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Decoding the Dominance Paradigm

I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to be domination—which implies its opposite, the theme of liberation, as the objective to be achieved.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, I described the methodologies of dominance whereby Europeans established White hegemony throughout many parts of the world. As educators committed to social transformation and healing, however, it is essential that we go further in our understanding of dominance than mere description of its more blatant manifestations. Many of the obvious and overt methodologies of dominance have now been limited by legislative and legal constraints, yet we know that the residual effects of White hegemony continue to exert a powerful downward and deleterious pull in the lives of our students who have not been marked with the racial code of privilege.

White dominance continues to weigh in as a powerful contender in the educational process, with or without the presence of blatant White supremacists. Despite decades of civil rights activity, it is the subtle and often invisible nature of White dominance that has proven to be so resistant to change in Western nations. The challenge now facing us in education is to dismantle the deeper nature of racism and dominance, a challenge that will require a more rigorous analysis of the underlying dynamics of dominance than we as White educators have yet achieved. This deeper analysis of dominance is the focus of the present chapter, and it is a task we must complete before we can realistically hope to contribute to the process of social transformation and healing.

THE DYNAMICS OF DOMINANCE

We cannot fully understand dominance without exploring the process of knowledge construction, which is the means by which individuals and societies determine what is real and true. Knowledge is never neutral (J. A. Banks, 1996). Our "knowing" does not necessarily describe what is real in an objective sense, but rather what is *considered* to be real in a subjective sense (Code, 1991; Fiske, 1989). "Official knowledge" is constructed by those who occupy the seats of power in all major social institutions, including education (Apple, 1993). Personal truth may be in the mind of the beholder (a function of individual perception), but official truth is in the hands of the powerful (a function of group control). Hegemonic groups tend to construct reality in ways that reinforce, protect, and legitimize their position of dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993).

Since the process of education is primarily concerned with the communication of meaning and truth, it has always been imperative, from a hegemonic group perspective, that all elements of schooling be aligned with official knowledge. In this way, the educational process has allowed those in power to selectively control the flow of knowledge and inculcate into young minds only those "truths" that solidify and perpetuate their own hegemony (Gramsci, 1972). As J. A. Banks (1997) has stated, "citizenship education in the United States has historically reinforced dominant-group hegemony" (p. 4). To break through this dam of dominance, we must begin to identify and dislodge the various building blocks from which it has been constructed. In my efforts over the past 20 years to understand how social reality has been fashioned to favor Whites, I have identified three major processes that function together as the dynamics of dominance: the assumption of rightness, the luxury of ignorance, and the legacy of privilege. I will explore each of these in the following discussion.

THE ASSUMPTION OF RIGHTNESS

Dominant groups tend to claim truth as their private domain. For the most part, hegemonic groups do not consider their beliefs, attitudes, and actions to be determined by cultural conditioning or the influences of group membership. As Whites, we usually don't even think of ourselves as having culture; we're simply "right." Dominant groups don't hold "perspectives," they hold "Truth." This assumption of rightness has been a powerful force in the establishment of White dominance.

In the American experience, for example, the assumption of rightness was strongly reinforced by the sense of "exceptionality" that fired

the imaginations of the Founders, a belief in the "monolithic myth of American success" (Appleby, 1992, p. 427). There was a sense of perfectionism in the Founders' experiment with democracy, a conviction that they were embarking on an adventure never before experienced by humankind. The language of "inalienable rights" and "equality and justice for all" grew out of a tremendous optimism that they actually could create a new and better social arrangement than had been available in Europe.

In their revolution against England, the Founders felt they had defeated a system of hereditary superiority based on class and created a new society founded on equality. In actual fact, of course, they had merely substituted a different hegemonic system, one based on factors of race and gender as well as economic position. The American version of dominance was embedded in the language of "white, male property owners" written into the Constitution. The new nation, founded on the principles of equality and justice, was in fact administered under the realities of racism, sexism, and elitism (Franklin, 1976).

The extermination of American Indians, the enslavement of Blacks, the theft of land from Mexico, and the later exploitation and marginalization of Asian American laborers did not fit well with the expressed image of the United States as a just and fair nation. A certain cognitive and moral dissonance grew as events in our history made it clear that the "pursuit of happiness" was intended for Whites only. As the dissonance intensified, there developed a need to rationalize the obvious inequalities, a way to explain the injustices, and yet keep the myth of justice alive. This need was met through an evolving sense of White superiority and Anglo-conformity (Cole & Cole, 1954).

Even the Founders had at least a nascent sense of racial superiority (Franklin, 1976). Benjamin Franklin, for instance, talked about "scouring our planet" of its darker-hued people and creating the new nation as an Anglo-Saxon haven populated by the "principal body of White people on the face of the earth" (cited in Levine, 1996, p. 108). With the emergence of "scientific" race theories "explaining" the innate and hereditary inferiority of non-European groups, the notion of White superiority was firmly in place by the middle of the nineteenth century. Horsman (1981) writes:

By 1850, a clear pattern was emerging. From their own successful past as Puritan colonists, Revolutionary patriots, conquerors of the wilderness, and creators of an immense material prosperity, the Americans had evidence plain before them that they were a chosen people; from the English they had learned that the Anglo-Saxons had always been peculiarly gifted in the arts of government; from the scientists and ethnologists they were learning

that they were of a distinct Caucasian race, innately endowed with abilities that placed them above other races; from the philologist, often through literary sources, they were learning that they were the descendants of those Aryans who followed the sun to carry civilization to the whole world. (p. 5)

With a preponderance of “evidence” thus mounting in favor of White superiority, the young nation finally found a way to justify the unequal treatment of non-White groups. Since these groups were held to be, by their very nature, innately and racially inferior, it was reasonable to remove them from the line of progress and exclude them from the benefits of equality and justice. Consistent with the assumptions of social dominance theory, a set of legitimizing myths thus began to emerge to rationalize and perpetuate White hegemony in the United States (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). The ultimate legitimizing myth became that of racism itself (Montagu, 1942/1997). Racist notions about Africans, for example, became “the means of explaining slavery to people whose terrain was a republic founded on radical doctrines of liberty and natural rights” (Fields, 1990, p. 114). Formulated in the early race theories of the nineteenth century (Chase, 1977; Horsman, 1981), reinforced in the pseudoscience of eugenics in the 1920s and 1930s (Gould, 1981; Horsman, 1981; Kelves, 1985), and reincarnated yet again in the 1990s with the publication of the *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), the curse of racism has always been available, in both its ridiculous and its increasingly sophisticated forms, to provide a convenient rationale for White dominance.

Racism for Whites has been like a crazy uncle who has been locked away for generations in the hidden attic of our collective social reality. This old relative has been part of the family for a long time. Everyone knows he’s living with us, because we bring him food and water occasionally, but nobody wants to take him out in public. He is an embarrassment and a pain to deal with, yet our little family secret is that he is rich and the rest of us are living, either consciously or unconsciously, off the wealth and power he accumulated in his heyday. Even though many of us may disapprove of the tactics he used to gain his fortune, few of us want to be written out of his will. The legacy of racism, which has been fueled and legitimized by our assumption of rightness, has haunted the house of collective White identity for centuries. How we deal with this specter is a topic I will approach in more depth in the discussion of White racial identity formation in Chapters 5 and 6.

In addition to racism and theories of White supremacy, two additional elements of the White assumption of rightness warrant comment here: the idea of the melting pot and the notion of colorblindness. The

melting pot idea was immortalized in a play written in 1908 by Israel Zangwill, a Jewish immigrant who came to the United States from England. His vision of the melting pot idealized the Americanization process whereby new immigrants could “melt away” their distinctive differences and emerge in the image of Anglo-conformity. This notion was expressed in visual and physical form by the Ford Motor Company in their “Ford English School” graduation ceremonies held from 1914 to 1921 (Levine, 1996). During these celebrated public events, recently arrived immigrant workers, having completed their company-sponsored course of study in English language and American culture, would enter a huge cauldron dressed in the costume of their homeland and emerge in their best American clothes, carrying American flags.

As romantic as this image might appear from a Eurocentric perspective, the melting pot has never been a viable option for people of color. Blacks, Indians, Hispanics, and Asians, even when they wanted to assimilate, have always found the color of their skin to be a more powerful marker than any costume or flag. This reality seems difficult to grasp for many of the White educators I encounter in my work throughout the United States and Australia. They ask: “Why can’t everyone just be Americans, or just Australians? Why do some people insist on ‘hyphenated’ names, like African American or Asian American or Aboriginal Australian? My family gave up the past, why can’t yours?” In an extreme articulation of the melting pot theory, a White Australian once told me, “The problem with Aboriginal people is that they want to keep their culture.” Belief in the melting pot is intimately related to the assumption of rightness: “If White folks melted, anyone can. If you haven’t melted yet, you ought to.”

The belief in colorblindness is a close cousin to the idea of the melting pot. In my work with White educators, I often hear the following line of reasoning: “I was raised not to see color. I have always treated everyone the same. I see people as individuals, not as member of a racial group.” Similar to the melting pot idea, the declaration of colorblindness assumes that we can erase our racial categories, ignore differences, and thereby achieve an illusory state of sameness or equality. The colorblind perspective treats race as an irrelevant, invisible, and taboo topic (Rist, 1974; Schofield, 1997). The proponents of colorblindness assume that the mere perception of difference is a problem. “If I see race, I must be a racist. If I don’t see color, or other differences, they will go away.” For these people, the mere existence of the difference causes discomfort and must be ignored or denied. Of course, the underlying assumption is that human difference in itself is a problem.

Colorblindness grows from a dominance-oriented perspective. Dif-

ference threatens dominance, because it upsets the belief in one's own rightness. "We are all the same" translates as "We are all like me," which is comforting for those who are accustomed to dominance. A White teacher once told me that "God is colorblind," which raised the assumption of rightness to a higher level. I responded, "If God is colorblind, why did she create such a beautiful array of skin tones among the human family?" This produced a blank stare from the teacher, so I turned to my African American colleague and asked, "Jessie, if I tell you I don't see your color, how does that make you feel?" His response was, "You don't see me." That led to tears from the teacher. Her claim to colorblindness was coming from the goodness of her heart. Her assumption of rightness was well intended, as it often is. It was painful for her to realize that her dearly held belief in the sameness of human beings actually denied the authentic existence of people whose experiences of reality were different from hers. Dominance dies a difficult death, for individuals as well as nations.

THE ROOTS OF RIGHTNESS

Because the assumption of rightness has been deeply imbedded in White social reality, it is important to consider the source of this propensity for so narrowly circumscribing the parameters of truth. What has fueled White society's need to impose a single set of assumptions on people as diverse as Aboriginal Australians, American Indians, Africans, Pacific Islanders, and many other groups around the globe? In my efforts to uncover the central beliefs that have supported the hubris of Western dominance, I have found that the deepest legitimizing myths lie at the core of our theology and religion. Even though Christianity has for centuries inspired great acts of compassion and social justice, the temporal power of the Christian church has also at times been subverted to serve the purposes of White social dominance. In the analysis that follows I seek not to disparage the essential message of the Christian tradition but merely to elucidate the unfortunate means whereby the politics of greed and racism can sometimes misdirect the power of even our most sacred institutions.

Judeo-Christian legends of creation place man, and later woman, in a garden over which they are given dominion. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth'" (Genesis 1:28). Literally, from the beginning of time, those

societies that draw on the cosmology of the Old Testament have been predisposed, by order of their God, to establish dominance. And it was not all human beings who were granted this divine trust, but only those who were within the fold of Judaism, and later Christianity. Thus, the notion of the "chosen people," which is second central tenet of the Judeo-Christian worldview, narrowed the focus regarding who should have dominion over the creation.

A third idea, that of the "one true God," further defined the specialness of the chosen people. There may be other cultures and religions in the world, with other beliefs and different names for the creator, but there is only one true faith, and it is ours. Good Christians were called to proselytize the planet and convince others of their special truth: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 19-20). Christianity further restricted the parameters of truth and chosenness by establishing their Messiah as the single arbiter at the gates of heaven. No one entered paradise except through him. The Catholic hierarchy later added the notion of the infallibility of the pope, which gave god-like qualities to the temporal laws and leaders of the church. The doctrine of the divine right of kings then extended infallibility and limitless power to selected political leaders. And since the church hierarchy was so vociferously patriarchal, at least half of humankind, namely women, were preemptively eliminated from the inner circle of authority and power.

These deeply held religious beliefs regarding dominion, chosenness, the singularity of truth, the infallibility of church and temporal leaders, and the power of the patriarchy have provided the backdrop for the drama of White dominance. In many settings throughout the past 500 years these ideas have been manipulated politically to fuel the engine of Western expansion. The quest for land, wealth, and adventure were central drives, to be sure, but the cosmology of dominion and chosenness has provided the cognitive and moral rationale, the sense of rightness that was necessary to justify the entire enterprise.

Butler (1990) details this convergence of Christianity and dominance in his insightful analysis of the church's role in justifying slavery in the United States. He claims that it was the Christian concept of paternalistic authority that gave plantation owners their peculiar notions of control over the lives of enslaved Africans. Anglican concepts of authority "shaped a paternalistic ethic among planters," an ethic that

not only coalesced with the doctrine of absolute obedience but made it all the more palatable and attractive. . . . Clergymen helped planters explain slave

"misbehavior" in ways that solidified the masters' prejudices about slave degradation, and transformed planter views about laziness, lust, and lying among slaves into powerfully detailed pictures of African depravity. (p. 153)

Christianity and White dominance were similarly linked in Australia, as is demonstrated by the hubristic exuberance of John McDougall Stuart upon planting the Union Jack on a hill in the central desert:

We then gave three hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civil and religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilization, and Christianity is about to break upon them. (cited in Peach, 1984, p. 120)

Christian notions of dominion, chosenness, singularity of truth, and divine sanction of temporal patriarchal authority were well suited to the task of justifying the institution of slavery, land theft, and other forms of White supremacy.

These Christian notions are strikingly different from the cosmology of most of the Indigenous people who became the targets of the Western drive for dominion. Never in my conversations with Indigenous spiritual teachers throughout the world, for example, have I encountered the missionary zeal that has so characterized the Christian tradition. Seldom have any of these Indigenous groups sought to impose their spiritual cosmology on other people. Quite to the contrary, their great struggle in the face of dominance has been to simply preserve the integrity of their traditions in their own cultural communities.

In contrast to Western cosmologies, most Indigenous spiritual traditions also embody more respectful attitudes toward women and nature (Cajete, 1993). Among the Ojibway of North America, for example, creation stories depict the earth as Mother and human beings as her children (Johnston, 1995). Rather than having dominion over the earth, humankind is dependent on her for our very survival. In Ojibway tradition the proper role for human beings is to honor the earth as we would our mother, to treat the earth with respect, as an altar upon which we carry out our lives. The belief in earth-as-mother also grants intrinsic and high regard to the role of women, which is vastly different from the commonly held biblical image of Eve as an afterthought of creation, a mere helpmate for man, and the prime cause for humankind's expulsion from paradise (Allen, 1992).

My purpose here is neither to demonize the Judeo-Christian world-

view nor to deify the universal goodness of Indigenous perspectives. I merely seek to point out that some of the foundational principles of Western theology have been exploited in the service of dominance. Certainly, the Native Peoples of the Americas and other parts of the world have had their own internal issues of dominance and conflict across territorial and cultural boundaries. Witness, for example, the Aztecs' relentless persecution of neighboring groups or the Maoris' powerful warrior tradition that drove out the original inhabitants of New Zealand. In sheer magnitude of dominance, however, none of these intergroup struggles between Indigenous populations compares to the extent of Christianity's reach throughout the world. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British alone had brought one-fourth of the globe and one-fifth of the human race into the Christian fold (MacLeod, 1997). Add to this the colonial grip established by France, Spain, Holland, and Portugal, and much of the planet's population was eventually subjected to the cosmology of Christendom.

It is important to point out that the Christian spiritual tradition itself has not been at fault in the establishment of White dominance, but rather the methods by which people in power have used Christianity to establish and defend White hegemony. Throughout history, the role of Christianity as related to issues of dominance and social justice has been mixed and complex. From liberation theology in Latin America, to civil rights leadership in the United States, to anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa, the Christian church in many ways has been a strong advocate for equity and social healing. The missionary movement may have been used as a tool in establishing Western colonial dominance, but the Christian vision has also inspired many people who have fought to unravel the destructive influences of that same missionary zeal. I trace my own passion for multicultural education to the vision of human dignity I learned through my early experiences in the church. In addition, Christianity today provides a spiritual base and a source of healing and inspiration for many people of color and Indigenous groups who are working for social change around the world.

But if our goal is to eliminate the deleterious effects of White dominance, then we must dig deeply into its causes. In order to free ourselves from the shackles of dominance, it is essential that we look at the shadow-side of Christian politics, including the predilection for single-dimensional truth and the proclivity for imposing spiritual hegemony over people of many different cultures. It is important to acknowledge that the assumption of rightness, which has sustained White racism and dominance for centuries, has also infected the roots of the very religious tradition that has inspired many of us who now seek to end dominance. In the spirit of Kingsolver's (1995) words at the opening of Chapter 2, we must seize the

viper of rightness by the throat, look it straight in the eye, and own up to its venomous influence, even in our most cherished religious traditions.

THE LUXURY OF IGNORANCE

The assumption of rightness is often reinforced by the fact that dominant groups tend to know very little about those people whom they define as “the other.” Individuals from the dominant group are usually unaware of their own power and can carry on the daily activities of their lives without any substantial knowledge about, or meaningful interaction with, those people who are not part of the dominant group (Griffin, 1995; G. Howard, 1993). This luxury of nonengagement is not available to members of negative reference groups, whose “lives demand expertise in translation and transition” between their own culture and the culture of dominance (Griffin, 1995, p. 7).

In Australia, for example, most White Australians have very little personal contact with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people, on the other hand, for their very survival, have had to cultivate a deep understanding of White Australians. Since the early days of British invasion, Aboriginal people have been studious observers of the moods, quirks, rituals, and emotions of the White colonial psyche. They have had to know where they are safe and where they are not, and how to devise strategies for survival amidst the conditions of foreign occupation. Aboriginal young people today, like their African American counterparts in the United States, have to be carefully taught by their elders how to read the intentions and avoid the hostilities of Whites, particularly officials such as the police. By comparison, most White Australians know very little about the actual experiences and feelings of Aboriginal people.

The luxury of ignorance was graphically demonstrated when I recently attended a school board meeting in a community near Seattle, where a large crowd of parents had gathered to argue the merits of expanding the district’s foreign-language offerings. The proposal would have required the expenditure of funds for additional teachers, an issue that was hotly contested at the meeting. At one point, a frustrated father stood up and blurted out to the assembled audience, “If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it’s good enough for my kids!” As ridiculous as this comment may be, it underscores the simple-minded ease with which members of the dominant group can structure a reality that supports their own limited assumptions.

Because of our dominant position, White perceptions and assumptions are often projected as truth into the larger world. Personal reality is assumed to be actual reality. “Jesus is one of ‘us’; therefore he must have spoken English.” “This is ‘our’ school; therefore ‘they’ don’t belong here.”

The process of projection is the foundation of the luxury of ignorance. Although all human beings project their assumptions into the larger world, Whites have the particular advantage of hegemonic social position to reinforce their limited images of truth (Tatum, 1992). Such familiar projections and stereotypes as “Blacks are lazy” or “Indians are on welfare” have been extremely resistant to change, precisely because they have been so deeply inculcated into dominant-group perceptions of reality. Mistaking personal and group judgments for actual descriptions of reality has been referred to in social science literature as the “phenomenal absolutism error,” a process that is intrinsic to the luxury of ignorance and the perpetuation of dominance (Campbell, 1967, cited in Rothbart & John, 1993, p. 40).

Appleby (1992) likens the luxury of ignorance to “a deep forgetting” that has clouded White awareness of the realities of history (p. 425). She writes, “Most of what really happened in the colonial past was ignored because it fit so ill with the narrative of exceptionality” (p. 425). In the United States, and to a large extent in most of the lands invaded by Europeans, Whites were so fascinated with the “specialness” and the progress of their own colonial enterprise that they were either blind or irresponsible to the pain and destruction that resulted from their peculiar exceptionality. This was the real colorblindness: Whites seeing only in white. Thus, Griffin (1995) describes the United States as “a nation troubled by the bad dreams that come from repression and willed forgetting” (p. 10). This selective perception of reality is a function of our refusal to acknowledge those truths that collide with the legitimizing myths of White American specialness. The luxury of selective forgetting is not afforded those who have suffered the consequences of White dominance. For them, the American Dream has often become an unbearable nightmare.

Through the luxury of ignorance, Whites have for centuries maintained a view of reality that “makes sense” to us. Believing in our own legitimizing myths, we have been able to sustain a perception of our goodness, even in the face of the horrific destruction imposed on other people. Whites have had the power and the privilege, as we will see in the next section, to write our own versions of history. We have been able to determine the structure and content of schooling and in this way have institutionalized our ignorance in the name of education. Through the filter of our particular truth, we have projected only a narrow wavelength of light, usually tinted to favor our own countenance.

THE LEGACY OF PRIVILEGE

Many privileges flow to Whites based solely on the color of our skin (McIntosh, 1988, 1989). Simply feeling comfortable moving into a new neigh-

borhood, or simply not having to wonder whether your colleagues perceive your new position as an affirmative action hire, are privileges that are usually invisible to White people. And in addition to being invisible, most of our privileges are also unearned. Sleeter (1996) states:

As a White doctor's kid, who was doing well in school, teachers believed the best about me and treated me accordingly. Doors never closed to me, an experience I assumed to be universal. (p. 19)

Another privilege that comes unearned and invisible to Whites is the right to be seen as "the real Americans." All White people in America are foreign-born, or the descendants of foreign-born relatives, yet, because of the notion of Anglo-conformity discussed earlier, we are usually seen as the "standard" American (Bourne, 1916). The only "real" Americans, of course, are people of the Indigenous Nations, but they are usually left out of the equation and were not even offered citizenship in the United States until 1924. Related to this issue, my American Indian colleagues like to tease non-Indigenous Americans with the comment, "If only our tribes had established better immigration policies in the fifteenth century, we might have saved ourselves a lot of trouble."

From another perspective, Asian Americans are continually subjected to the "forever foreign" syndrome. Even well-educated White professionals will approach my colleague, David Koyama, and ask, "Where are you from?" His answer is always, "I'm from Seattle." They will persist, "Where are you really from?" He says, "I'm from the Wallingford neighborhood in Seattle." This isn't the direction in which the questioner wants to be going. In spite of the fact that David's Japanese American family has been in the United States for four generations, many people want to place them, and others who look like them, somewhere across the water. The security of not being questioned about one's personal identity, or not having to be seen as "fresh off the boat," is an additional privilege of Whiteness that often goes unacknowledged.

Studies of racial identification and self-perception in children, carried out in the 1940s and replicated in the 1990s, point to another area of privilege for Whites (K. B. Clark & Clark, 1947; Hinkle & Brown, 1990). In these studies Black children frequently made preferential choices for White dolls over Black dolls. Similarly, in my wife's inner-city classroom in the 1960s, Black children in the first grade were initially much less likely than White children to describe themselves in positive terms when looking in the mirror (Lotus Linton, personal communication, April 1969). The possibility of feeling good about oneself is a privilege that often comes invisibly to Whites as a mere function of our historical position of racial dominance.

Many of the privileges that continue to flow to Whites today are outgrowths of the colonial experience. American and British expatriates living in India, for example, continue to receive the rewards of a centuries-old system that has perpetuated the "making of masters in the servant's land" (Kidder, 1997, p. 158). Whites who would have an average middle-class lifestyle in the United States or England are able to live like royalty in India. Simply by virtue of being White and Western, expatriates throughout the world enjoy the benefits of these "colonial remnants." And even those Whites who stay at home in their First World nations are supported daily by the continuing exploitation of lands and people in the colonialized world. The simple privilege of buying cheap french fries in a fast-food restaurant, for example, is supported by a complex system of dominance and subordination, wherein American-owned foreign agribusiness is destroying the culture, land base, and livelihood of peasant farm families 8,000 miles from my neighborhood burger stand (Apple, 1997).

Perhaps the most grievous characteristic of privilege is the social and psychological insulation that comes with dominance. The United States now has the richest adults and the poorest children of any Western nation (Males, 1996). This discrepancy is a function of both race and economics, since children of color are disproportionately represented in the ranks of poverty. Sadly, overwhelming numbers of well-to-do White folks support political efforts to balance the federal budget by sacrificing the present health and future prospects of poor children, otherwise known as "welfare reform" (Gans, 1995). Why do we allow the suffering of children in poverty to continue and even worsen in our country? Is it because the White people of our nation are uncaring and cruel? Whereas this may be true for some, a more plausible explanation is that so many of us are simply not touched by poverty. Privilege allows us not to know, not to see, and not to act. Privilege provides moral insulation against the cold winds of reality and awareness.

Finally, there is the privilege of "voice." Dominant groups have the power to control public discourse. Whites in Western nations have written the official history, established the systems of education, owned the media, directed the flow of funding, disproportionately influenced the political climate, and occupied the seats of power in most social institutions. Because of our social position, we have had the power to silence or interpret other people's voices and cultures. For example, groups attending the series of World Indigenous People's Conferences continually speak out against the "commodification of culture," which is the process whereby White anthropologists, explorers, missionaries, writers, scientists, and entrepreneurs have for centuries appropriated Indigenous culture for their own purposes and use.

People from many different Indigenous groups have told me how their stories, arts, artifacts, spiritual objects, and even the bones of their ancestors have been collected and displayed in Western universities, laboratories, art galleries, books, theaters, museums, and shops (Bob Morgan, personal communication, June 1994). Through the series of World Conferences and other international forums, Indigenous people are now fighting for the legal recognition and protection of their property rights regarding the material and spiritual content of their cultural traditions.

Intentionally or unintentionally, we in the West have often been the consumers of other people's cultures, claiming their property as ours and projecting their images through the filter of our interpretation. This predilection for voicing other people's stories is not well received by our colleagues from other cultures. In the words of the preeminent African American playwright, August Wilson:

We reject, without reservation, any attempt by anyone to re-write our history so as to deny us the rewards of our spiritual labors, and to become the cultural custodians of our art. (Quoted in Holmstrom, 1997, p. 15)

Even in our postmodern rhetoric related to the deconstruction of dominance, Whites often speak of "giving voice" to marginalized groups, as if *their* voice is *ours* to give. From our position of privilege, we have often attempted to construct the stage on which other people's dramas are enacted. We have even tried at times to play their parts. And, of course, we have usually sold the tickets.

Many privileges have come to Whites simply because we are members of the dominant group: the privilege of having our voices heard, of not having to explain or defend our legitimate citizenship or identity, of seeing our images projected in a positive light, of remaining insulated from other people's realities, of being represented in positions of power, and of being able to tell our own stories. These privileges are usually not earned and often not consciously acknowledged. That our privileged dominance often threatens the physical and cultural well-being of other groups is a reality that Whites, for the most part, have chosen to ignore. The fact that we *can* choose to ignore such realities is perhaps our most insidious privilege.

POSSIBILITIES FOR HOPE AND HEALING

White teachers often speak to me about their feelings of powerlessness regarding the tremendous odds working against us in the classroom. In

the face of the pernicious and long-term effects of dominance, many of us become frustrated in our efforts to significantly alter the lives of our students, particularly those who have been most marginalized by dominance. Given the challenges confronting us, some well-intended and once idealistic teachers have fallen into despondency and even cynicism. Some, who once believed that all students could achieve, have lost faith in the face of the real difficulties in their students' lives and have come to blame the culture and characteristics of the child for the school's failure to effectively serve all of our students. Even Whites who have held true to our calling as educators continue to struggle with the issues of dominance, and we often ask ourselves: What can I do as a White teacher?

Much of our frustration as educators flows from the fact that the dynamics of dominance are self-perpetuating. The luxury of ignorance, the assumption of rightness, and the legacy of privilege have for centuries functioned together to support and legitimize White dominance. The interaction of these three dynamics has formed the "dominance paradigm," a pervasive and persistent worldview wherein White assumptions are held to be true and right, White ignorance of other groups is the norm, and White privilege flourishes essentially unchallenged and unacknowledged. The dominance paradigm has allowed Whites to continue to benefit from past and present dominance, with or without our conscious input and awareness. It has created a "cultural encasement of meanings, a prison house of language and ideas" that has proven highly resistant to change (McLaren, 1988, p. 173).

By elucidating in this chapter the deeper issues of dominance, I have worried that White educators might feel either overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge or perhaps blamed for the pains of the past. My intent has simply been to create a clearer understanding of the dynamics of dominance. My hope is that, by understanding the true nature of these dynamics, we can become highly competent diagnosticians of dominance, a skill that is essential to our role as White teachers in a multicultural nation.

For the remainder of the book I will argue that change is possible and that White educators do, indeed, have a significant and unique role to play in the healing process. Of course, we alone cannot solve all the problems left in the wake of dominance, but together with our students and colleagues of color there are many healing responses we can bring to the educational process. As White educators we represent only one of many influences determining the direction of schooling, but our collective presence has had disproportionate historical influence over the course of educational institutions. By redirecting the resources and the

power that have been available to us because of dominance, we can be instrumental in shifting the flow of education toward greater equity and inclusion. Our responsibility as White educators is to understand the past and present dynamics of dominance in order that we might more effectively contribute to the creation of a better future for all of our students.