

Disrupting White Vision: Pedagogical Strategies Against White Supremacy

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to a pedagogy of antiracist art education by offering strategies to disrupt white supremacy and the “white savior complex” in the classroom. I begin by discussing students’ commonly held internalizations of white supremacy. I next outline my experience teaching Marlon Riggs’ documentary *Ethnic Notions* (1986) to introduce a history of racist image production including minstrelsy and racist archetypes like Uncle Tom, Sambo, Mammy, Coon, and the Savage in antebellum, postbellum, and colonial contexts. Next, I use a close reading of two recent examples to illustrate how these anti-black tropes continue to inform contemporary visual culture. The first example is a philanthropic commercial for the “Christian Children’s Fund” that utilizes the most problematic aspects of the white savior in colonialist aesthetics. In the second example, I analyze a comedic skit from *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) that acts as a critical response to the commercial. A satirical take on the white savior trope, the skit is both an alternative to and subversion of the history of racist and imperialist imagery. With a historically informed knowledge of how imagery is used to uphold white supremacy, we can make direct connections between histories of racialized imagery and the art world and build lessons for an antiracist pedagogy.

Keywords: antiracist pedagogy, *Ethnic Notions*, white supremacy, white savior complex

White Supremacy in the Classroom

During a critique in a first-year university studio art course, the class was discussing an artwork created by a young woman. She used inexpensive common objects one would find in a grocery store to create her piece, including dried beans and pasta, hot-glued onto cardboard. Unsure of how to describe the work, one student stated: “I like how it, like, is sort of *ethnic* looking.” This student conflated aesthetic production outside the confines of normalized Western materials and construction with the generic “ethnic,” in effect, centering and normalizing Western culture and aesthetic values

while flattening and sidelining all others (Said, 1978). The student did not have any racist intent and meant no deliberate offense, but this expression of racial insensitivity is an example of white supremacist socialization. White supremacist socialization does not mean everyone is explicitly racist, but rather that we learn subtle coding of a normalized racial hierarchy and in turn support the reproduction of institutions that uphold white supremacy. In the classroom, moments like these have encouraged me in my teaching practice to not only introduce underrepresented artists and narratives, but to also understand the production of racialized imagery in a deeper historical context. In bringing these lessons into the university art classroom, I can encourage students to recognize relationships and formations of race and power from a nuanced intersecting vantage point that incorporates individual, historical, and structural perspectives (Desai, 2010).

To teach a history of racialized images in the United States is to simultaneously teach a history of white supremacist imagery—they are dialectically co-created. I share Dylan Rodríguez's (2006) definition of white supremacy as a "*logic of social organization* that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized 'human' difference" (p. 11; emphasis in original). This logic of social organization is determined alongside racializing processes. Upholding white supremacist social organization requires constant perpetuation through "institutions, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 3). In the classroom, white supremacy takes its place somewhere in the constellation of iterative cultural expressions that preserve and remake hierarchical racializing processes. In plain language, white supremacy was reproduced at the local level with the statement "it's sort of ethnic looking." An antiracist pedagogy might intervene at this point of reproduction, disallowing the perpetuation of white supremacist ideology. At its best, an antiracist pedagogy also creates platforms to understand the profundity of white supremacy as a historical construction and structural problem that individuals support in these small moments.

I often begin the semester by asking first-year university art students to read a critical history of the city where the university is located. I found particular success in asking students to read an essay entitled "Capitol: An Austin History" by Scott Hoft (2015) while I was teaching in Austin, Texas. This succinct and accessible text discusses the violent removal of Native Americans, the establishment of Austin through the labor of enslaved persons and white settlers, the redlining

of nonwhite people, and current gentrification processes within the city. I then ask the students to go out into the city, anywhere beyond campus, and return to the next class with photographs. The assignment is low-stakes and the photographs will eventually serve as material for a simple video project. More important than the photographs, the real goal of this excursion into the city are twofold: first, it aims to situate the university within a specific historical context; second, it helps students consider the university as a space that is raced, gendered, and classed through guided discussions that reflect on their experiences. Additionally, it is important that students recognize they are actors in the world and not just students in an art classroom.

After a few semesters doing this exercise, I began to notice an emerging theme among students' project ideas later in the semester—they often wanted to photograph, interview, and/or collaborate with disadvantaged populations outside their immediate community. Students often take interest in populations that are poor, nonwhite, and not affiliated with the university. Allow me to share a specific example: a group of first-year university students (each 18 years old, white, and female) made plans to do a project in which they would ask people living without homes to read tweets tagged with #firstworldproblems into the video camera. An unironic detail is their potential collaborator, to be located randomly on the street, would read these tweets off of their \$2,000 MacBook laptops—a university requirement to purchase upon entrance into the art program. The students were sincere in their interest in humanizing people living without homes while simultaneously intending to critique the callous cultural meme of “first world problems”—a meme meant to note when someone, usually white people, complain about a problem for someone with a lot of material privilege. For example: “My iPhone broke! #firstworldproblems.”

I offered some feedback and tried to help refine the project idea with the students but I struggled to communicate the historically painful and problematic terrain in which they were engaged, in particular a white savior mentality inherited from a colonial mindset—one that reestablishes whiteness as the cultural norm and ideal of civilization. This contemporary iteration of the colonial mindset is here refashioned as a liberal humanist form of benevolence. This individualized notion of altruism does not interrogate the historically formed hierarchical relations between ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’, and instead upholds the same structural relation in viewing oneself as having the capacity to save the Other. The students became frustrated

and changed their idea completely. The experience was upsetting. Like many instructors, I long for students to engage socially and politically with their artwork, yet these students felt I had taken away their agency through endless criticism and promise of pitfalls. For me, this experience and other similar encounters demonstrated a need to take greater responsibility in meaningfully situating visual culture's role in white supremacy. The following provides greater detail on why this is an essential task for arts educators.

Understanding White Savior Complex

The project idea discussed above is paradigmatic of what activists refer to as a “white savior complex.” White saviors believe they can and/or must save disadvantaged people, often brown and black but not always, from whatever ailment they are in.¹ Many are familiar with this through cinematic tropes like the singular white male hero who, inevitably, is the protagonist (Hughley, 2014). These white supremacist cinematic visions help construct for viewers an emotional investment in whiteness and presents white people as predominant even in nonwhite worlds. In effect, these cinematic tropes act to erase sociopolitical struggles of people of color, center narratives on whiteness, and re-write racialized structural and imperialist oppression as a series of individual failings. Within the activist sphere, “benevolent, humanist, and humanitarian liberal-progressive foundations” position in communities of color and poor communities primarily white-led and white-staffed organizations from elsewhere (Rodríguez, 2007, p. 35). Rodríguez (2007) rightly condemns the mentality that leads white organizations to parachute into communities of color that they deem need saving as an internalization of the white liberal humanist vision. The figure of the white savior, while well intentioned, maintains a racialized hierarchical relationship by insisting it is white folks who can help those in need. The white savior is a racialized subject of whiteness, one that maintains supremacist order in their efforts to purportedly overturn it.

Antiracist pedagogy must develop strategies that introduce students

1 I say *disadvantaged* as opposed to *oppressed* to denote that an analytical failure of the white savior is at play. Recognizing oppressed people as such would require a historical and political analysis that sees oppression at a structural level, e.g. to name the oppressor/s. To speak of “advantage” (or lack thereof) tilts the view toward liberalism—these down and out people merely did not have the advantages *we* have had as white saviors. In liberalism, there are no systems of oppression inherent in capitalism; reforms just need to be made.

to the ways white supremacy is embodied and practiced by well-intentioned white people. This requires an introduction to materials and methodologies that allow analytical and critical thinking while providing historical context of a structurally violent relationship that continues to reproduce itself through cultural and political frameworks. Specific to working with students against the white savior complex, antiracist pedagogy seeks to undermine imperialist relations that reinforce dehumanization and systemic oppression by marking the Other as either mute and invisible, or as opportunities to advance one's own project (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Fanon, 2005; Flaherty, 2016; Said, 1978). Below, I will share and analyze my attempts to practice this antiracist pedagogy.

Terror and White Travelers

To understand the embodied white supremacy inherent in the liberal humanist vision, and how it manifests in art school, it is useful to consider the ways students encounter "the Other" as they cross the color line (or the racialized economic line). In bell hooks' (1992) essay "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," she describes her white students' surprise, and subsequent rage, that black folks commonly practice a "critical 'ethnographic' gaze" (p. 167) with regard to whiteness. Anger arises for many white students when their liberal universalism is complicated and their "colorblind" perception of the world is disrupted. "...Racist thinking perpetuates the fantasy that the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful" (hooks, 1992, p. 167-168).

This moment of multi-racial interaction in the classroom can be instructive in teaching against white supremacy (Desai, 2010). hooks builds on this anecdote by describing the crossing of the color line by white people as *travel*, which for many black folks is not an encounter of cultural exchange but an "encounter with terror" (p. 173-174). Recalling childhood experiences in apartheid Jim Crow South, hooks (1992) writes:

As a child, I did not know any white people. They were strangers, rarely seen in our neighborhoods. The "official" white men who came across the tracks were there to sell products, Bibles, and insurance. They terrorized by economic exploitation. What did I see in the gazes of those white men who crossed our thresholds that made me afraid, that made black

children unable to speak? Did they understand at all how strange their whiteness appeared in our living rooms, how threatening? Did they journey across the tracks with the same “adventurous” spirit that other white men carried to Africa, Asia, to those mysterious places they would one day call the “third world”? Did they come to our houses to meet the Other face-to-face and enact the colonizer role, dominating us on our own turf? (p. 170-171)

For both hooks and her nonwhite students, the interracial encounter is not outside the violence of history. Conversely, the white students’ and hooks’ *white traveler* move with a sense of obliviousness to their individual actions as part of a continued stream of asymmetrical and violent racial interactions.

hooks’ anecdote from the classroom acts in reverse to my white students’ #firstworldproblems idea for their project. The students enact the white person on a *mission* (hooks’ traveler). Ironically, the joke of #firstworldproblems is that it condemns, yet simultaneously remains indifferent to, the violence of history in relation to colonialism and the emergence of the “first world.” Indeed, this is the basis of the humor in complaining about one’s iPhone breaking, for example. The students sought to upend this joke by calling attention to the cruelty of this indifference, but they were unable to subvert the cruelty of the joke without reenacting it. Benevolent as the students’ intentions may have been, they intended to cross the color/economic line with the expectation of receiving something in return. In this instance, the impoverished remain the object of pity that require middle class white peoples’ care, while the students leave with a completed art project. In the art world, this unequal “collaboration” will often replicate itself with more successful socially engaged and social practice artists that use people in more vulnerable positions to elevate personal cultural capital and liberal cachet.² This hierarchical relationship is also a *way of seeing* that I will refer to as *white vision*. White vision is a gaze of dominance. Born of white supremacist socialization, it activates the latent assumption that white people are required to save the Other. This vision also consistently fails to see structural violence maintained throughout the history of the U.S.

² See, for example, the case of John Ahearn, thoughtfully discussed in Kwon, 2002, pp. 56-99.

Disrupting White Vision

In the second part of this paper, I describe concrete strategies to historicize white supremacy in images through a discussion of Marlon Riggs' (1986) documentary *Ethnic Notions*. Then, I describe how this white supremacy reproduces a "white savior complex" by looking at a commercial (n.d.) for the Christian Children's Fund. Finally, I discuss a subversion of this format through a close reading of a skit from *Saturday Night Live* entitled "39 cents" (King, 2014).

Ethnic Notions and The History of Racist Imagery in the U.S.

I introduce students to a history of racist imagery in a U.S. context with the 1986 documentary *Ethnic Notions* directed by Marlon Riggs. The film is valuable as a teaching tool because it insists on historicizing minstrelsy performance and its corresponding commercial imagery into a political climate that creates and maintains a hierarchical racial formation. This hierarchical racial formation, in part inherited from practices of colonialism, is dialectically co-constituted alongside white supremacy during both antebellum and postbellum U.S. contexts. Finally, the documentary situates a history of white supremacist imagery in the U.S. as part of a colonial legacy by showing the recycling of tropes that emerged out of the numerous European colonies in Africa.

Heavily illustrated with film clips, advertisements, postcards, and recreations of minstrel songs, *Ethnic Notions* "takes viewers on a disturbing voyage through American history, tracing the deep-rooted stereotypes which have fueled anti-black prejudice" ("*Ethnic notions*," n.d., para. 1). The film begins with a brief history of minstrelsy—white performers in blackface imitating both free and enslaved black persons. As the film demonstrates, minstrelsy is responsible for many of the U.S.'s most persistent racist archetypes like Uncle Tom, Sambo, Mammy, Coon, and the Savage.

Before discussing how this film functions in the classroom, I'll describe some of these manufactured archetypes the film unpacks in order to illustrate how images are used socio-politically, making them inseparable from the larger ideological apparatuses from which they were developed. The film opens with the story of T.D. Rice, a white entertainer who performed a caricature of a singing, dancing, happy, and buffoonish slave. This trope would come to be known as Sambo. It is thought that Rice developed this character in 1828 after seeing a physically disabled black man "jumping Jim

Crow.”³ Rice then exaggerated the man’s speech, dancing, and tattered clothes while applying burnt cork on his face, making him the first blackface performer. In subsequent years, this would be mimicked and popularized by dozens of white performers donning blackface, creating what we now know as the minstrel show. These performances, which typically included song, dance, and skits, became one of the most popular forms of popular entertainment in the 19th and 20th centuries (Lott, 1993). Direct quotations of these archetypes can be seen in early film, and recycled well into the 20th century, and adaptations in contemporary culture continue to remain prominent (Bogle, 2016). The emergence of minstrelsy and the Sambo character corresponded with the rise in the abolitionist movement as the U.S. neared the Civil War, functioning then as an implied if not explicit defense of slavery (Nederveen Pieterse, 1994). As scholar George Fredrickson quips in *Ethnic Notions*, mocking early minstrelsy: “Slavery must be a good institution if slaves were happy and the masters were kindly” (Riggs, 1986).

The second archetype explored by the documentary is Zip Coon—a depiction of free blacks of the North. The Zip Coon was a buffoon who attempted to assimilate into white society by imitating whites but, of course, failed embarrassingly. “Together, Zip Coon with Sambo provided a double edge defense of slavery. Zip Coon failed to adapt to freedom, and Sambo presented the image of the happy darky in their proper place” (Riggs, 1986).

Today, the Mammy archetype is perhaps the most well-known due to the persistence of products like Aunt Jemima and lasting images in films, such as Hattie McDaniel’s (1936) portrayal of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. Scholar Barbara Christian describes the archetype as strong, asexual, and ugly, juxtaposed with the ideal image of white femininity as beautiful, fragile, and dependent. Further, the de-eroticization of Mammy intends to remove the threat to the white domestic sphere by preemptively denying sexual contact between white men and black women, an image of the main house that we know from numerous historical accounts is untrue. It is well documented that both enslaved women, and later domestic workers,

3 In *Ethnic Notions*, choreographer and performer Leni Sloan explains Jim Crow as a dance that developed on the plantations after the church outlawed dancing—defined as crossing one’s feet—in 1690. Enslaved persons created a way of shuffling and sliding their feet so as to not break the law. From my research, accounts of this history seems unstable, however it appears there is a scholarly consensus that, after 1828, “Jim Crow” typically refers to T.D. Rice’s show. This would hold true until post-Reconstruction when “Jim Crow” is used to describe segregation laws—here is where the phrase begins to take on its contemporary associations.

were raped or assaulted by their owners or employers (Pilgrim, 2015). Sambo, Zip Coon, and Mammy offered convenient counter-abolitionist and pro-slavery propaganda leading up to the Civil War. However, after emancipation it was important for the image of (now free) black people to shift in order to function as a successful ideological weapon. Unsurprisingly, propaganda moved toward an old colonialist trope imported from Europe that viewed the now free, undomesticated black people as savages, brutes, and sexual predators. The Savage trope is a holdover from colonial imaginings of Africa as the Dark Continent. Colonists' construction of the colonized as animal-like, undomesticated, and savage made for a convenient ideology that supported a colonial "civilizing" mission (Nederveen Pieterse, 1994). During Reconstruction, the most famous depiction of the Savage is to be found in Thomas Dixon's (1905) *The Clansman*, later remade as a film by D.W. Griffith (1915) as *The Birth of a Nation*.

This film depicts the assembling of the Ku Klux Klan against a Reconstruction-era black man (played by a white actor in blackface) whose incessant and threatening pursuit of a white woman leads to her untimely death. Re-emerging here is the trope of the black-beast rapist, which was cause for hundreds—if not thousands—of extra-legal lynchings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Pilgrim, 2015). In Griffith's vision, retaliatory mob violence is required against the cinematically constructed black rapist, the Savage, to protect the white community. Erskine Peters notes, "We wouldn't have gotten images of the brute negro before emancipation because this image would not have helped the defense of slavery. To suggest there were rebellious black people would have suggested that enslaved persons wanted to be free" (Riggs, 1986).

Against/ alongside the image of the Savage emerged the nostalgic archetypes of Uncle, who was domesticated by slavery. Uncle [Tom], ideological counterpart to Mammy, was always depicted in full servant's uniform complete with a smile, ensuring the white audience that he was happy to serve. Viewed alongside the Savage, the image of Uncle suggests that the younger generation of free black people are wild and threatening, in part, because they have never had the benefit of the domesticating paternalism of slavery. I have left out several important aspects of the excellent film *Ethnic Notions*.⁴ However, it

4 While otherwise excellent, *Ethnic Notions* does not include a discussion of the archetype of "Jezebel"—a hyper-sexualized black woman. Jezebel continues to operate today in the commodification of sexualized black female bodies. It also acts as a defense against sexual violence perpetrated upon vulnerable and racialized women. I have not gone into detail with regard to this history only because of

should be evident from my selective culling of this work that the black image in the white imagination has historically remained essentialist, anti-black, and adaptable to shifting political contexts that continually reconstitute white supremacy.

Viewing *Ethnic Notions* with students is a powerful experience. Typically, when students and I watch this in class, I will end our session after a brief and informal discussion or shift to another task that is less emotionally demanding. The next class, I return to the documentary with a series of prompts and ask students to summarize lessons from the film. When asking the group to recall some of the manufactured archetypes the film discusses (Sambo, Zip Coon, Mammy, etc.), I ask questions such as: “What political purpose did these archetypes serve?” or “How were these images of Sambo used and how did they change after the war?” It is important that images do not float freely away from their context. Insisting on an accurate historicizing not only helps students recognize how imagery is weaponized, it also helps to create a framework for accountability and historical context within their own politics and art practices. Insisting that images have consequences and interact with converging social, political, and world-making historical forces, offers students some sense of the importance of cultural production—even if they do not yet wholly understand the profundity of white supremacy and racialized violence. This helps establish in the classroom complex and historically informed narratives with regard to constructions of race (Acuff, 2018).

Christian Children’s Fund and the White Savior Complex

After reviewing the basic arguments of the film, I prepare a handful of contemporary examples to illustrate how these images persist and adapt. I will limit my discussion to two videos I believe are particularly instructive for students. The first is a commercial for the Christian Children’s Fund (n.d.). Likely filmed in the mid-nineties, the commercial opens with a pan of nonwhite children wading through a mountain of trash—plastic bottles, cans, old tires, etc.—while a masculine voice-over speaks to the American viewer:

You’ve never seen a place like this, have you? But everyday children like Michelle come here to [...] pick up plastic. [...] When you look out here, you might

limitation of space, but the intersection of sexual violence and white supremacy is crucial to understanding how white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and settler colonialism wields power (Pilgrim, 2015; Roberts, 1999; Smith, 2005).

think—what could *I possibly have in common with people like these?*

The last question is a rhetorical one. Next, in order to assure us *we are all the same*, he responds to his imagined white audience's answer: "You couldn't be more wrong..." A man hikes into the frame—white American actor Alan Sader. He looks like a trim Santa Claus or a loving television grandfather. At the climax of the commercial, he kneels down to one knee, puts his arm around young Michelle, and looks into the camera: "Wouldn't you like to give a child *like Michelle* a break? Go to the phone now..." The paternalism is palpable. The *us* versus *them* rhetoric assures the white viewer that, as much as Alan Sader tries to convince us, white Americans are not at all like these nonwhite children. The Savage trope is clear, even if these poor children deserve our help. This is a contribution to the myth-making of the Dark Continent, part of a long history of colonialist representation of the unspecified generic Africa, where Africans are primitive and need the civilizing ways of the colonizer (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Nederveen Pieteser, 1994).

***Saturday Night Live* against the White Savior**

As a counter to this, I share with students a parody from *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) entitled "39 Cents" (King, 2014). The skit is a satirical commercial for the fictional charity "HelpFund" that has all of the cinematic tropes of liberal humanist charity appeals: white men in a dirty, diseased, presumed "nonwhite" environment; slow, sad piano; and decorative, nonwhite people from a low socioeconomic status in the background functioning as props of poverty. The spokesperson for HelpFund is Charles Daniels, a white male character obviously modeled after Alan Sader, who is played by comedian Bill Hader. Using the precise posturing as Sader with young Michelle, Daniels kneels next to a black man (Jay Pharoah) washing clothes in a small tub on the dirt ground: "Just 39 cents. That's less than a small cup of coffee, but it can make all the difference in the world to the people of this village." The black man washing clothes quietly interrupts the white man: "Ask for more money. Why you start so low?!" Surprised and momentarily knocked off of his game, Daniels gets back to his pitch."

As you can see, *these* villagers are desperate for your help, so pick up the phone." Later, two black men (Pharoah and Kenan Thompson) start chatting skeptically in the background, trying to figure out who this white guy is and what he is doing in their community (recall

hooks' white traveler). Eventually the two men discover he is filming a charity infomercial and start yelling toward Daniels: "Yo! Start higher!"

This address, both to Daniels and the camera, breaches the contract of white vision that forces silence. The insistence to demand more from Daniels acknowledges that the historical exploitation of colonialism has garnered far greater riches for Westerners than 39 cents a day. Daniels is shaken and finally annoyed, he quips sharply while side-eyeing his black antagonists: "39 cents/day is *all these people need.*" With his response, Daniels both assures his white audience they will not be burdened more than 39 cents a day while also attempting to police the black community's demand for more. *You will be happy with what we give you* is the implication. The commercial is almost completely off the rails when the two black men (Thompson and Pharaoh) are joined by two black women (Leslie Jones and Sasheer Zamata) who collectively surround Daniels with their bodies and verbally challenge his every word. Where previously he walked the unknown community as a King among the Savages, he is now held captive between their bodies. They antagonize: "He keeps saying 39 cents, why can't it be 99 cents?" Daniels assures it is because that is the price of coffee. "Why can't it be the price of Arizona Iced Tea? They're 99 cents!" says Jones' character. The clear, but unspoken reference is to Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black teenager who was murdered by George Zimmerman, a middle-aged white man, after being mistaken for having a weapon that was, actually, Skittles and Arizona Iced Tea. Cast onto a neo-colonial context, this comparison simultaneously transforms Arizona Iced Tea into a symbol of mourning and resistance. With their reference to Martin, the "Savages" have linked liberal humanist philanthropy with anti-black state violence.

Additionally, the writers and actors of the skit have subverted white vision by providing an antagonistic voice to the historically silenced object of colonialist violence and capitalist charity. As the scene in the commercial escalates, one of the black women (Jones) impatiently challenges Daniels: "Hey—I bet you don't even know what country you in?" He stumbles before he finally meekly offers, "... Africa?" This is too much. Jones' character now replaces Daniels—centered in the frame and obfuscating his body. Her friends physically close in on Daniels. "If you want to see this cheap-ass white man again, you better send us \$200 cash, right now!" This could be read as a farcical threat of violence, but in the spirit of latent insurgencies of black liberation, it could also be read as a call to anticolonial violence albeit

a comedic one. Further, if the fictional philanthropist Daniels acts as a stand-in for the continued structural violence of the colonialist paradigm transformed into a liberal humanist paternalism, it is a call to expropriate the expropriators (Fanon, 2005).

Pedagogically, the funny and accessible skit links the Jim Crow era Savage to the contemporary Noble Savage found in the Christian Children's Fund commercial. What is significant in the *SNL* skit is the reversal of subject positions after seeing and hearing the extraordinary paternalism that the nonwhite people must be spoken for and saved by the white audience. The transfer of gaze and subject position in the *SNL* skit is also a central component of critical feminist and anti-colonial art and film criticism, what hooks (1992) refers to as the oppositional gaze. Bringing this discussion into the classroom provides an excellent opportunity for young artists to consider theories of the oppositional gaze, subject/object position, and power dynamics as they are produced and presented formally in images. Had the students with the #firstworldproblems project idea had access to some of the media and history discussed above, they would have been much more equipped to approach the exceedingly difficult problems of homelessness or poverty with greater care and avoided the pattern of paternalism. In retrospect, the students' frustration resulting from my warnings of possible pitfalls with their project was my failure. As instructors, it is our job to support students in navigating these questions with care. The above strategies for contextualizing white supremacy and racialized imagery is my belated response to these students.

Conclusion

An antiracist pedagogical approach in art education must actively critique white supremacy in visual culture. This critique requires a historical understanding of racial formation as well as the role images played—and continue to play—in support of white supremacy as a logic of social organization and hierarchy (Rodríguez, 2006; Spillane, 2015). White supremacy reproduces itself across time and space, as the recycling of racist colonial articulations of oppressed peoples in the U.S. illustrates (Nederveen Pieteser, 1994). As *Ethnic Notions* (1986) shows, colonial imagery informs the racialized tropes that still circulate in contemporary U.S. culture, and white supremacist imagery is adaptable in relationship to political power. We are all socialized in a white supremacist environment, therefore we must deconstruct the visual, social, and political languages that we interact with to allow for a meaningful engagement with antiracist voices. A

critique of white supremacist imagery destabilizes its ability to act as a tool of oppression, as hooks (1992) eloquently writes, in order to “name racism’s impact [is to] help break its hold. We decolonize our minds and imaginations” (p. 178).

When young artists develop critical strategies for interrogating the context and meaning of the images and projects they envision producing, we strengthen our abilities to ask important questions rooted in justice and solidarity that engage complicated questions of race, representation, aesthetic value, and the relationship of cultural production to white supremacy. Antiracist pedagogy struggles to disrupt the circuitry of white supremacist reproduction. The classroom is one place to begin.

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