
**Art Education in the Time of Coronavirus, Reflecting on Today, Anticipating Tomorrow,
and the Influence of White Supremacy Ideology**

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"I **can't breathe**," he cried out mutedly multiple **times**, "Help me," "Let me go," "Mama," and then George Floyd's last breath was taken with a White police officer's knee on his neck.

The focus of this paper is on the disproportionate killing of people of color in the United States by the coronavirus and by White police officers. White Supremacy ideology influences the inequality and the injustice people of color have experienced for hundreds of years in this country. This inequality and injustice have influenced the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on and police brutality of people of color. Ameliorating the influence of the White Supremacy ideology will go a long way to minimize the inequality and injustice that people of color experience. Living successfully in a multiracial society requires the preparation and the education acuity necessary to humble oneself to the dynamism of diversity to challenge our preconceived notions of people and to do the necessary planning. To this end, I proposed employing art education to prepare students for a multiracial society.

Trends of the infection and death among people of color from the coronavirus greatly concern me. The American Public Media (APM) Research Lab compiled data from Washington, D.C., and the 50 states in the United States and these data suggest that indigenous, Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander people have the highest death rates per 100,000 from the coronavirus through August 18, 2020 (See Tables 1 & 2). In an article posted on the web, Harmeet Kaur

(2020), from CNN, noted “...Covid-19 has only magnified the systemic inequalities that persist in the United States. And nonwhite Americans, especially African Americans, have been hit hard on nearly every front.” This **nearly every front** she refers to, I take to mean, inequality in healthcare, education, and in general, their quality of life.

Still trying to grasp the magnitude of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the communities of people of color, the brutal murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of White police officers happened. The Washington Post Staff (August 18, 2020) wrote that “George Floyd’s death at the hands of police in Minneapolis ... brought renewed attention to the high-profile deaths of Black Americans during the past decade and ongoing concerns about systemic racism in the criminal justice system.” Systemic racism is not only in the criminal justice system, but occupies every facet of society. This powerful thought for me is that now there are two pandemics to fear as a Black male living in the United States, which are police violence and the coronavirus.

The inequality and injustice that people of color are experiencing in the United States remind me of the history of the influence of White Supremacy ideology. White Supremacy ideology is the belief that White people are superior to those of other races and thus have the right to dominate them (Anti-Defamation League, n. d.). A culture that is founded on White Supremacy ideology believes it has the right to shape norms, values, beliefs, and standards to advantage White people and oppress people of color (Vander Zander, 1959). As a native of Jamaica who considers Mexico as my second homeland and being a citizen of the United States, I learn that White Supremacy ideology influenced colonialism and the enslavement of my ancestors to grow crops to be sold in England. Like the colonialists in Jamaica, the Spaniards destroyed the Mexican culture (civilizations and heritage buildings) to gain access to the land to

extract raw materials like gold and silver to enrich themselves. During this process, my ancestors and the natives of Mexico were brutally beaten and savagely killed as they labored in inhumane conditions.

While the culture of White Supremacy ideology manifested itself through the regular mechanisms of colonialism and slavery in Jamaica and Mexico, it has metastasized into a system of inequality and injustice for people of color in the United States. Despite the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, proclaiming the end of slavery, issued by President Abraham Lincoln, after the American Civil War between the Northern and Southern states, the atrocities against African Americans were codified into laws. **The Black Codes**, sometimes called **Black Laws**, were passed in 1865 and 1866 by **Southern** states to restrict African Americans' freedom, and to compel them to work for a low wage. These laws also limited when, where, and how former slaves worked and how much compensation they could receive. These codes were intended to put Blacks into indentured servitude, take away their voting rights, control where they lived, how they traveled, and seize their children for labor.

The Jim Crow Laws succeeded the Black Codes that further systematized the influence of White Supremacy ideology. Immediately following the ratification of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery in the United State, the roots of the Jim Crow laws began as early as 1865. The Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local statues used to legalize racial segregation. These laws were meant to deprive African Americans of their right to vote, hold jobs, and get an education. Arrests, fines, jail sentences, violence, and death were the consequences for Blacks who violated the Jim Crow laws.

As if the Jim Crow laws were not restrictive enough, in 1865, a group of Confederate veterans, who fought in the Civil War to uphold the institution of slavery formed a private club

in Pulaski, Tennessee. This group known as the Klu Klux Klan, became the most ruthless organization in the Jim Crow era. The influential Ku Klux Klan infiltrated the White Southern culture, and their members could be found at the highest levels of government to the lowest echelons of the criminal elements on the street. This group terrorized Black communities vandalizing schools, attacking and forcing families off their land, torturing, and lynching Black citizens at night.

Because big cities in the South were not beholden to the Jim Crow laws, Blacks migrated to the cities to escape the violence. As the Black population increased in the cities, the White city dwellers demanded more laws to limit opportunities for African Americans. The Jim Crow laws were expanded and African Americans were forbidden to enter public parks, theaters, and restaurants all of which were segregated. Waiting rooms in bus and train stations, water fountains, restrooms, building entrances, elevators, cemeteries, amusement-park cashier windows were all segregated. In addition, there was also segregation of public pools, phone booths, hospitals, asylums, jails, and residential homes for the elderly and handicapped. African Americans were prohibited from living in White neighborhoods. Even textbooks were separated for Black and White students. For most of the Southern states, marriages and cohabitations between Blacks and Whites were forbidden.

With the increased lynching of Blacks, they fought back and there were at least 25 race riots that took place across the United States over several months during 1919. With education increasingly under attack and few opportunities for Black graduates and Jim Crow laws dominating the South, the 1920s saw a significant migration of educated Black people out of the South. In 1921 the Oklahoma's Greenwood district was destroyed (Figure 1). Tulsa,

Oklahoma's Greenwood district was known as The Black Wall Street because it was one of the most prosperous African American communities in the United States.

The North was not immune from the Jim Crow laws, it had its share of segregations and segregationists like Allen Granbery Thurman who ran for governor in 1867 promising to bar Blacks from voting. Increased Civil Rights activities in the African American communities to ensure that Black citizens were able to vote resulted in the removal of Jim Crow laws.

Despite the end of the Jim Crow laws, the inequality and the injustice influenced by the White Supremacy ideology continued. This led to the passing and implementation of new laws to protect people of color from the continued inequality and injustice. In 1948, President Harry Truman integrated the military. In 1954, The Supreme Court ruled in *Brown V. Board of Education* that educational segregation was unconstitutional. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 halted efforts to keep minorities from voting. In 1968, discrimination in renting and selling homes ended with the Fair Housing Act. Passing and implementing these new laws did not ameliorate the influence of White Supremacy ideology, instead, it evolved into aversive racism. Aversive racism is pretending in public to support equality and justice for Black and Brown people but behind the scenes, every effort is thwarted (DiAngelo, 2018). In the final analysis, White Supremacy ideology continues to influence inequality and injustice for people of color in the United States.

As I thought about this history and observed the impact of the coronavirus on people of color, I cannot but believe that through aversive racism, the influence of White Supremacy ideology has continued in the United States. Racism exists. Police brutality against people of color exists. Inequality and injustice exist. The most important natural resource of any society is its people. For a society, particularly a multiracial society, to develop to its full potential, it must

nurture its human resource. This means that its people must be healthy, well educated, and there must be a high level of cohesion where people of different backgrounds and political, social, and religious persuasions can seamlessly work together for the common good to better themselves, their families, and their communities. This common good cannot be fulfilled with the ideology of White Supremacy influencing inequality and injustice. White Supremacy ideology poses an existential threat to a multiracial society.

As the coronavirus spreads throughout the United States, the human condition has been at the forefront of my mind which led me to focus on the essential workers. Essential workers are part of the 2.1 million farms, 935,000 restaurants, and some 200,000 registered food manufacturing, processing, and storage facilities (National Conference of State Legislatures, May 21, 2020). They put their lives on the line to provide me the opportunity to work from home out of harms way. Fifty percent of the essential workers are people of color who are in the food and agriculture businesses, and fifty-three percent are in industrial, commercial, residential facilities and services (McNicholas & Poydock, May 19, 2020). Consider for one moment, the challenging times we live in with the coronavirus, and then, imagine life without these essential workers. The inequality and injustice influenced by White Supremacy ideology do not only cause the disproportionate infection and death of people of color, but it affects all of us.

White Supremacy ideology and the inequality and injustice it influences also impact education and the quality education students receive. Students, in K-12 education, learn by doing and when they learn to interact with their classmates and/or their teachers who might have a different background and a different worldview from their own, they learn from different experiences and they also learn to respect differences. While schools are legally desegregated in the United States, in a practical sense they are still segregated if you look at the achievement gap

by students' racial groups (Jencks & Phillips, 1998) and the demographic of teachers who teach them. The data indicate that in 2017–2018 the demographic of public-school teachers was about 79 percent White, 9 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Black, 2 percent Asian, 2 percent were of two or more races, and 1 percent was American Indian/Alaska Native; additionally, those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1 percent (National Center for Education Statistics – nces.ed.gov). With this teacher demographic, a student could go through public school without experiencing a teacher of color, and this could continue to perpetuate the influence of a culture of White Supremacy ideology in society.

With the current situation, the coronavirus will continue to disproportionately infect and take the lives of people of color until an effective vaccine is developed. But in the meantime, we must start creating a climate and an environment that will ameliorate the influence of White Supremacy ideology that promotes inequality and injustice and the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on Black and Brown people in the United States. As art educators, we can be an integral part of creating the new normal that the coronavirus demands, we do not have to wait for the next coronavirus to educate students for change. When we educate students for change today, we will prevent the disproportionate impact of the next coronavirus on people of color.

Kenneth Robinson (2011), a British author, speaker, and international advisor on education in the arts, suggested that we created the human world we now live in, and through creativity, imagination, and ingenuity, we can recreate it. How can we recreate the human world to promote equality and justice for all? Customs, traditions, or mores of culture are either reinforced or changed based on experiences. *Mores determine what is considered morally acceptable or unacceptable within any given culture.* White Supremacy ideology is a cultural trait and with the right experiences, it can change. The good news is that the influence of White

Supremacy ideology can be ameliorated, and thus, we can recreate a human world that promotes equality and justice for all.

Nelson Mandela said, **Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.** Arts educators have an important role to play in the recreation of this human world by preparing their students for their futures in a multiracial society. Creativity, imagination, and ingenuity are the foundation necessary to bring about the changes we seek, the new human world we want to build as the global community, and the humanity we want to develop in each of us. This requires producing academically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and politically well-rounded individuals with the life and career skills necessary as citizens of a global community to take on the difficult tasks of reimagining and recreating a multiracial society that values equality and justice for all.

I teach elementary education and art education majors and I believe that they are the key to recreating the human world we want and deserve. *Global Consciousness through the Arts: A Passport for Students and Teachers --2nd Edition* (Richards & Willis, 2020) is the book I use to guide me in the preparation of students for their futures as well as being a good citizen in the global community. Through this book, I provide students opportunities to have a broad range of experiences that exposed them to different cultures and life circumstances and to facilitate the development of their life and career skills so they can understand the existing human condition and want to do something about it. These life and career skills include but are not limited to global consciousness, creative problem solving, creative thinking, learning and thinking for innovation, collaboration, multiple intelligences, mental model building, intrinsic motivation, social learning, authentic learning, and financial acuity. The 305-page online *Ancillary* for this

book provides the pedagogical tools and resources for these prospective teachers to design and deliver content experiences to their students.

This is not enough, however, we as art educators must unleash the power of the visual arts to deliver high-quality learning in public schools. For example, learning in and through the visual arts encourages the use of complex and subtle forms of thinking, imagination, judgment (Eisner, 2002); it improves learning in other academic areas like reading, writing, and mathematics (Catterall, 1998; Richards, 2003); it can stimulate and integrate multiple domains of learning like cognitive, affective, physical, personal, interpersonal and social (Jensen, 2012; Richards, 2003; Steiner, 2001; Tietyen & Richards, 2017); and it can engage multimodal types of cognitive processes to enhance and stimulate the creation of artworks --for example, attention, focus, and concentration, divergent thinking, visual-spatial awareness, image formation, memory, imagination, inspiration, and intuition (Arnheim, 1969; Eisner, 2002; Steiner, 2001). These are just some of the ways in which the visual arts can assist learning.

With financial exigency in schools, particularly at this time with increased unexpected expenditures for the COVID—19 pandemic, public school administrators should resist the temptation to eliminate arts programs, but instead, should invest in more robust arts education programs. These programs would intend to engage students' participation in meaningful education rather than become a space for students where they do fragmented, disengaged, and disempowered activities. The arts are dynamic, if applied professionally, students can develop their cultural identities and explore the cultures of others (Nyman, 2002). The arts can encourage the development of collaborative skills, the use of different technologies, and combine knowledge from different disciplines to address different circumstances (Eisner, 2002). These experiences are intended to provide students with a well-rounded education that will enable them

to recognize the humanity in themselves and others and to develop a healthy respect for differences.

Some final thoughts: People of color in the United States are disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus. The coronavirus did not cause this disproportionate impact, the influence of White Supremacy ideology did. While the future seems uncertain with the coronavirus unabated, there is hope that this situation can be turned around because we have the tools necessary, we just need the right leadership. Through art education, we can recreate a human world where the next pandemic will not disproportionately infect and kill people of color. But more importantly, we can produce educated citizens to employ the resources, technologies, and strategies necessary to prevent or contain attacks like that of the coronavirus on the global community. We must develop a global community that is not influenced by White Supremacy ideology but is one that can employ the power of diversity to explore a future together where there is no limit to creativity, imagination, and innovation. A future with excitement and hope for all. Education through the arts is vital to prepare a citizenry who will enhance the tenets of a multiracial democracy and a global community.

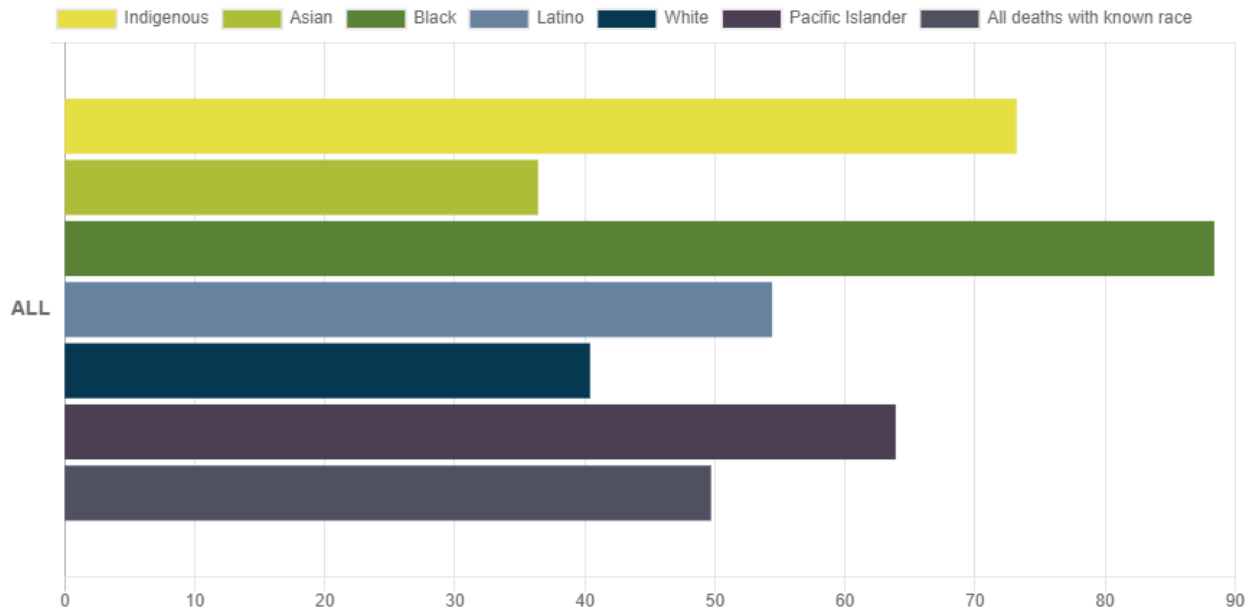
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Table 1.

COVID-19 DEATHS PER 100,000 PEOPLE, THROUGH AUG. 18, 2020



* Includes all available data from Washington, D.C., and the 50 states. Users are cautioned that the Indigenous rate is calculated from just 30 states reporting Indigenous deaths, and the Pacific Islander rate from just 15 states reporting such deaths. States employ varying collection methods regarding ethnicity data. Denominator is built from data aggregated from each state, aligned with their method. Users are cautioned that states do not uniformly report Indigenous, Pacific Islander and other deaths, and many of these deaths are represented in "Other" race.

Source: American Public Media (APM) Research Lab

Table 2

Adjusting the data for age differences in race groups widens the gap in the overall mortality rates between all other groups and Whites, who have the lowest rate. Compared to Whites, the latest U.S. age-adjusted COVID-19 mortality rate for:

- Blacks is 3.6 times as high
- Indigenous people is 3.4 times as high
- Latinos is 3.2 times as high
- Pacific Islanders is 3.0 times as high, and
- Asians is 1.3 times as high.

Source: American Public Media (APM) Research Lab

Figure 1

The Devastation of Black Wall Street



"Smoke billowing over Tulsa, Oklahoma during 1921 race riots," now commonly referred to as a massacre

[Library of Congress](#)