

CRITICAL  
BLACK  
STUDIES  
READER



Rochelle Brock, Dara Nix-Stevenson, Paul Chamness Miller, Editors

The *Critical Black Studies Reader* is a ground-breaking volume whose aim is to criticalize and reenvision Black Studies through a critical lens. The book not only stretches the boundaries of knowledge and understanding of issues critical to the Black experience, it creates a theoretical grounding that is intersectional in its approach. Our notion of Black Studies is neither singularly grounded in African American Studies nor on traditional notions of the Black experience. Though situated work in this field has historically grappled with the question of “where are we?” in Black Studies, this volume offers the reader a type of criticalization that has not occurred to this point. While the volume includes seminal works by authors in the field, as a critical endeavor, the editors have also included pieces that address the political issues that intersect with—among others—power, race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, place, and economics.

“Brock, Nix-Stevenson, and Miller’s collection of essays is a unique, insightful, and major contribution to critical Black Studies at a politically significant time. An impressive group of scholars examine issues of the politics of Black Studies, Black aesthetics, popular culture, queer and transgender studies in Black Studies, and questions of Black activism in historical perspectives. This is necessary reading and will be a frequently cited text in future research in the area of critical Black studies.”

—**William M. Reynolds**, Georgia Southern University

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*Advance praise for*

## Critical Black Studies Reader

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“We can’t call for justice without intense study, critical analysis, and action. What the authors of this book have done is provide readers with a historical understanding of the past to create a new future built on the ingenuity of the Black radical imagination. This book is required reading for everyone in the struggle with liberation on their mind.”

—*Bettina L. Love, Associate Professor,  
Department of Educational Theory & Practice,  
University of Georgia*

“This volume brings together cutting-edge scholarship within multiple theoretical and methodological traditions in contemporary Black Studies including Critical Africana, Marxist, Feminist, Queer and Afrofuturism. From historical, sociological, and autoethnographic analyses of activist politics and movements, to cultural studies of media representations and popular culture, to innovations in theory, aesthetics, and pedagogy—this reader puts forth an exciting collection of writing that celebrates the myriad contributions of Black life, culture, and theory in the last hundred years. The *Critical Black Studies Reader* takes a refreshing approach that will be sure to engage scholars on multiple levels of connection—intellectual, social, and perhaps even spiritual. Brock, Nix-Stevenson, and Miller offer a well-crafted edition of scholarship that honors the wisdom and magic of Black Studies.”

—*Lisa Weems, Associate Professor of Cultural Studies in Education,  
Global and Intercultural Studies,  
Miami University, Ohio*



# Critical Black Studies Reader

# BLACK STUDIES & critical thinking

Rochelle Brock and Cynthia Dillard  
*Executive Editors*

Vol. 60

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# Critical Black Studies Reader

Edited by Rochelle Brock, Dara Nix-Stevenson,  
and Paul Chamness Miller



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For my beautiful sisters—Faye, Beverly, and Kelly.

*Rochelle Brock*

For all Black mothers, especially my mother, Carla, who has been unwavering  
in her support since I appeared in her womb at age 15.

*Dara Nix-Stevenson*

For my mother, Pam, without whose unconditional love I wouldn't be who I am.

*Paul Chamness Miller*



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# Foreword

Black Studies have come a long way since it became an institutional area of academic study in 1968. Although some of the forefathers of Black Studies, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and John Henrik Clark, made their mark on the study of Black life long before academia began to recognize the worthiness of such studies at predominantly White universities, Black Studies lived and was advanced by scholars trained in the social sciences and humanities. During its evolution, varying theoretical approaches to Black Studies emerged and some of those are represented in this text. To be sure, the essays contained here serve to accurately capture the vision of Black Studies as it stands in the twenty-first century.

Attention to Africana studies, or the comparative study of the people of Africa and the diaspora, has emerged as a major trend among Black Studies in the United States. Therefore, the authors of part 1, “Theories of Critical Black Studies,” represent some of the voices that are critical to our understanding of where we are in this particular moment. Placing Black Studies within a global context, Domenica Maviglia’s essay on Frantz Fanon, Rinnel Atherton, and Alexander Hines on nurturing cultural competence, G. Sue Kasun’s attention to transnationalism, Orelus’s engagement with postcolonial studies, and D. L. Stephenson and Reynaldo Anderson’s essay on Arab-Africans add to the ongoing critical discussions on the significance of Black life around the world. Part 1 invites readers to use a historical lens to look beyond the present to the future of Black Studies.

It may be said that Black Studies scholars, many of whom are/were activists, always had/have their finger on the pulse of working-class and middle-class America. Yet, diverse experiences have not always been welcomed. Black Studies depends on including all voices of Black life. Diversity is essential. Black gender and sexuality studies have found a place in Black Studies and, therefore, are a growing area of critical inquiry. While Black feminist studies have been developing since the late 1970s and Black masculinity studies began to prominently emerge in the late 1990s, Black Studies still tended to be somewhat conservative in its approaches. Pierre W. Orelus, Faye Spencer Maor, Michael A. Brown, Paul Chamness Miller, Tammie Jenkins, and Mel Michelle Lewis make informative contributions to

our understanding of historical and contemporary issues related to gender and race. Scholars such as E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson, who published an anthology on *Black Queer Studies* (2005), opened a much-needed space for Lewis's essay on teaching Black Queer Studies. These scholars remind readers that approaches to teaching the intersections between queer identity and race are important for contemporary classroom discussions.

Further, the location of the body as erotic as visited in Emelyn A. dela Peña, Jollene Levid, and Barbra Ramos's and Hope Jackson's essays is in conversation with the idea of criminalization and wellness as pressed in Tabias Wilson's essay. Mutilated Black bodies, as in the cases of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin, have sparked social movements in the forms of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement, respectively. Motivated by a desire, if not an absolute need, for justice and fairness, academia, namely Black Studies scholars, were called to action in the classroom. It cannot be lost on readers that protests that occurred in the 1960s, which paralleled the Black Arts Movement and Black Power Movements, would later serve as models for the University of Missouri or Mizzou Protests in the fall of 2015, which resulted in students' demands for new allocations of resources toward diversity initiatives, including the hiring of new faculty who could teach Black Studies or Ethnic Studies courses.

This anthology recognizes teaching as a salient part of Black Studies. Approaches to teaching as well as studies on student and faculty experiences as offered by Shuntay Z. McCoy and Tiffany Packer give readers a sense of where Black Studies is as an academic practice. Interactions in the classroom, at times, reveal much about societal experiences. Nathan Stephens complements these essays with his "Autoethnographic Account."

Brock, Nix-Stevenson, and Miller have assembled a comprehensive group of scholars with diverse perspectives on Black Studies. Readers will certainly come away informed and engaged.

Tara Green

Professor and Director, African American and African Diaspora Studies Program  
University of North Carolina, Greensboro



# PART 1

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# Theories of Critical Black Studies



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# Introduction

Part 1 offers perspectives on critical Black Studies that ground the Black experience, offers fresh ideas and concepts to the study of the Black experience, and offers strategic or social change theories. Thus, theoretical perspectives are offered that serve not only African American Studies but also the broader areas of Ethnic, Women and Gender, and Cultural Studies.

Drawing from postcolonial frameworks, in chapter 1, “Remarks on Frantz Fanon’s Thought: Deconstructing ‘White Mythologies,’” Domenica Maviglia offers fresh insights through her examination of Fanon’s work. Her critique reminds us why Fanon’s theories of colonial oppression, racism, and alienation are more relevant today than when initially theorized.

In chapter 2, “Nurturing Cultural Competence While Facilitating the Developmental Progression of the Cognitive Lens,” Alexander Hines and Rinnel Atherton use the narratives of preservice teachers to examine the relationship between intentional pedagogy, centered on nurturing cultural competencies to support the ability to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy. Their research ultimately reveals that teacher education programs, especially given the changing demographics of America, need to develop curricula that address cultural ways of knowing and other cultural issues that support educators becoming culturally competent practitioners.

In chapter 3, “Transnationalism: Competing Definitions, Individual Agency in an Age of Globalization, and Research Trends,” G. Sue Kasun defines transnationalism as inherently unbordered social practices in the world among structures that have governing power over those practices. She then situates the definition among complementary and competing ideas about the concept. Finally, Kasun contextualizes the definition by exploring research that claims transnationalism has existed since the early 1900s, especially through African diaspora writers, including Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois.

In chapter 4, “The New Face of Humanitarian Intervention and Arab-African Recolonization,” Reynaldo Anderson collaborates with D. L. Stephenson to argue that film representations of Black female sexuality can be understood in terms of “everyday pornography” and a “porno-tropics” of sexual representation through an examination of American Oscar-winning films *Precious* (2009) and *Monster’s Ball* (2001) and the Oscar-nominated South African film *District 9* (2009).

To conclude part 1, Pierre Orelus, like Maviglia, incorporates postcolonial and critical race frameworks by using data from a previous Black masculinity study conducted in 2010 to examine the ways and the extent to which Black masculinity intersects with the legacy of slavery and colonialism, racism, classism, and White hegemony. Chapter 5, “Decolonizing the Black Male Body,” begins by reviewing and analyzing ways and the degree to which this legacy continues to influence the masculinity of men of African descent, including the manner in which they have performed their maleness.

## CHAPTER 1

---

# Remarks on Frantz Fanon's Thought

## Deconstructing "White Mythologies"

*Domenica Maviglia*

### Africa Seen from Martinique: Frantz Fanon's Biographical Portrait

To fully understand the standpoint of Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) regarding colonial oppression, alienation, and racism, a few broad brushstrokes of his life's journey are needed. Fanon was born in Fort-de-France, capital of the French colony of Martinique, from a family of African slave descent. Despite racial discrimination, the situation of Blacks in the Antilles was different to the one in African colonies. In the Antilles, the society was characterized by a well-rooted Black middle class that aspired more to integration than national independency (Zahar, 1970). Average Martiniquans did not aim to free themselves from their White masters but rather to integrate into their society, with the widespread idea of considering themselves Black-skinned French citizens, in contrast with the uncivilized "Blacks" of Africa.

Fanon's family belonged to this middle class, allowing him to study and obtain his high school diploma in March 1946. During his high school years, Fanon met Aimé Césaire, a professor who strongly influenced Fanon since he provided young Martiniquan intellectuals with the knowledge needed to become aware that it is "a good and beautiful thing to be Blacks" (Fanon 1969, p. 37). At the age of 18, Fanon illegally left Fort-de-France to join the Free French Forces. He was taken in charge by the British Army, and at the end of 1943, he was sent back to Martinique to train with a Gaullist army division. In March 1944, he was moved with his battalion to Casablanca and in August 1945, he joined the ranks of the 6th regiment of the colonial infantry of the First French Army in Provence, taking part in several battles against Germany. In September, Fanon was wounded in a battle at the border with Switzerland and he was decorated for his service. Discharged by the Army, Fanon returned to Martinique, where he received a studentship as a war-wounded and honorable soldier. He decided to study medicine, enrolling at the University of Lyon, where he graduated in 1951. During his years in Lyon, he developed an interest in neuropsychiatry, focusing in particular on the North African syndrome (i.e., the condition characterizing the lives of North African immigrants in France, especially

their psychological disorders). In 1952, he started working in several French hospitals and during this period he published his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

In July 1953, Fanon specialized in psychiatry and started practicing in Africa. After filing a formal request, he was sent for three years to Blida-Joinville (Algeria) as *chef de service* of the most important psychiatric hospital in Africa. Here, Fanon had the possibility of applying the social therapy techniques learned from Spanish psychiatrist Tosquelles, deepening his knowledge about life in colonial Algeria by analyzing the life and relationships between colonized and colonists in a rural area placed in the countryside between the big European land proprieties and the depressed agricultural economy of the hinterland. In particular, he put at test the reciprocity of the psychological alterations existing in racial relationships and colonial situations, noticing that colonists (French colonizers and racists in Algeria) subdued colonized Muslims by “educating” them to behaviors that could not be interiorized and by “de-educating” them about their own tradition and lifestyle. Fanon noticed that the more colonists tried to hammer their community lifestyle into the heads of Muslims, the worse their neurosis became. Therefore, in September 1956, during the first gathering of Black writers and artists at the Sorbonne of Paris, in a speech titled *Racism and Culture*, Fanon argued that his experience at the psychiatric hospital of Blida could not be described as a journey that took patients toward a safe harbor of normality but as an accomplice of the established order to marginalize people in distress. For this reason, he decided to send his letter of resignation to the resident minister, taking a firm stance against French colonialism:

Madness is one of the means man has of losing his freedom. And I can say, on the basis of what I have been able to observe from this point of vantage, that the degree of alienation of the inhabitants of this country appears to me frightening. If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger of his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation. What is the status of Algeria? A systemised de-humanisation of the function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man's need. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced. It is the duty of the citizen to say this. No professional morality, no class solidarity, no desire to wash the family linen in private, can have a prior claim. Non pseudo-national mystification can prevail against the requirement of reason. ... The decision I have reached is that I cannot continue to bear a responsibility at no matter what cost, on the false pretext that there is nothing else to be done. For all these reasons I have the honour, *Monsieur le Ministre*, to ask you to be good enough to accept my resignation and to put an end to my mission in Algeria. (1969, pp. 53–54)

The letter received no immediate reaction, but at the end of the year, Fanon was expelled from Algeria and moved to Paris. In January 1957, he settled in Tunis, where he practiced at the La Manouba clinic. Then, starting from 1958, he worked in the psychiatric ward of the Charles Nicolle polyclinic, devoting a good deal of his time to political activism after joining the newsroom of *Résistance Algérienne: Organe de l'Armée et du Front de Libération Nationale* (Algerian Resistance: Organization of the Army and the National Front of Liberation). In December 1958, in Accra (Ghana), venue of the first African Peoples Conference, Fanon delivered his first speech as a member of the Algerian delegation, meeting some of the most important leaders of the independence movements and parties of sub-Saharan Africa.

In January 1960, Fanon attended as a member of the Algerian delegation of the second African Peoples Conference in Tunis. Here, he argued for the creation of an international brigade of African volunteers that should lead the charge against French colonialism. The following month, while working as a new permanent representative of the Algerian interim government in Accra, he traveled to Cairo, visiting the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Algerian Republic interim government, in order to take part in a discussion on the guidelines that should drive African politics. In these meetings, Fanon embodied the revolutionary spirit of the open fight against imperialism, leading a relentless charge for independence. He was a Black man, descendant of kidnapped and deported Black men, who came back as a soldier and theorist of African independence (Zahar, p. 12); he loved the idea

of embodying Algeria's fight, which represented a model for the whole of Africa, and together with his Algerian colleagues he represented politically Algeria's relationship with Africa.

In the following months, Fanon took part in a series of diplomatic missions in Africa, widening his contacts among government representatives and leaders of freedom movements. At the end of the year, back in Tunis, he was diagnosed with leukemia. Starting from 1961, his activity was focused entirely on writing *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), in an effort that saw him working relentlessly, despite the fact that the worst stages of his illness forced him to temporarily suspend his work. That autumn his health took a turn for the worse and he had no choice but to accept being admitted at a clinic in Bethesda, Maryland, where he died on December 6, 1961. In his will, he requested his body to be flown on a special flight to Tunis, where he was buried in Algerian soil by a division of the Freedom National Army.

### The Evils of Colonialism: Oppression, Alienation, Racism, and Dehumanization

Fanon's analysis focuses mainly on psychological and sociopsychological processes and it acquires a crucial importance in the study of the phenomena related to colonialism and neocolonialism. His theories, outlined with genuine revolutionary spirit in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, were strongly affected by the historical, economic, and political conditions of Martinique and Africa.

This Afro-Martiniquan psychiatrist who fought actively against colonialism addressed a wide range of phenomena such as colonialism, alienation, oppression, the mechanisms of domination and dehumanization, racism, and anticolonial violence. As a committed militant always on the side of the "wretched of the Earth," Fanon wanted to provide a psychological escape from oppression. This enlightening idea is clearly stated in the works of 1952 and 1961, where he defines himself as a deeply wounded man, locked in an "infernal cycle" who, without bearing the arms provided by incontestable truths, understands what it means to be born Black in a world dominated by White Europeans who, through the process of colonialism, inculcate into the minds of millions of individuals sentiments of fear, inferiority, terror, subjugation, desperation, and servility (Césaire, 1955). Besides underlining the structural dependence between motherland and colony, Fanon's account of the colonial situation explains in detail the interdependence existing behind this structure, as well as the colonists-colonized antagonism (Zahar, 1970).

Fanon's pragmatic and sharp description highlights the ideological and sociopsychological consequences of colonialism. In the first volume of his *Political Essays*, Fanon defines colonialism as the military conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a population (1969, pp. 81–82). He eloquently describes the stage on which the colonial play takes place and its two main antagonists, colonists and colonized. The wealth and privileges of the former, explains Fanon, are strictly dependent on the exploitation and impoverishment of the latter, in a permanent state of oppression: "It is the colonist who made and who continues to make the colonised. The colonist derives his truth, that is his wealth, from the colonial system" (1968, p. 4). The supremacy of colonists, legitimized by the supposed inferiority of indigenous people, is recognized by the oppressed through an alienation process. In particular, through Europeanization (i.e., dehumanization), French colonialism led to a sense of uprooting, scattering, confusion, cultural depersonalization, and condemnation of Blacks, causing frustration, compensation phenomena, and psychosomatic illness, products and expression of colonial alienation. This inferiority complex is, according to Fanon (1952), a consequence of a two-faced process: "economic and of interiorisation-epidermalisation" (p. 197). In the economic process, alienation takes place when Blacks fall victim to a system of racial exploitation, as well as the contempt felt by a specific type of civilization that considers itself superior. In the process of interiorization-epidermalization, alienation takes place at an intellectual level (i.e., Blacks see European culture as a means to mark a difference with their own race). In the former process, Fanon identifies what he dubs "negritude," while the latter triggers he calls "lactification," which forces Blacks to encode the prejudices and stereotypes of Whites in their relationships.

Fanon's analysis focuses precisely on the colonial mentality that portrays Blacks as individuals colonially divided between a socioracial mask that becomes stronger and a cultural mask that fades away; individuals who delegitimize themselves as Blacks, minimize their African past, cut the roots that bind them to a past of slavery, and instead state their "Frenchness" in order to feel like something else or even feel like "the others": French citizens. Black becomes a counterfeit of White or, in better words, Blacks self-counterfeit as "civilized" Blacks by wearing White masks. Because of the acceptance of this White identity, Blacks are forced to project themselves in the existential universe of Whites, finding themselves locked in an intellectual alienation that leaves no other option but to use the European cultural identity to escape from their supposedly inferior race.

In his analysis of the dehumanization caused by colonial relationships, the Tunisian intellectual Albert Memmi (1979) points out that colonized people exist only in relationship with an ideologically dominant colonist. By accepting their subjugation, colonized people place themselves outside of history, because the colonial system cuts the umbilical cord that bounds Blacks with their inner selves and their culture, alienating them from themselves. The imposition of a European cultural code by Whites leads to a weakening and demeaning of indigenous cultural roots, starting with the colonization of language; linguistic counterfeiting is a clear sign of the acceptance of this inferiority but, simultaneously, it is also an essential tool for progress. Fanon underlines that colonialism levels the behaviors of colonial populations, resketching the geography of their world and establishing linguistic stereotypes. Hence, the cultural and historical identity of colonized people is replaced with a complex of inferiority that recomposes their identity by shaping it in the civilizing nation's own image and likeness. This process of Frenchification provides Blacks in the Antilles with a behavior potentially open to assimilation, which is socially rewarding and hierarchically codified in social and administrative tasks that strictly intertwine with race. This means that language learning allows Blacks to culturally and sociologically integrate with Whites. Nevertheless, at the core of Fanon's theory, there is the idea that alienation affects also the personal and sexual relationships of colonized people, who fall in the trap of a legitimizing Manichaeism of racial separation set by a model that states that Whites are superior and Blacks are inferior. It is often easy to hear people talking about Black soul, Black language, Black body, Black sky, Black future, while on the other hand, terms such as White truth, pristine White justice are also widely used. Black is associated with night and darkness, in direct contrast with the White innocence of fairytales. Black symbolizes sin, something despicable. In other words, it embodies the dark side of the soul, a clear form of racism since these terms are framed in an oppressing system that attacks the cultural values, traditions, and customs of oppressed populations. In addition, deconstruction and cultural depersonalization cause stratification and individual mortification, fueling apathy and a supposed respect of tradition managed with sadist contempt, which induces an alienation fed by the denigration of traditional lifestyles.

According to Fanon, once we have the diagnosis, it is time to devise a treatment. He calls neurosis the phenomenon causing so much suffering among Blacks and, to help them, he urges Blacks to move beyond the color of their skin and the White dreams linked to the negative connotation of their "negritude," toward a world where Whites and Blacks mutually recognize each other in a shared endeavor. Therefore, only by making Blacks aware of this Black unconsciousness, it is possible to devise the enhancement of difference; *négritude* is the first step toward the acknowledgment of Black authenticity and the rediscovery of Black history, in order to use it against oppression. The only escape hatch for alienated colonized people is to become fully aware of this situation, involving all those exploited by a colonialism that looks at them as members of an inferior race. Blacks must break the symbolic system of violence of colonists, because it ideologically promotes an ontological inequality among individuals. According to Fanon's view, negritude represents simply a dialectic stage (a denial of a denial, an indispensable empowerment moment. This puts people in front of a common consciousness that breaks the dominant axioms of a colonial society that imposes domination, subordination relationships, stereotypes, and an alienating taming process.



Therefore, the revolution against colonial violence is outlined as a struggle against reformism and corruption to dismantle the colonial system. The recovery of individual identity takes place on the road of a long political journey; by rebelling, colonized people provide a national scope to their struggle, claiming their "Algerinity" vis-à-vis the racial hurdles imposed by colonial domination, and rejecting assimilation and integration in the name of national independence and the recovery of a common identity. The anticolonial struggle calls upon people to fight for their independence, triggering a process of cultural revival. Through his sociopsychological analysis, Fanon charts the path connecting the violence of colonists to the anticolonial violence of colonized people, identifying the breaking point that divides the oppressing colonial system and the offensive of colonized people against the violence of rulers through an empowering counterviolence that breaks the repressive cycle of the ruling system and, with it, the basic components of alienation. In other words, anticolonial violence rejects the models imposed by imperialism, the standardization of the dominant European model that indigenous African middle classes follow.

According to Fanon, the subjected and alienated Africa must reject the historical abuse of colonialism without ignoring the values of European culture, but instead reject them because of the role they played in Africa in the creation of injustice, misery, and humiliation. In his view, this is even truer since Europe does not represent the privileged cultural cradle of mankind. Through the works of Fanon shines the idea that the hope generated in countries struggling for their freedom will give birth to a "renewal manifesto" that might provide an original input to the progress of civilization and the blossoming of a "new man"; this is not a "global man" but rather a "man belonging to a new species" (Fanon 1961, pp. 3–60). Fanon (1969) offers this ideological perspective of political and human palingenesis, projecting universally his ideas on the colonial liberation struggle.

Total liberation involves every facet of the personality. ... When the nation in its totality is set in motion, the new man is not an *a posteriori* creation of this nation, but coexists with it, matures with it, and triumphs with it. This dialectical prerequisite explains the resistance to accommodating forms of colonisation or window dressing. Independence is not a magic ritual but an indispensable condition for men and women to exist in true liberation, in other words to master all the material resources necessary for a radical transformation of society. (p. 233)

The centrality of the violence on oppressed people is clear, while the rural masses exploited by colonists are seen as the main reservoir of human and political potential to carry out an anti-imperialist liberation struggle.

### Deconstructing "White Mythologies"

As brilliantly demonstrated by the renowned economist Amartya Sen (2006), colonialism caused incalculable damages by impoverishing and depleting colonized civilizations of their culture by humiliating them through a system of subjugation and denigration. Similar or even greater damage was caused by the division–opposition between East and West, forcing the populations of former colonies to adopt servile attitudes or even an intransigent opposition to the West. Unfortunately, this entrenchment in a parasitic obsession against the West fueled vicious global phenomena that cannot be underestimated. It led to an "exaggeration of differences" (Sirna 2008, p. 32) and new forms of "anti-colonial nationalisms" (Sen, 2006, p. 91) that caused hostile attitudes toward universalism and global ideas such as democracy, freedom, and rule of law, simply because they are considered an expression of the West. It generated religious fundamentalism and international terrorism, spreading anti-Western values and strengthening an ideological opposition that wishes to "tie the score" with the West or "close the gap" with it, try to "beat it at its own game" and build a society that "even Westerners will have to envy" (Sen, pp. 90–92). Unfortunately, the vicious role played by this anti-Western sentiment is terribly clear in rigid, monolithic common identities that do not allow personal choice. These misleading identities

produce dangerous divisions, oppositions, and conflicts, since they strengthen the walls dividing people, making the acknowledgment of the common aspects of humanity almost completely impossible.

In fact, Sen (2006, p. x) argues that there is no unique and superior system to define human identity, whether it be based on religion, nationality, race, gender, culture, or other elements, but that there is a “plurality of human identity,” because we all are “differently different” (p. x). Subsequently, it is not legitimate to classify people according to cultural, ethnic, or religious factors, or following criteria of other types. Individuals are in fact “creative producers of the difference to which they wish to subscribe” (Burgio, 2007, p. 29) and could not be turned from “multi-dimensional human beings into mono-dimensional characters” (Sen, 2006, p. 177).

Considering these dynamics, one could ask whether and how the constant presence of a certain type of cultural determinism may negatively affect democratization. It is important to understand how much the cultural representations of difference affect real policies and, subsequently, may help in defining possible educational interventions. Nevertheless, the real challenge of our age is to avoid two big threats: the opposition of identities in a competitive and violent escalation, and the emergence of forms of multiculturalism seen as “pluralist mono-culturalism” (i.e., the temptation that different communities might have—even when living in the same area—to mutually ignore each other). Obviously, in this age of decolonization, there is a necessity of coordinated interventions by economic, social, political, and educational institutions, in order to avoid nationally and globally the creation of identities that might be too large and affected by a false sense of superiority.

Therefore, what is required is an intercultural logic that does not aim at replacing and reducing the sense of belonging of individuals but instead allows for the recovery of a sense of common belonging, which Morin (1999) labels as “Earth identity,” because it belongs to an ethical landscape of discussion on global issues in a global democracy that has yet to be built. In the words of Amselle (2001, p. 46), this means giving birth to a new universalism that does not work against the manifestation of differences, but represents a privileged means of their expression, because local peculiarities are always framed in a larger system that gives them meaning.

In this new universalism, the dialogic-intercultural approach of critical pedagogy might represent a useful tool to educate individuals in how to avoid becoming stuck in front of the barriers of a single and mono-cultural way of thinking, to get rid of hierarchies, and to promote a “genuine encounter” with difference, learning how to notice and respect the dignity of the Other. This approach might promote a deconstruction of “White mythologies” and reverse the order of a Eurocentric world, since it is based on a quest for equality and the establishment of a fair openness to Others. A deconstruction that addresses once again the topic related to the respect and acknowledgment of the Other and that aims at forging relationships and combining differences, perfect elements to prevent all vicious deculturalization processes and the breakdown of social cohesion. The value and functionality of this approach is even clearer if implemented to deconstruct and reorient the practice of education and the theory of pedagogy, taking into account the thousands of faces through which difference manifests itself, the main asset of humankind. In other words, individuals must improve and enrich their humanity through continuous interactions that involve and hold them accountable in the eyes of themselves, the others, and the entire world. Hence the need for critical pedagogy and interculturalism: consciousness, theory, and practice that might provide legitimacy and meaning.

The views that critical pedagogy brings forward represent a crucial device for our future. A future that will be more interethnic and globalized, with identities intertwining with differences and with differences feeding identities, in a continuous dialectic interplay.

This pedagogical paradigm is therefore a theoretical model and a historical–social objective: a challenge to the criteria of mental habits, prejudices, cognition, and axioms. It helps us overcome identities without nullifying them, bringing us in a new moral universe built on encounters and dialogue, where the rule is to open up to others, interact with them, and develop common spaces that respect difference and its value. Hence, this pedagogical model asks for a new pluralistic, dynamic, and open *formae mentis*, and a new dialogic and fair ethos.

In this landscape *in fieri*, critical pedagogy represents, at a community and individual level, the best tool to promote a change in mentalities and relationships, while at the same time making the case for values, attitudes, and mental habits that should be implemented with time. It represents a guardian against possible drifts or dangerous pessimism, to relaunch an axiological and critical idea of pedagogy that tackles and unveils the defects and shortfalls of functional, technical, adaptive, and conformist pedagogy.

It aims, therefore, at defying the typical mentalities and identities of monocultures by relaunching values like dialogue, peace, and solidarity as a basis to build a useful and proper education that could provide a sound foundation to social co-existence. In other words, as Franco Cambi (2006) explains, to activate and trigger this new *forma mentis*, it is necessary to employ some key concepts of cultural anthropology, like the autonomy of cultures, relativism, pluralism, and nonhierarchization, and make use of pedagogy to provide society and its individuals with the principles and values of dialogue, understanding, deconstructionism, and solidarity, which are the engine and result of the "space of encounter." This is a space that, according to Cambi:

must be protected and built, devised and wanted; built, devised and wanted as a space inhabited by individuals that take shape right there, structure themselves, change, develop a *habitus* and an identity; and at the same time the space must assign them a structure, identity and meaning. A space that is simultaneously educational and pedagogical, where an intercultural practice is implemented and there is a theory of interculturalism, and where these elements interact with each other to influence the individuals, cultures, institutions and social groups, changing their identity processes and their sense of belonging. (p. 27)

We are talking about a genuine revolution that might change multiethnic and multicultural co-existence, turning a moment of risk and discomfort into an opportunity for growth and enrichment.

In this situation of historic renewal and clash between cultural models that originate forms of racism, ethnic closure, and fundamentalism, the West must recognize its duty, involvement, and objective in order to recalibrate itself away from centuries of domination, colonialism, and self-celebration, in favor of pluralism and diversity, assigning a crucial and decisive role to education. This effort must be widespread to design and build new values, new mindsets, new social co-existence models, new models of individual development, and collaboration among peoples and cultures.

In this emerging and brand-new framework, only education can design and implement anthropological changes in *interiore homine*, carrying out educational actions in relationship with individuals and communities and considering their empowerment as an awareness and accountability-building process in a culture of dialogue and understanding. In this way, people will be able to develop a form of globalization that might pour the common foundations of a future world where our role as individuals and communities is clear.

First, people must be educated to understand and enhance the human being by acknowledging that every individual has a value in itself and a value for us all, since everyone represents a remarkable and unique individual, full of potential and importance. Dialogue plays a fundamental role in this process; it should not hide the tensions between individuals belonging to different cultures but it should be built on and by these differences, in order to develop a common space and avoid self-referentiality and ethnocentrism.

It is necessary to educate people to recognize, embrace, and spread human rights as a new vision of global co-existence and its main rule. Human rights should emerge outside cultures and traditions as a new common dress for global co-existence, and they should be defined, codified, learned, lived, and embraced with total resolution and critical sense.

Then, people must be educated about the values of equality, tolerance, and dialogue, which are the principles that create the "space of encounter" and the launching pad of every intercultural adventure. They must be educated to consider diversity as a resource to go beyond themselves, asking for a reevaluation of themselves, their identities, and their sense of belonging. They must be educated to see

integration as a process that requires mutuality, recognition, participation, and a positive attitude that must be active, participated, and mutual.

Finally, as Latouche (2003) states, it is necessary to educate people to *décoloniser l'imaginaire* (decolonize the imaginary); avoid every *imperium*; get rid of all forms of bias or prejudice, limitation, closed rule, or identity; and open up to reevaluation, deconstruction, reinterpretation, and demystification. Only in this way will it be possible to establish an open democracy characterized by encounter, dialogue, and shared built integration.

These actions will lead to full recognition and mutual respect, opening up a new dimension, a new model of culture where the values of humanity and democracy will have to be inferred from the multicultural and intercultural inputs in a more critical and open way.

Education must therefore shape a global human being, a global citizen that becomes such only through dialogue and openness, avoiding all forms of closure, protecting identities, and embracing the ethical, dialogical, collaborative, and pluralistic principle of democracy. According to Franco Cambi (2006) we need “to live without ideas deriving from colonialism, racism and imperialism in the geographical, demographic, political, plural and polymorphic space represented by today’s and tomorrow’s world” (p. 75). Such a world, after all, represents the space where we live and where we will have to live with a greater respect for the values ruled by the guiding and inspiring principle of unity-diversity, which is hinged on the square of tolerance, dialogue, integration, and rights that leads to the recognition of democracy as a value.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Nurturing Cultural Competence While Facilitating the Developmental Progression of the Cognitive Lens

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The literature pertaining to the achievement gap, along with factors that contribute to its continuous growth, illustrates that it is rapidly escalating (Close the Gap, 2005; Ramanathan, 2010; Frye & Vogt, 2010; Research Center, 2011; Minnesota Department of Education, 2012; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES, 2012]). Given this dilemma, educators and researchers should take a more aggressive approach to reducing and subsequently eliminating existing disparities. Analyses of national reports and statistics centered on student performance show that African American, Hispanic, and Indigenous/Native American students consistently are left behind by their White and Asian peers predominantly in mathematics and science (NCES, 2011, 2012; Education Week: Achievement Gap, 2011). Correspondingly, Hispanic and African American students' reading scores are significantly low; typically, they score 20 points below their White peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics assessments at the fourth and eighth grade levels, respectively (Carey, 2002; Education Week: Achievement Gap, 2011). According to StudentsFirst.org's 2010 report, more than 67% of fourth-grade American students attained reading scores below grade level. Middle and high school students' achievement on reading proficiency assessments was equally poor. In 2009, only 32% of eighth graders and 38% of twelfth graders were proficient in reading. The 2012 NCES report highlighted that reading scores for students who read for enjoyment more frequently (i.e., daily or weekly) scored higher on the reading assessments than their peers who read less often for pleasure. In 2012, a higher percentage of White students indicated reading for pleasure in comparison to African American and Hispanic students except for nine-year-old students. At this age, both White and Hispanic students indicated reading for enjoyment at higher percentages than in previous years compared with African American students. In 2011, the Research Center reported that Asian and White students appear more inclined to take comparatively demanding courses in comparison to their African American and Hispanic peers. Commensurate with these accounts, students in more rigorous mathematics courses scored higher on the NAEP mathematics assessments in comparison to their peers who took



regular or lower-level mathematics course work (NCES, 2012). Also fundamental to student achievement is the immense proportion of underserved students in a grade lower than the one standard for children of their age. Corresponding inequities are discernible in graduation rates and success in college for underserved students. Children of color and those in poverty are clustered in the lowest performing schools (Ramanathan). Besides race and poverty, other factors that play a part in contributing to the continuously expanding achievement gap include poor funding, test bias, teacher quality, systemic and structural inequities, teachers' lowered expectations of students, and stereotyping that is characteristically negative (Ramanathan, 2010; Frye & Vogt, 2010; George & Aronson, 2003; Howard & Clarence, 2011). Students from underprivileged and underrepresented groups may fall short of succeeding, attaining below their natural aptitude academically when they experience adverse labeling regarding the people, culture, or community in which they hold membership (Research Center, 2011). According to Frye and Vogt, though African American children make up 16% of the student body within the American public education system, the gifted education program only has about 8.4% of this population. Moreover, there have been drops in the number of African American students documented as gifted. Many students whose academic performance is exceptional go unnoticed and underserved.

### Theoretical Framework

There is a plethora of literature addressing cultural competence in relation to teacher education and the need to facilitate the academic achievement of diverse students (Gay, 2002; Jett, 2012; Le Roux, 2002; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Seeberg & Minick, 2012). Gay (2002) reasons that teacher education programs need to facilitate the development of expertise, mindsets, and competences that allow pre-service teachers to engage in culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Furthermore, she examines five crucial components of culturally responsive teaching, including cultivating a foundation of expertise regarding cultural diversity, incorporating curriculum focused on cultural and ethnic content, establishing and providing an emotionally secure learning community, entering into dialogue with culturally diverse students, and considering and building cultural ways of knowing into the pedagogical approach (Gay, 2002).

Jett urges pre-service teacher educators to dialogue, endorse, and act to develop teachers who can engage in culturally responsive pedagogy. He also indicates that Hayes and Juarez (2012) in their work utilized critical race theory to support their work on culturally responsive pedagogy. Other research by Seeberg and Minick focuses on developing teacher candidates' cross-cultural competence, which would support their ability to pass on global learning to their future students. The results of the study establish that subsequent to experiencing a pedagogical approach centered on a reflective cross-cultural training method, students in the study evidenced a shift in viewpoint from ethnocentricity to ethnorelativity. A different contribution by Le Roux explains that competent teachers can effectively communicate with culturally diverse others. He also posits that schooling that supports positive adjustment goes beyond teaching and learning content within the curriculum (Le Roux). It involves social interactions and effective communication skills. In addition, standards, beliefs, ideologies, ways of thinking, emotional states, relations, and bonds play an important role in the experiences within learning contexts. Le Roux further indicates that learning systems are impacted by history and societal frameworks. From his perspective, procedures, customs, and views of the established ascendant culture shape didactical content and approach (Le Roux). Le Roux moreover argues that the goal of inclusive education is to mirror representativeness on the whole rather than exemplify an incomplete perception that highlights the prevailing culture as crucially significant. The theoretical foundations supporting the current study include the Vygotskian perspective, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy as supported by Gay (1995, 2000/2010, 2002), Jett and Ladson-Billings (1995), and Le Roux.