Peer-Reviewed Article: Conferencing toward Racial Literacies from the Post-White Orientation

Marcus Croom

Marcus Croom is assistant professor in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at [Indiana University](#) in Bloomington. As a race critical researcher, his inquiries focus on race and literacies within educator preparation and educator development in American schooling, specifically teaching and learning as practiced with the Post-White Orientation. He typically generates knowledge through practice of race theory (PRT), case study, and qualitative methods, especially race critical practice analysis. His mission is to cultivate more human fulfillment and mitigate human suffering. Holistically, his work involves using research and experience to help individuals and groups develop racial literacies, which thereby advances the justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts of schools, universities, businesses, organizations, and communities.

Abstract

The 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference theme was "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present." As an invited expert, I presented a workshop that challenged Watson Conference participants to racially reorient themselves, personally and professionally, toward the Post-White Orientation as well as post-White conference design. Likewise, in this 2022 special issue of *Writers: Craft and Context*, this article urges readers to begin identifying and disrupting antihuman racial orientations and practices in themselves as well as conference designs. Such race reorientation work should use practice of race theory (PRT) to explicitly engage in healthier ways of thinking and doing race (i.e. developing and practicing racial literacies).

Keywords

conference, antiracist, practice of race theory, prt, post-white, racial literacies, equity practice

INTRODUCE: (CON)TEXT

In response to the 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference call for consultation theme, "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present," I presented a workshop that challenged participants to racially reorient themselves, personally and professionally. This challenge involved identifying and disrupting antihuman racial orientations and practices within conference designers themselves so they might understand how to begin using practice of race theory (PRT) to explicitly engage in healthier ways of thinking and doing race (racial literacies) and, in turn, begin to design conference opportunities for their conference participants to also develop racial literacies (defined below). In this special issue article, I offer a written experience of that online conference workshop crafted as an explicit depiction of expository writing. You have already begun this written experience by interfacing with this text in your own multifaceted, racialized context. The introduction is followed by a discussion of related literature, characterization of the Post-White Orientation, and an original conference case that should be used to initiate the practice of post-White conference design, particularly among higher education professionals. I conclude with useful questions that might guide you further toward post-White conference designs in 21st-century U.S. contexts. Overall, this article exemplifies the transforming framework *equity practice*, defined as identifying and discontinuing inequities (Croom, 2020a). Equity practice is transforming because the roots of inequities are accounted for and acted upon. In this instance, *equity practice* is applied to conferencing, but the *equity practice framework* has also been applied to U.S. schools, school districts, and universities in my previous and ongoing consulting work (briolearning.com). Throughout, from the article title to the references, I have created opportunities to notice and trace multifaceted racialization using this text as written for *Writers: Craft and Context* (and its

audiences, communities, their norms, their powers and positions, their languages, and so on).

RELATE: THEY SAY, I SAY

Dr. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois anticipated a practice theory of race and also indicated what racial literacies involve:

> Thus [Du Bois writes, with the aim of debunking the false concept of group and racial exclusiveness], it is easy to see that **scientific** [i.e. a biological] **definition of race is impossible**; it is easy to prove that **physical characteristics are not so inherited as to make it possible to divide the world into races**; that **ability is the monopoly of no known aristocracy**; that the possibilities of **human development cannot be circumscribed by color, nationality, or any conceivable definition of race**; [and yet] all this has nothing to do with the plain fact that throughout the world today **organized groups** of men by monopoly of **economic and physical power, legal enactment and intellectual training** are limiting with determination and unflagging zeal the development of other groups; and that the concentration particularly of economic power today puts the majority of mankind into a slavery to the rest. (Du Bois, 1940, p. 137; emphasis added)

In other words, (1) the common sense view of race is false (Croom, 2020b); (2) despite the fallaciousness of the biological theory of race, the "plain fact" is that race is real in human history and experience (Croom, 2016a, 2020c); (3) warranted is an alternative theorization that demystifies race and more accurately accounts for race in human history and (intersecting) human experience (Croom, 2020d); and (4) the ongoing fact of consequential human racialization calls for racial literacies (Croom, 2016a), that is, race critical "ways of thinking and doing that support human well-being amid the various processes that racially situate our lives, and some of these race practices and racial experiences are violence and trauma(tic)" (Croom et al., 2019).

As pioneers of race critical scholarship have pointed out for over 100 years (Berry & Gross, 2020; Du Bois, 1903, 1940; Morel, 1920; Morrison, 1992; Robinson, 1983; Wilson, 1860; Woodson, 1933), Western European and U.S. customs of race practice are routinely oriented by the baseless and morally bankrupt notion of racially White superiority, and anti-Blackness in particular (Grosfoguel, 2013). Thus, the vindicationist tradition and the Post-White Orientation (described below) name and counter this antihuman, Deficiency Philosophy, which continues to be generated and perpetuated needlessly through various forms of racial thoughts and practices, including European science and European critical theory (Croom, 2020b; Drake, 1987; Herbjørnsrud, 2021a, 2021b; Hoover, 1990; Rabaka, 2009; Robinson, 1983).

DEFINE: RACE AND THE POST-WHITE ORIENTATION

Du Bois has clarified, and the American Anthropological Association has recently confirmed, that it is "impossible" to define race on biological terms. Therefore, how should race be defined? In practice of race theory (PRT), race is defined as "consequential social practice" (Croom, 2020b). This means race is not in our bodies at all. Rather, race is what we *think and do*, including attributions to human bodies, to good or ill (intersecting) effects. According to this practice view of race, our racial past and racial present need not be our racial future because understanding race as practice and process refutes racial inevitabilities. That is, we can think and do race for good rather than ill. Obviously, it remains to be seen whether human beings *will* think and do race for good, especially those persons (across racial groups) who are stockholders with investments in the fake value of White and Whiteness. Still, toward the aim of post-White racial futures for us all, I have proposed that we use race critical conference designs as avenues to cultivate and distribute healthier ways of thinking and doing race and to accelerate the realization of post-White racial futures in the United States and perhaps other Westernized contexts as well.

PRT is one of at least six race frameworks currently used in the field of education, including critical race theory (CRT), Marxism, Whiteness studies, cultural studies, and the multidimensional theory of racism and education (Croom, 2016b; Leonardo, 2013). Historically, there are at least three orientations to race: the White, Anti-Black Orientation; the Post-Racial Orientation; and the Post-White Orientation (Croom, 2016c). Each of these orientations is embedded within a worldview or philosophical stance. According to Mary Rhodes Hoover (1990), there are two enduring worldviews of human beings that are categorically distinct, namely Deficiency Philosophy and Vindicationist Philosophy. These standpoints are linked to thoughts and practices that racialize human beings differently; some are hyperraced (to the point that race is distorting or obscuring other aspects of persons) while others are hyporaced (to the point of minimizing or neutralizing race as an aspect of persons).

On one hand, the Deficiency Philosophy views the hyperraced as "inherently flawed, deficient or pathological and [the hyperraced] are inferiorized relative to Whites, the hyporaced" (Croom, 2020c, p. 535). On the other hand, the Vindicationist Philosophy "views both Whites and BIPOC as racial groups, but this philosophy also recognizes the full humanity of the hyperraced. From this standpoint, [the hyperraced] are vindicated from all the false and harmful notions that deficiency philosophy perpetuates simultaneously to the detriment of the hyperraced and to the benefit of Whites" (535). Furthering Hoover's work, I have noted that a weakness of Vindicationist Philosophy is the unwanted possibility of maintaining White and Whiteness as a reference point or frame of reference (Croom, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Therefore, I have coupled "post-White" to Vindicationist Philosophy in order

to delete—*in every way*—any false valuations and unnecessary reference-making to White(ness) (Croom, 2016c).

Parenthetically, the "post" in the term "post-White" signals that "human culture—likely forever transformed by (White superordinate) racialization—is arguably returning from a brief, horrific hiatus wherein the racially White and Whiteness were baselessly, yet experientially, significant" (Croom, 2020b, p. 279). In other words, "post-White" conveys that (a) the barbaric distortions of White(ness) have occurred and are consequential, (b) racialization remains (post-White is not postracial), (c) and White(ness) is neither the preeminent nor preferred way of being in human culture—contrary to all the forms of false claims that have and continue to prop up White(ness) as if it is or ever was inherently preeminent or preferred. Accordingly, "post-White" is not at all "anti-White" because the Post-White, Vindicationist Orientation is principally indifferent to the empty, valueless notion of White(ness)—though admittedly "White supremacy" at times might elicit a nose chuckle.

Continuing, I have also contributed terms—"hyperraced" and "hyporaced"—to further interrogate uncritical race practice, to further disrupt the Black-White binary, to further highlight the diversity and precarity of White(ness), and to further expose White(ness) as a racial classification rather than as some neutral or nonracial existence (Croom, 2020c). In sum, whereas the White, Anti-Black Orientation and the Post-Racial Orientation are both embedded in Deficiency Philosophy, the Post-White Orientation is embedded within the Post-White, Vindicationist Philosophy. This results in rejecting—*in every way*—the false notion of White(ness), or the hyporaced as above the hyperraced, or BIPOC(ness). BIPOC(ness) means Black(ness), Indigenous(ness), and People of Color(ness), where "ness" includes the intersecting aspects of these ways of being fully human (e.g. languages, (non)religions, etc.). Regardless of our past and present, ongoing racialization does not itself justify antihuman racial hierarchies. We can reorient and practice race for good, not ill (develop and practice racial literacies).

When we reorient from Deficiency Philosophy to Post-White, Vindicationist Philosophy with regard to conference designs, a few questions arise: **How is the White, Anti-Black Orientation operating in ourselves—across racial groups? How so in our conference designs? Also, what patterns and barriers are hostile to the humanity of BIPOC conference participants?**

After introducing the Post-White Orientation and raising these questions, I offered a template that conference designers could use to support the development of racial literacies through de/reconstructing the priorities and practices of their conference gatherings (see Figure 1). The aim was for conference designers to understand how to begin using practice of race theory (PRT) to explicitly engage in healthier ways of thinking and doing race and, in turn, begin to design conference opportunities for their conference participants to also develop racial literacies. Defining,

and reincorporating from above, "racial literacies . . . means developing those ways of thinking and doing [race] that support human well-being amid the various processes that racially situate our lives, and some of these race practices and racial experiences are violence and trauma(tic)" (Croom et al., 2019, p. 17).

ILLUSTRATE: POST-WHITE CONFERENCE DESIGN

As Du Bois and many others have long pointed out, an alternative theorization of race is warranted, one that demystifies race and more accurately accounts for race in human history and (intersecting) human experience. Practice of race theory (PRT) is the alternative account of race that aligns with the Post-White, Vindicationist Philosophy. As stated above, race is not biological, human-capacity determining, or natural. Rather, race is what we *think and do*—with human bodies and more—to good or ill consequences.

When we advance from the "common sense view" of race to the "consequential social practice view" of race (i.e. PRT), we begin to understand "there is a mutual relationship between race micropractice, race mesopractice, and race macropractice" (Croom, 2020b, pp. 269, 279). In other words, whether in texts like this one or during scholarly conferences, race is being thought and done for good or ill—across racial groups. This fact raises additional questions: **When are we ourselves (not) practicing race? And why? When is race (not) practiced in conference documents (written form) and discussions (unwritten form)? And to what effect?**

When the questions above are considered, they demand practical answers to an obvious question: What do we do now? *We begin developing racial literacies and practicing post-White conference design.* The bolded questions above support the development of racial literacies and the following is a guiding template for how to practice post-White conference design:

- **Identify and reject** all forms of the Deficiency Philosophy; the White, Anti-Black Orientation; and the Post-Racial Orientation.
- **Identify** forms of **race practice** (unwritten, written, symbolic, material, individual, institutional, etc. using PRT).
- **De/reconstruct** processes and practices that perpetuate the Deficiency Philosophy; the White, Anti-Black Orientation; and the Post-Racial Orientation.
- **Establish** processes and practices that perpetuate the Post-White Orientation (Croom, 2016c):

  By post-White orientation, I mean a racial understanding and practice characterized by (a) unequivocal regard for "non-White" humanity, particularly "Black" humanity; (b) demotion of "White" standing (i.e., position, status); (c) rejection of post-racial notions; (d) non-hierarchical

racialization; and (e) anticipation of a post-White socio-political norm.

• **Designate** paid or unpaid roles for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to co-design conference gatherings. Note: This process follows the identifying and re/designing work that has already begun and that will continue after hyperraced co-designers become involved. These designated co-designers are not the "clean-up crew" for troubled conferences or conferences in crisis. Rather, these are expert analysts and conference-design leaders.
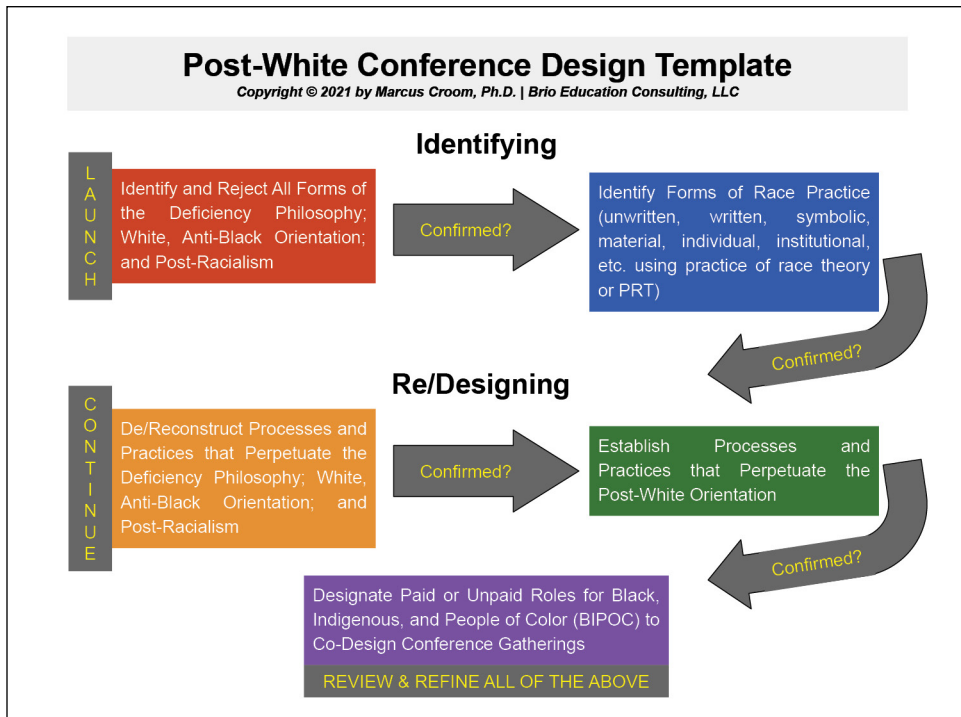

Figure 1: Post-White Conference Design Template

To provide conference designers the opportunity to begin de/re-constructing future conferences by developing racial literacies and practicing post-White conference design (as discussed above), I offer a fictional conference case below. This original conference case is not intended to portray any actual academic conference that exists anywhere in the world.

The IAAA Conference Case [version 9.8]

The International Association of Anonymous Academics (IAAA) meets annually at a selected venue throughout the world. The annual conference is designed by a committee whose members serve a three-year term. Members roll onto the committee, run an annual conference, then roll off the committee after the third year, having provided support to new committee members as well as those who are currently responsible for carrying out an annual conference.

During the planning of the upcoming conference, concerns were raised in the feedback about a prior conference and about how some members were experiencing their annual gathering. For example, while IAAA members clearly celebrated more inclusive bathroom facilities, the use of additional languages for all materials and sessions, and indicated they liked the enhanced online features and platforms of the conference, members also said that they "*feel excluded*," are "*invisible*," and one even stated they are "*tired of getting so little in return for my IAAA membership, conference registration and my travel costs.*" The conference planners were puzzled.

With these member comments in mind, conference planners took a closer look at the sessions' feedback. It seemed the sessions with groups of attendees who moved together across various sessions reported a different experience than individuals who attended various sessions. The planning committee also noticed that informal events were mentioned as members discussed the formal conference schedule and events. For example, one member said, "*I don't even go to the keynote anymore. Instead, I catch up with colleagues or meet with people who want to talk about our work. I play back the keynote online after the conference is over.*" Other comments suggested some members were very happy with the sessions: "*I really like the way we have moved away from identity politics to put more focus on research! The last few annual meetings have felt really odd. Great job.*"

More generally, conference planners also picked up on differences related to incomes, resources, status, and how members envisioned the future. One member said, "*I plan my participation by the location of the conference. If it's not held within driving distance of where I live, I don't come.*"

Another member asked, "*Are we really an international organization if we only meet outside the U.S. every fifth year? When was the last time we gathered in Paris? Why do we keep going to Florida and California?*"

Some on the planning committee were stumped to read, "*Once I arrive, I find a grocery store so I can make sandwiches in my room. If there's free food or bottled drinks, I make the most of it until I can get back home.*"

Related to the future, a member shared, "*I'm not sure if I'll keep coming. Now that I'm a professor, it seems like I'm hearing the same old stuff every year. Our peer-reviewed sessions report and present the same ideas over and over again. And most of it has nothing to do with the real world.*"

But the planning committee also read a different take: "*I'm thankful I had a chance to present a poster session about my work. My children said they see me in a different light now. Plus, this is the first major trip my spouse and I have had since I started my doctoral program! Next year, I plan to present a paper.*"

Notably, even the feedback from the keynote speaker suggested differences: "*When you reached out to me, I was hesitant to accept your invitation, but I did. Looking back, this was not a good decision. Not only did I feel disrespected by some of your members, but I also discovered that you offered me a smaller contract than last year's keynote speaker. After rearranging my schedule to join you, covering my own travel expenses, receiving a smaller honorarium, and being disrespected before and after my keynote, I'm upset by all of this and regret my decision.*"

The conference planning committee understood something was going wrong with the annual conference. The feedback made this clear. It was not at all clear what they should do to redesign the conference based on what they learned.

IAAA Conference Case Analysis Guide

Since this conference case is wholly fictional and is not intended to portray any conference anywhere in the world, begin by noting whether any actual conference experiences came to mind for you as you (re)read. Describe and examine such associations if they occurred and note other connections that you bring to your reading of this fictional conference case. Also, consider each example of quoted feedback from IAAA members and the guest speaker. What question(s) did their comments raise for you? Given that there are no names provided in this conference case (International Association of Anonymous Academics), how are you imagining each anonymous character presented? Write and/or draw what you had in mind as you (re)read the conference case. What do your own thoughts reveal about your own racial orientation (i.e. White, Anti-Black Orientation? Post-Racial Orientation? Post-White Orientation? Combinations?) and your own positioning as a reader? Relate your own race thought to your own race practice in light of this conference case, whether these are imagined racial practices or actual racial practices (as defined in PRT). Which case comments or sections above would you connect to the post-White conference template? Why? Using the post-White conference template, share three actions you would take to begin redesigning the IAAA annual conference. Justify your

possible actions by relating them to words and/or meanings in the IAAA Conference Case.

CONCLUDE: DISCUSSING AND FURTHERING QUEST(ION)S TOWARD POST-WHITE CONFERENCE DESIGN

Although I had a conclusion in mind when I began crafting this article, I did not write the conclusion you are now reading until I had revised this article a number of times, including revisions that responded to early feedback from peer reviewers. Guided by helpful feedback from my peer reviewers, as well as other readers I contacted for feedback, I made various minor revisions; moved some text from the introduction above to this conclusion; foregrounded some ideas within the text; further defined key terms throughout to avoid misunderstandings; wrote an original conference case (IAAA Conference Case) to provide readers an opportunity to begin developing racial literacies and practicing post-White conference design; and decided against connecting this article to the work of one or two fellow special issue authors (as suggested in some feedback) because highlighting only one or two special issue articles in my own contribution, instead of highlighting each article published here in this conference volume, might undermine my purpose for writing this contribution: to help readers use the philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual understandings discussed above (Post-White Orientation, PRT, racial literacies, post-White conference template, etc.). Along these lines, I also added that this article exemplifies *equity practice*, defined as identifying and discontinuing inequities (see "Identifying" and "Re/Designing" in Post-White Conference Design Template above) (Croom, 2020a). This revision was important because readers might benefit from explicit reference to the *equity practice framework* and the possibilities of applying this framework in various contexts within or beyond U.S. schooling.

When you look back at what is written in this article, do you see I have provided signpost headings throughout this text, beginning with the article title, that point out the largely invisible or unspoken conditions to which the writer and the writing are responding, particularly multimodal and multileveled racialization? For example, this text is structured according to Westernized academic conventions routinely hierarchically racialized as White and regarded as universal, although many erudite expository writing possibilities and conventions beyond Western Europe and the United States of America might have been as effective or even more so.

Also, have you considered that the selected citations provided as references (i.e. the authorities to which I have chosen to refer) do not fully account for all the persons who have informed what these writers have said or what I am now saying? This means I have crafted a text that proffers who should be regarded as authoritative, as well as who might not be regarded at all, depending on what readers bring to their reading of this text. Given the pervasiveness

of the false notion of White superiority—especially in Westernized contexts—the Deficiency Philosophy and the White, Anti-Black Orientation could either be perpetuated or debunked through my citations. Does my text reject Deficiency Philosophy, the White, Anti-Black Orientation, and postracialism?

Altogether, readers are invited to use my text to not only "learn about" my selected topic (an exposition) but also to "learn across" the situated positions involved with my writing task and any other selected writing task (an exposé). Accordingly, look back at the text above to note what I take for granted and what I make explicit because each move should open up questions and conversations. Also, consider how my expository task (this crafted text) exposes the situated, hierarchical racialization already in progress before the text (the writer), in the text (the writing), beside the text ("*The Archive*" and the archive; Croom, et al., 2021), and behind the text (historically, politically, citationally, etc.; Croom, 2021), even tacitly in some instances. Restated, having read this text, now look back for everything this text is pointing toward, explicitly or implicitly. Engage—rather than evade—the multiple, situated aspects of racialization that this article raises and let's work together to end harmful race practices through conference design and other avenues.

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