

THE TRIUMPH OF WHITENESS: DUAL CREDIT COURSES AND HIERARCHICAL RACISM IN TEXAS

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EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA, George Lipsitz, Zeus Leonardo, and other whiteness theorists often emphasize the continuity of the American rhetoric and culture of whiteness, a continuity that, different theorists argue, extends from centuries of slavery throughout the twentieth century. In his well-known *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva emphasizes this view of the continuity and endurance of whiteness and white privilege by subtling his book *Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality of America*. Leonardo makes a similar claim for the persistence of whiteness: “[White domination] does not form out of random acts of hatred, although these are condemnable, but rather out of a patterned and *enduring* treatment of social groups” (139, emphasis ours). Making a parallel argument, Lipsitz declares, “The highest levels of judicial, legislative, and executive power have worked together to *preserve* white privileges” in the present (38, emphasis ours). Some whiteness theorists emphasize the decades-spanning extension of whiteness so much that it seems fair to call this emphasis one of their major themes.

Other whiteness theorists, such as Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek, contend that while the culture and rhetoric of whiteness is “pervasive” in American life, culture and rhetoric usually operate in a fashion that is relatively “invisible” (298). But, by claiming that whiteness is now more diffuse and less visible, theorists risk giving some readers the impression that whiteness is becoming less powerful and less damaging. Of course, threads of continuity certainly link the culture of white domination that has prevailed in every era of American history, at least since slaves were introduced in the Jamestown colony in 1619. Yet, we contend, deplorable racial attitudes, practices, denials, and hierarchies do not simply persist and endure but instead sometimes fluctuate and evolve, and not merely in the direction of becoming more sophisticated and less visible.

In the case of Texas, a resurgence of an inward-looking white culture has *increasingly* blinded many elected officials and educational administrators alike and led them to *fortify* white privilege and *enlarge* existing racial hierarchies in a fashion that is decidedly overt and quite visible. These officials and educational administrators in Texas did so when, in a discriminatory fashion, they engineered and proliferated dual credit programs in high schools, which are programs offering courses that count simultaneously for high school and college graduation credits. This phenomenon indicates that, far from simply continuing or simply

evolving into instantiations that prove more diffuse and less visible, the culture and rhetoric of whiteness sometimes emerge into forms that are *more explicit, more visible, and more damaging*.

In the case of public schools in Texas, the culture and rhetoric of whiteness has now evolved into a more engulfing and more harmful form than what ordinarily prevailed during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, before these courses spread. Such a development should spur theorists to reconceptualize whiteness as a culture and a rhetoric *capable of expanding and buttressing white advantage and white control*.

We forward this argument in four steps. First, despite our disagreement with Lipsitz's apparent assumption about the stability of whiteness, we embrace and outline his theory and analysis to explain how structural racism and white domination continue to plague American life. We choose Lipsitz in part because he focuses squarely not simply on attitudes and assumptions but on material and economic advantages that accrue to whites, especially to affluent whites. Second, we sketch the history and current status of what are often dubbed dual enrollment (DE) or credit (DC) courses in the United States and the response of composition scholars and the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Third, we analyze the unfolding of DC courses in Texas in ways that perpetuate, strengthen, and enlarge white domination. Fourth, we explore implications of our work for a reconfiguration of whiteness theory in order to account for instantiations of a culture of whiteness that is enlarged and strengthened.

Lipsitz's Theory and Analysis of White Domination

In *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, Lipsitz identifies ways that people who are categorized as white benefit from structural racism. He describes in detail how whites enjoy economic advantages, such as lower interest rates and higher approval rates for home loans; greater access to educational and job opportunities; and the ability to transfer wealth. According to Lipsitz, these advantages emerge in many domains of American life, including the economy, war, politics, music, movies, and art.

Lipsitz describes specifically how the arenas of housing, employment, and education interlink, functioning with each other to perpetuate structural racism. According to his analysis, unequal access to education leads to unequal opportunities for jobs, which leads to fewer opportunities to own homes. As he explains, "owner-occupied homes constitutes the single greatest sources of wealth for white Americans" (33). More specifically, whites are structurally at an advantage because of the ways that whiteness often leads to wealth through a continuing process that, in his words, "enable[s] white parents to give their children financial advantages over children of other groups" (33). He continues, "Unequal opportunities for education play a crucial role in racializing life chances in the United States" (33). And he notes, "White resistance and refusal in housing and education work to deprive minority children of both intergenerational transfers of wealth and the tools to better their own conditions" (38).

The Rise of DC Courses and the Response of Composition Scholars and CCCC

Many American high school students take specially designated upper-level courses for which they receive credit toward both high school graduation and college graduation. Dual enrollment (DE) options appear in varied configurations and go by such names as current enrollment (CE), advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB), early college (EC), and dual credit (DC). In this work we focus specifically on dual credit (DC) courses, the name by which the state of Texas identifies college courses offered to high school students that allow them to gain high school and college credits simultaneously. Many scholars date DC programs back to at least the 1970s. As Kristine Hansen explains, DC classes that were developed in the 1970s did so as a means to “challenge high school students who would be bored with the regular high school curriculum and are ready to begin college work” (25). At Syracuse University, a DC program known as “Project Advance” announces on its website that it began in 1972 “as an attempt to address ‘senioritis,’” a form of academic ennui that besets certain advanced high school students, especially after they have already been accepted for college. Hansen notes,

AP, IB, and [DC] programs are aimed squarely at those who want to get ahead because they offer students the promise of starting and therefore finishing college early, distinguishing themselves from the common herd, and enhancing their chances of being admitted to a good university, where they will get even further ahead. (3)

Not only do many students in DC courses both begin and finish their college careers sooner, but they also accrue large financial advantages inasmuch as their high schools often pay their tuition fees to the colleges that supply course credits. Such payments save those students and their parents many thousands of dollars. Further, even when DC students pay the same college tuition fees that they would otherwise pay after high school, many of them still save hundreds or thousands of dollars because they still live with their parents, thus eliminating the need to pay for room and board at a college or university while taking college-level courses.

These huge advantages have spurred the development of DC programs across the nation. According to a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, in 2010–11 an astonishing 1.277 million students participated in programs that allow students to earn high school and college credits simultaneously (Marken et al. 3). As Chris Anson observes, DC courses in composition are among those that have spread widely (247); yet, despite their rising popularity, DC programs have received surprisingly little attention from composition scholars. Those who write about DC courses in composition, including those who contributed essays for a scholarly anthology about them (Hansen and Farris), provide informative and helpful essays. But this scholarship largely fails to address racialized dimensions of DC courses and their tendency to enshrine white domination. So does a recent, otherwise useful official CCCC statement about DC courses (Farris et al). But, lamentably, the culture and politics of white domination impacted many DC courses almost from their beginning. These classes often (not always) tended to flourish in relatively affluent high schools that regularly dispatched their graduates to colleges and universities, not in inner-city high schools characterized by large dropout rates and graduates who failed to attend college. The racially and economically

disparate implementation of DC programs is especially well documented in Texas, and the numbers are worth considering in some detail.

The Unfolding of DC Courses in Texas

In 2007 public school boards throughout Texas implemented legislation that requires each of their systems to make at least twelve hours of college credit available to high school students. The passage of this requirement prompted a massive increase in the number of students enrolled in DC courses throughout the state. According to the Texas Education Administration (TEA), an official state agency, a staggering 94,232 students enrolled in such Texas programs during the 2009–10 academic year (Friedman et al. iii). Today the TEA uses the FAQ portion of its website to tout DC courses as a means for students of every economic level to receive “advanced academic instruction beyond, or in greater depth than” the knowledge measured by the statewide standardized exam known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills test. According to the TEA, “rigorous and meaningful [DC] coursework in high school prepares students for success in college . . . [,] which benefits both the students and the economy.” This assertion reinforces the claim of the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) that DC courses offer a “low-cost scalable model for bringing accelerated courses to urban, suburban, and rural high schools” (“What is Concurrent Enrollment?”).

Designed, implemented, and written by Lawrence B. Friedman, Lisa Hoogstra, Andrew Swanlund, Shazia Miller, Manyee Wong, Daniel O’Brien, and Natalie Tucker, a TEA study of 2011 analyzes DC courses in Texas from 2007 to 2010. These TEA researchers investigated the state context for DC programs and courses, analyzed funding for the DC courses, and made policy recommendations to the state legislature based on the data results. Friedman and his coauthors chose a sample of fifteen institutions of higher education (IHEs), which included twelve community college districts (CCDs), three universities that are major DC providers within the state, forty-eight high schools, and their corresponding local education agencies (LEAs).

The institutions were chosen, in part, based on their geographic location, with the goal of incorporating a wide range of different students in geographically and demographically different areas in Texas. Among the studied CCDs, seven served many counties, five served small areas, and three were adjacent to the Texas-Mexico border. According to the TEA report, “CCDs were selected that had high, low, moderate, and high populations of Hispanic students (ranging from 18% to 97%) and economically disadvantaged students (ranging from 22% to 85%) as determined by the percentage of students enrolled in schools served by the CCD” (Friedman et al. 9).

Information from these institutions was gathered through telephone surveys and the analysis of supplemental as well as financial data.¹ Twelve of the fifteen IHEs completed telephone surveys regarding the state context (curriculum, courses, quality, responsibilities of costs, faculty, curriculum, subject areas) of the DC programs. These telephone surveys provided investigators with qualitative as well as quantitative data that may have been unavailable otherwise. The purpose of the telephone surveys was to gain a better understanding of the administration of the DC programs as well as to contextualize the programs in regard to the

requirements, incentives, guidelines, and outcomes as they align with or deviate from the guidelines of the high schools and colleges that participate in the programs. Of the telephone surveys, three were created for the study. One was for DC administrators at community colleges and universities, one for the LEA administrators, and one for high school staff (Friedman et al. 10). Administrators from all fifteen IHEs, thirty-six administrators from sampled LEAs, and thirty-four administrators or staff from high schools completed surveys (ii). Fourteen IHEs, twenty-two LEAs, and twenty-four high schools provided usable data. The number of survey questions varied: twenty-two for IHE administrators, fourteen for LEA administrators, and thirty-four for high school administrators or staff. Some questions prompted specific answers, such as, “Which of the following factors—financial need, merit, or high school attended—affect high school students’ tuition rate or awarding of scholarships?” (A 6). Other questions were open-ended, for example, “In your opinion, what were some of the factors that supported the effective implementation and delivery of dual credit courses offered by your college/university?” (A 6).

Fourteen of the fifteen IHEs provided supplementary financial data, enrollment data, and demographic information. TEA researchers gathered financial data in order to, in their words, “determine, at a course level, varying costs associated with [DC] programs as well as various sources of funding and revenues used to support these programs during the 2009–10 academic year” (Friedman et al. 11). This financial data is important because a large consideration is how students pay for courses and what percentage of students are economically disadvantaged. According to the TEA researchers, students qualify as economically advantaged or disadvantaged based on whether they qualify for free or reduced-price lunches according to the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program—a qualification that is determined by their economic status according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Using the surveys and supplementary data, the TEA authors elaborate the highly racialized implementation of DC classes:

The majority of students enrolled in courses for [DC] were either white or Hispanic. On average, 46% of students enrolled in courses for dual credit were white, 40% were Hispanic, and 10% were African American. Less than 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander. . . . In 2009–10, 35% of all high school students in Texas were white, 46% were Hispanic, 14% were African American, and 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander. Less than 1% of students were categorized as “other.” White students thus were overrepresented in courses for dual credit in 2009–2010, and other racial/ethnic groups were underrepresented; this was particularly the case for African-American students. (Friedman et al. 16–17)

Of these DC students, the majority were white females who speak English as a first language and are “not [from] economically disadvantaged backgrounds” (17).

According to the TEA tract, “white students were overrepresented, and other racial/ethnic groups, particularly African-American students, were underrepresented . . . within the high school population as a whole” (Friedman et al. iii). Also, the number of Texans enrolled in public schools who are classified or who identify as Hispanic exceeds the number of students who identify or are classified as white. However, white students significantly outnumber Hispanic students in DC programs. During 2007–11, 50 percent of all high school students in Texas were considered economically disadvantaged, but only 37 percent of students enrolled in DC courses came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Friedman et al. 17). As these findings show, the schools whose students were more economically advantaged were

able to enlist a higher number of students in the DC programs; the majority of those students were white.

The TEA authors note that economically disadvantaged students enroll in more vocational courses than do economically advantaged students. Likewise, students who were not white took more vocational classes than did whites. In the words of the TEA writers,

African American students took greater concentrations of coursework for [DC] in career or technical education and computer science and lower concentrations in core academic subjects such as social studies/history and English language arts compared with white and Asian students. Economically disadvantaged students also took greater concentrations of coursework in career or technical education and computer science than students who were not economically disadvantaged. Such difference may reflect long-standing achievement gaps among students in these subgroups. The student eligibility requirements for career or technical education courses are lower than those for core academic courses. (Friedman et al. iii)

These vocational classes in career or technical education and computer science range from culinary arts and hospitality to automotive repair, and computer drafting.

Lipsitz helps explain how this entire process occurs: “Inadequate funding for inner-city schools means that minority youths frequently encounter larger classes, fewer counselors, more inexperienced teachers, and more poorly equipped laboratories and libraries than their white counterparts” (38). The presence of fewer counselors not only impacts DC programs in inner-city schools, but those in other low-income areas as well. The TEA report declares that—per the telephone survey administered—counselors play a key role in explaining the availability and positive aspects of DC courses. An inadequate number of counselors in a high school can mean that information about DC programs may not be available to lower-income students. Clearly, those who lack knowledge of the programs do not understand how, where, or why to enroll in the programs. By contrast, students enrolled in more economically advantaged school districts gain more awareness of the programs, enlist in large numbers, and receive credit.

Taken as a whole, this TEA report, though expressing no sense of outrage, amounts to a damning indictment of the DC system in Texas because it clearly explains that the DC courses promote white advantage and white domination. Recall that one stated goal of DC programs in Texas is to benefit not only students who are excelling academically but also those qualified as “at-risk”—a goal also emphasized in the CCCC Statement. Unfortunately, the data shows that Texas has largely—and badly—failed to benefit many such students. According to the TEA, students’ racial identities and the financial capacities of their families and schools clearly impact enrollment in DC courses.

Some schools simply pay for their students’ DC courses (Texas Education Agency). Of course, the schools that pay for the courses are schools that have more money. And the finances of a school system stem from the available tax base in a particular geographical area: the richer the tax base, the more tax money can be extracted to fund the school system. As the TEA researchers assert, “school funding based on property tax assessments in most localities gives better opportunities to white children than to children from minority communities” (Friedman et al. 33). The TEA investigators add: “Requiring students and families to pay part of the cost of courses can create problems for participation in dual credit programs. For example, students from low-income families, perhaps the very at-risk students the LEA is targeting, may be precluded from participating if the cost is too high” (Friedman et al. 4). Obviously, some

students' inability to pay for such programs works mightily against the goal of providing greater opportunities to all students.

Not only do students who enroll in DC courses get a “head start” on college, but they also enjoy a better chance of graduating from both high school and college. Composition scholars Joanna Castner Post, Vicki Beard Simmons, and Stephanie Vanderslice comment, “Significant data supports the assertion that participation in concurrent enrollment programs *does* ultimately lead to college success” (169). Post and her colleagues continue: “According to [Education Commission of the States], 25 percent of students who earn nine or more concurrent enrollment credits not only complete college but also continue on to graduate school” (169).² If this is the case, and if the educational goal is to advance “all students” or “students from every economic level,” then the DC courses and programs conspicuously fail to meet their own guidelines. Instead they are, in Lipsitz’s poignant phrase, “racializing life chances” of students as they reinvent, strengthen, and enlarge the entrenched socioeconomic hierarchy and structural racism of American society.

In a small number of states, some people have attempted to eliminate economic barriers for students by requiring that the schools pay all students’ tuition. However, these activists have yet to succeed in certain states, including Texas, where funding for the courses continues to rely on the value of the homes in respective areas. Lipsitz observes that “whiteness never works in isolation; it functions as part of a broader dynamic grid created through intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality” (73).

Like many other whiteness theorists, Lipsitz omits what is often another important point of intersection for whiteness—the ability or inability to speak English as a first language. In Texas and across much of the nation, white students enrolled in DC courses often speak English as a first language. Numerous Latino/a students and their parents do not—a phenomenon that, we suspect, contributes to uneven awareness of the benefits of DC courses in Texas and thus to the lopsidedly white enrollment in those courses. To Lipsitz’s dynamic grid of race, gender, class, and sexuality, we add the use of English as a first language as an additional variable that intersects with whiteness.

While this essay addresses conditions in Texas, some evidence suggests that our argument about Texas may, unfortunately, fit other parts of the United States as well. A 2005 research report released by the U.S. Department of Education documents that schools with higher numbers of nonwhite students offer fewer DC courses than schools with larger numbers of white students (Marken et al. 5).

Racial segregation has often plagued American education. In the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case of 1954, the Supreme Court officially outlawed segregation in public schools. However, almost immediately after *Brown*, many public-school officials, faced with the prospect of racially mixed schools, reconfigured segregation by grouping student cohorts through a process often known as “tracking.” Educated in different decades, both of us—Moreland in a small town in East Texas, Miller in a small town in South Texas—attended public schools that “tracked” students in a segregated fashion.

Tracking still occurs. Reporting in 2004 about a tracked high school in Portland, Oregon, Jessica Singer found that by simply looking at the zip codes of the “regular” and “honors” students, she could determine that, in her words, “90% of honors students came from the

affluent neighborhoods that fed into our school” (212). As Jeannie Oakes explains, while alleging that they base these “tracks” on ability levels, school officials often instead base them partly or mainly on students’ racial identities and on parents’ socioeconomic status. Directly reflecting larger social patterns of marginalization and structural racism, DC courses in Texas currently amount to a reconceived version of “tracking” based, as in the past, partly or mainly on racial identity and socioeconomic status.

There is a difference, however—an important difference: the DC programs in Texas are proving *worse* than “tracking.” Before anyone created DC courses, young, affluent white Texans at least had to complete four years of high school and four years at a college or university before they could graduate and start their careers. Now many of them don’t have to. Instead, DC courses grant them opportunities to graduate *earlier* than their parents did and thus to begin climbing their professional career ladders *sooner* than their parents did. But many less affluent students, including large numbers of nonwhites, still *do* have to complete four years of high school and another four years at a college or university. Thus, because the selective availability of DC courses discriminates against less affluent students, many of these students, upon graduation, start climbing their professional ladders *later* than many of their affluent white counterparts, who graduated from college either a semester or an entire year earlier. For that reason, these less affluent students are *more* disadvantaged than their previously “tracked” parents were. In short, by shutting out many lower-income students—including large numbers of nonwhites—from DC courses while affording already privileged, affluent white students with faster access to college graduation, the system of DC courses in Texas significantly intensifies and worsens the system of white domination that plagued that state before it ever implemented DC courses.

Implications for Reconsidering Whiteness Theory

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that the neoliberals wield the language of abstract liberalism (including such phrases as “equal opportunity”) to justify practices that are, in effect, resolutely racist—a process that he labels “colorblind racism” (Bonilla-Silva; Behm and Miller; Martinez). Early proponents of DC courses certainly brandished the language of abstract liberalism when they argued that DC courses would enhance opportunity for all. These predictions proved woefully mistaken when officials and educators implemented DC courses in Texas. In that case, the language of abstract liberalism, in effect, obscures and masks huge socioeconomic and racial disparities that DC courses not only perpetuate but also worsen.

Certainly educators and state officials in Texas need to dramatically change the way that DC courses are funded and implemented in their state. Further, Lipsitz, Bonilla-Silva, and other whiteness theorists need to recognize *more than* the possibility of the partly masked continuation and preservation of whiteness, decade after decade. Two other whiteness theorists, Brianne Hastie and David Rimmington, appear to move beyond that position when they declare, “Invocation of (neo)liberal values often *further entrenches* systemic disadvantage, but behind the veneer of individual differences” (195, emphasis ours). Moving further, we contend that affluent whites can do more than merely continue and preserve—or even further entrench—their privileges. We claim that whites sometimes can significantly

enlarge those privileges. Unfortunately, with respect to DC courses in Texas, that possibility is already here.

Notes

1. The telephone surveys allowed room for more qualitative research; the supplementary financial data was collected from these institutions in the form of workbooks, which resulted in quantitative data. The purpose of gathering this information was “to determine, at a course level, varying costs associated with dual credit programs as well as various sources of funding and revenues used to support these programs during the 2009–10 academic year” (11). The types of data requested include the course information, expenditures, and revenue.

2. See also Swanson.

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