What the hell? "Black guys?"

That's totally racist, Jade.

No it's not. How is that racist?

What's the point of letting us know they were black?

Yeah! Why they gotta be Black, Jade? Why they gotta be black?

Well, no. They were Black. The point is that there's no need to...

Stop saying Black, man. That's racist too.

I didn't say "Black man." She said "Black man."

No, no. I meant Black comma man. Not "Black man."

What the hell is a "Black comma man" supposed to be, you racist jerk?

Let's start over.

Listen to you two. Can you not see the irony in this? By trying to ignore race completely you're only coming off more ignorant and racist.

You should have said, "What a rousing game of Uno I had last night. I didn't even realize whether or not my opponents were Black."

Thank you.
“Schools are key institutions where Americans make each other racial: not only are schools central places for forming racial identities, but they are key places where we rank, sort, order, and differently equip our children along racial lines even as we hope for schooling to be the great societal equalizer.” (Pollock, _Colormute_, 4)
African American Education: Pre-Civil War

“Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now,” said he, “if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave.” Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
Reconstruction/Post-Reconstruction

• 1871, Alcorn University established
• 1878, Renamed Alcorn A&M College
• Governor: “There is no need multiplying words about it, the negro will not be permitted to rise above the station which he now fills” since education only “renders him unfit for the work which the white man prescribed.”
Brown v. Board of Education

- *Brown II*
- VA county closes schools for four years
- Vouchers
- Black teachers and principals fired
More Recent Examples

• Standardized testing
• Behavioral disorders
• Culturally deprived
• Parents’ Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1
Mexican Americans and Schools

Question: Are Mexican Americans “white?”

• Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo, 1848
• CA School Code, early 20th century
• “Brown not white,” post-1954
• Receive “non white status,” 1973
Chinese Americans and Schools

Question: Where do Chinese Americans fit in the black/white binary?

• Positioned themselves as “better than blacks,” 1857

• Courts ruled they were “colored,” 1927
Blacks Controlling their Own Educational Destiny

- Frederick Douglass
- Dunbar High School
- Morehouse, Spelman, Howard, and other Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Questions to Ponder…

• How can we represent race groups equitably in our curriculum and public events and highlight our students’ more complex, blurry diversity?

• Is racial equality being adequately addressed and achieved by our reforms? When would targeting race groups in our reforms help children more? When would racial equality actually be best achieved by reforms designed for ‘all’?

• How do issues of language, immigration status, or family income factor in? Since inequality systems include various factors intertwined with race, would it make sense to analyze our inequalities through several simultaneous lenses? Or should we target specific forms of inequality separately?

• Do racial achievement patterns exist in our school or district? Are we treating them as if they are normal or acceptable? How are we each involved in producing them? How could we each be involved in remedying them? And who else needs to get involved in the analysis and remedy?
THE AMERICAN POLICY.
Bringing the brunt boy to the little Red, White and Blue Schoolhouse.