

Frances Cress Welsing: Decoding and Deconstructing the Cultural Logic of White Supremacy

by

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If you do not understand White Supremacy (Racism)-what it is, and how it works-everything else that you understand, will only confuse you. Neely Fuller (1969)

Frances Cress Welsing was born Frances Luella Cress, March 18, 1935, in Chicago, Illinois. Welsing continued in her family tradition of obtaining an education and eventually received her B.S. from Antioch College in 1957 and her M.D. from Howard University College of Medicine in 1962. She worked in several capacities during her academic and professional career. Some of these positions include being an assistant professor of pediatrics at Howard University College of Medicine from 1968-75, serving as staff physician at the Department of Human Services from 1967-1991, and operating her own private practice in Washington, DC. She was also involved with professional organizations in her field such as the National Medical Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Psychiatric Association. While these descriptions and titles are important to understanding who and what Frances Cress Welsing was as a professional, it is her role as social and psychological theorist that brought her national and international recognition. Her life's work, dedicated to the systematic study of white supremacy and its impact on the thinking and behaviors of both white and black people, is a contribution that leaves an intellectual legacy that cannot be ignored.

This examination of Frances Cress Welsing's work situates her in the radical school of Black psychology. In contrast to the scholarship done by psychologists in the traditional school of Black Psychology where Black psychologists use standard European psychological principles to understand Black behavior, Welsing directs her attention to white people. By analyzing white racist thought and behavior, Welsing turns Eurocentric psychology on its head and explains the behaviors of people of European descent relative to African people while simultaneously deconstructing the cultural logic of white supremacy. In doing so, Welsing creates her own unique version of radical Black Psychology. The specific aspects of Welsing's work that will be highlighted are: (1) her deconstruction of Freudian psychoanalysis, (1) her critiques of racist white scientists (2) her contributions as an intellectual antecedent to critical white studies and (4) the legacy of intellectual warfare she bequeathed to contemporary Black scholars and activists.

Cracking the Psychological Codes and Cues to White Supremacy/Racism

Inspired by the work of Neely Fuller (1969), who posited that "If you do not understand White Supremacy (Racism)-what it is, and how it works-everything else that you understand ... will only confuse you" (p. A), Welsing offered "The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation" (1974) as a guide to assist people of African descent in interpreting and understanding global White supremacy. Welsing and Fuller charged themselves with the task of explaining the unexplainable and making sense out of nonsense? For Welsing, the Isis Papers (1991) provided the keys to unlocking the codes of the color complex and begin the process of attempting to understand the absurdity of white supremacy. Welsing is in agreement with Fuller (1969) who opines that (1) white supremacy is the only functional racism; (2) all third world people (people of color) are victims of it and (3) there are social theories and systems that support and maintain the perpetuation of white supremacy in all areas of life. Welsing's and Fuller's analysis of white supremacy incorporates individual, cultural and institutional definitions of racism (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Jones, 1997) into a comprehensive whole.

For Welsing, the emphasis on white supremacy being the only functional racism is a critical component to her theory and is a prerequisite to comprehending the dynamics of racism. Welsing articulated the importance of power in the implementation and elimination of racism. She posits that people who have the ability and means (power) to eradicate racism do not have any intention/will (desire) to end it and the people who have the need/want (desire) to end racism, do not have the ability (power) (Welsing, 1991). It is here that Welsing's theory deviates from traditional approaches to understanding racism. Traditional approaches view the prejudices associated with individual and cultural racism as universal traits that can be manifested in any group, at any time and in any given social situation (Jones, 1997).

However, when Welsing and Fuller state that white supremacy is the only functional racism and that all people of color are victims of it, they are arguing that white people in power have control over the institutions that impact the lives of the world's majority (Black, Brown, Red and Yellow people) and thus are the only group in position to actualize and fully put into practice a system of domination based on racial superiority.

Welsing and Psychoanalytical Theory

Welsing does not argue that European psychological theories are irrelevant. However, Welsing does take the stance that major psychological theories were standardized and normed on European people, and thus should be viewed as culturally specific to people of European descent. Welsing turns Freudian psychoanalysis on its head and applies the theory to specifically understanding European cultural thought and behavior (Ani, 1994; Jamison, 2008). The foundation of Welsing's theory is based on genetic and social factors (Kambon, 1998). The genetic factor states that: (1) skin pigmentation has many adaptive functions which lack of pigmentation does not have (i.e. protection from disease, ultraviolet radiation, etc.) and thus the absence of color represents a genetic deficiency; (2) the majority of the world's population are people of color and are the norm among human beings; and (3) since people of African descent are perceived as the darkest among the people in the world, then they represent the group most despised and feared by whites (Jamison, 2008; Kambon, 1998; Welsing, 1991). The social factor states that: (1) since the majority of the world's peoples have more color/pigmentation than White people, then Whites are the numerical minority among the world's population and Blacks, of all the colored races of the world, therefore represent the greatest threat to White genetic survival; (2) White supremacy hostility and aggression against people of African descent manifests as psychological defense mechanisms that mask feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, fear, and envy toward people of color (Jamison, 2008; Kambon, 1998; Welsing, 1991).

Welsing puts forth three Freudian defense mechanisms (repression, reaction formation, and projection) that people of European descent use to oppress people of color, and especially African descent groups. These defense mechanisms manifest as: (1) repressing their feelings of inferiority by denying them; (2) discrediting and despising people of color; (3) sun-tanning, using make-up, enlarging breasts, buttocks, and lips to acquire the physical characteristics of people of color; (4) elaborating myths about white genetic superiority, (5) projecting their hate and sexual desires on people of color, while hypocritically maintaining that it is people of color that lust and desire white people; (6) obsessing, focusing, and alienating the physical body from sex; (7) dividing and separating people of color by classifying them as minorities, and (8) imposing birth control on people of color in order to neutralize/marginalize the reality that people of color are collectively in the majority of the world's population (Jamison, 2008; Karenga, 1992; Welsing, 1991).

Far too often, the sensationalism surrounding Welsing's articulation of the various manifestations of defense mechanisms deployed by whites undermines the understanding of certain core elements made in her arguments. While the popularized examples of defense mechanisms are important aspects of the Cress Theory, these defense mechanisms often come across as disconnected abstractions when presented outside of their proper theoretical context and sometimes detract from important aspects of the theory. In conjunction with defense mechanisms, a major value of the theory is seen in her reinterpretation of prominent psychoanalytical concepts that are thought to be universal. By shedding these concepts of their assumed universality, Welsing switches the angle of analysis from all members of Western civilization to focus on a specific group of people. Welsing (1991) maintains that theories espoused by thinkers associated with psychoanalytic theory such as Otto Rank, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, Karen Horney and Sigmund Freud that discuss Western personality traits are actually explaining personality traits peculiar to white people. Along these lines, Welsing asserts:

The term Western means 'white', Western has become a comfortable (and for some, confusing), obfuscating euphemism or code for the word 'white'. The terms 'Western civilization' and 'Western culture' specifically refer to the civilization and culture evolved, determined, directed, developed and controlled by people who classify themselves as 'white'. (Welsing, 1991, p. 23)

In decoding the language, mythologies, and concepts used in psychoanalytic theory that obscure critical analysis, Welsing positions the central problems of Western civilization and its discontents in the thoughts and behaviors of white people. Furthermore, her critique implies that within some of the theories developed by psychoanalyst regarding the nature of human beings, there are valuable lessons to be learned by Black people about the nature of white supremacy.

When certain concepts proposed as universal are specifically applied to white people, the political and cultural context of the concept changes. For example, when the "universal" concept of inferiority complex is applied on a broader cultural and societal level versus an individual and personal level, vastly different interpretations emerge. An illustration of how reinterpretations of European/white civilization are applied to bring forth better understanding of Western theories is seen in Bulhan's reading of Mannoni (1962) when he argues:

Behind the European need to rule people in distant lands there exists both an inferiority complex and a trait he called misanthropy...a basic feeling of inadequacy...[and] a basic mistrust and hatred of mankind...these two traits...constitute the driving force of European colonialism. Both traits are repressed, but they nonetheless find expression in the behavior of the European. The inferiority complex is defended against through compensatory efforts to dominate others, paternalize them, and be superior to them. (Bulhan, 1985, p. 111)

Welsing's technique is similar yet different in that her focus is not only on the motivating factors underlying the behaviors, but also on the terminology that is used to normalize racist behavior and strip it of its racial implications by shielding it under the cloak of objectivity and universalism (Ani, 1994; Carruthers, 1996; Wright, 1984). Viewed from this perspective, Welsing's analysis provides theoretical tools for decoding so-called objective and universal terms so that African people can evaluate and determine for themselves the difference between civilization or barbarism (Diop, 1991). By applying Welsing's critical lens to psychoanalysis, phenomena that appear to be civil by European standards can in actuality be barbaric and detrimental for African people. For Welsing, once Black people know how to decode the signs and symbols embedded in Western theories about white people, they are able to view psychoanalytic theory as self-studies done by white people about white people that illuminate the inner workings of a white psyche attempting to grapple with its own insecurities relative to whiteness.

Welsing saved her most scathing critique of psychoanalytic thought for the founding father of the theory himself, Sigmund Freud. Freud is hailed as the father of psychoanalysis and is revered as an intellectual icon within Western culture. In fact, it would be an anomaly to find any book on the history and systems of psychology that did not mention Freud. Decades after Freud was dead and buried his theory and its impact remained alive and well. Time Magazine, in an issue reflecting on the most influential thoughts and ideas in the 20th century, named Freud one of the century's greatest minds (Gay, 1999). Given Freud's prominent place within European intellectual heritage and his lauded list of contributions to psychological insight, some psychiatrists might be hesitant to question his work. Fortunately, for those involved in the process of liberating African minds, Welsing was not that type of scholar.

As a Black person committed to working in the best interest of Black people first, and a psychiatrist second, Welsing had no problem and saw no contradiction in shaking the intellectual roots of her own discipline and profession. Aware of the gravity of critiquing a figure such as Freud, Welsing (1991) expressed her understanding of the situation:

I fully realize how presumptuous it may seem to some (in the context of white supremacy system/culture) that I – a Black female psychiatrist – should presume to critique the thinking of Sigmund Freud, one of the acknowledged major thinkers of the white supremacy system. (p. 93)

Welsing recognizes the difficulty that those deeply entrenched in the intellectual hegemony of Western culture experience with any critique of Freud, let alone a critique from a Black woman. In spite of this predicament, Welsing was poised and ready to take on the task of challenging and critiquing the central figure within psychiatry.

Welsing (1991) asserts, “I have concluded that I have every right, indeed every obligation and responsibility as a being on this planet, to set forth my thinking on the furor that has been made on the subject of Freud’s work and thought” (pp. 93-94). Freud’s position in the pantheon of European thinkers notwithstanding, Welsing thought it was her duty to speak truth to power even if it meant deconstructing the concepts she had been taught. After years of teaching and training in the field of psychiatry, Welsing (1991) comments that “having been taught and having read Freudian theory, I decided long ago that most of Freud’s analysis made little, if any, real sense” (p. 93). In the final analysis, Welsing concludes the following: (1) many white psychiatrists conclude that (their) psychiatry is dead, psychiatry that for over 50 years has been based on Freud’s theories and (2) if Sigmund Freud was really an astute behavioral analyst and scientist, why was he unable to decode the behaviors associated with white supremacy relative to his own cultural group’s oppression? (Welsing, 1991, p. 94).

One of Welsing’s most interesting observations pertaining to Freud is the question she raises about the relationship between Freudian theory and critiques of white supremacy. Welsing’s stance is that if Freud, as a person of Jewish descent, “was going to spend most of his energy thinking about and decoding behavior, he should have thought in greatest about why his people historically had been under attack throughout the whole of their European experience” (Welsing, 1991, p. 94). For Welsing (1991), Freud’s failure to address the root causes of the oppression experienced by his own cultural group is the reason why “his discussion, coming forth in the language of abstraction and displacement, has remained completely obscure and, in the final analysis, useless” (p. 94). Welsing further contends that Freud wanted to be accepted in white society and feared that his psychoanalysis would be degraded and looked down upon as a marginalized ethnic science if its principles were applied to analyzing racism. Bulhan (1985) is in agreement with Welsing and explains that Freud’s “desire to win scientific respectability...diluted his social critique” (p. 56) and that as a result psychoanalysis became “a rationalizing bulwark to oppression” (p. 56) instead of a key to liberation. Consistent with Welsing’s interpretation of the codes in the color complex, she opines that Freud “could not come to terms with his own identity, nor the dynamic affecting those so identified (as non-white) by the surrounding social system” (Welsing, 1991, p.95). Thus, according to Welsing, if Freud had recognized that he lived in a world defined by a system of white supremacy that classified him and his cultural group as non-white, perhaps he could have made better use of his theory. Even with recognition of his otherness, Welsing suggests that Freud’s fear of offending whites and facing retaliatory action prohibited him from further interrogating white supremacy on a deeper level. This is a crucial component of Welsing’s problem with Freud and his theory. For Welsing, fear of losing the respect of and the lack of a need for appraisal from established members of psychiatry did not factor into how she applied her analysis. In reference to what she perceives as Freud’s cautionary actions, Welsing maintains that “I see no need to repeat his fear nor his folly, even though the same danger exists” (Welsing, 1991, p. 100). Whereas Freud missed the opportunity to utilize psychoanalysis to benefit his cultural group, Welsing never strove for acceptance from the mainstream, internalized her cultural identity, and embraced the vocation of a scholar committed to using her scholarship to address the pressing issues and needs of her people.

Criticism, Confrontation and Challenging Eurocentric Assumptions Within Eugenics

The genetic and social components of Welsing's theory have both garnered attention and sparked much controversy and debate in intellectual circles within the social sciences. Outside of African-centered scholars (Ani, 2016; Carr, 2016; Kambon, 1998; Karenga, 1992), there have been few attempts to address the substance of Welsing's theory in a scholarly manner. Many of the analyses of her work have been polemical attacks that seek to discredit the value of her work by labeling it a pseudoscience that believes in "psychogenetics" (2008) and practices "voodoo methodology" (1991). One noted exception to this popular approach to scrutinizing Welsing's theory has been St. Clair Drake's critique in his monumental "Black Folk Here and There" (1987). In "Black Folk Here and There" (1987), Drake asked the following questions relative to how the color Black has been perceived throughout history: (1) is the tendency universal to make the color Black symbolic of undesirable objects, situations, and emotional or psychological states? (2) does the devaluation of the color Black within the symbol system of a specific society lead to the expression of negative prejudices against people defined as 'Black' within that society? and (3) if negative stereotypes are held, and negative attitudes are expressed, against people defined as 'Black' within a society, does this necessarily result in discriminatory behavior toward them? Based on the major tenets of Welsing's work, one can conclude that Welsing would respond in the affirmative to Drake's queries. While for Drake, these were unanswered questions that must be placed under the close scrutiny of a panoramic view of history.

Drake's methodology consisted of using historical data as means of locating a period before white racism began. A historical chronology that traces the origin and development of white racism and negative ideas about Blackness and/or Black people was vital to Drake's analysis. This line of reasoning is extended further when Drake (1987) expresses his interest in studying "When, where, and why did pejorative connotations originally become attached to a specific kind of black person-the Negro physical type? Did these connotations diffuse to other areas and, if so, how and why? Did such connotations ever originate again independently and, if so, where and under what circumstances" (pp. 8-9). According to Drake, the values associated with the color Black and/or Black people can be positive, neutral or negative depending on the historical, social, political and cultural context in which it is viewed. Drake's position is that the denigration of all things Black and the practice of white supremacy is contextual and does not transcend time, place and space. However, for Welsing, Drake's analysis confirms rather than counters her argument. From Welsing's perspective, the historical instances of positive and/or neutral perceptions of Blackness in the white imagination should be interpreted as examples of unconscious thoughts in which Blackness is valorized and desired, that have been repressed and are now surfacing on the conscious level.

Welsing's work raises issues relative to the role of melanin, the function it serves, and the positive or negative implications and results of having or not having varying degrees of melanin. It is evident throughout her scholarship that Welsing had a deep interest in exploring the potential and possibilities of melanin as a research topic and in examining its relationship to race and racism. A critique that Drake (1987) has in common with the majority of Welsing's detractors is the idea that her theory places too much emphasis on biology and the science of melanin. Drake's criticisms of Welsing's take on melanin are threefold. Drake opined that Welsing's views are presented as valid without being tested and/or testable, are unsupported value judgements about biology, and that melanin theorists like Welsing are turning the clock of history backward to biological determinism (Drake, 1987; Moore, 1995). As the critiques and controversies relative to the role and value of melanin waxed and waned throughout the years, Welsing's fundamental position on melanin is clear when she comments "I put the discussion of melanin on the board to describe how pigmentation was a factor in what white supremacy behavior was all about" (Dyson, 1993, p. 158). Welsing invoked melanin as a means to bring attention to and highlight the significance of skin color within the system of white supremacy. Similar to Fanon's notion of the epidermalization of inferiority (1967), Welsing understood that white supremacy encourages Black people to internalize ideas that convey that Black skin is an error and that Black existence is a negation of that which is classified as white/human. Welsing's utilization of melanin as a conceptual and theoretical tool was a way to ensure that people classified as Black, some of whom denigrate Blackness and/or deny the reality that many of their lived experiences occur precisely because of their Blackness, centered their thoughts on attributes associated with their skin color and on how and why their Black skin is perceived in the manner that it is by white supremacy thinking.

As if anticipating the barrage of criticism that emerged from those who questioned her scientific rigor and methods, Welsing addressed the charges of pseudoscience and lack of empirical validity with a quote from James B. Conant that states:

The test of a new idea is...not only its success in correlating the then-known facts but much more its success or failure in stimulating further experimentation or observation...This dynamic aspect of science, viewed not as practical undertaking but as development of conceptual schemes, seems to me to be close to the heart of the best definition of science. (Welsing, 1991, p. 14)

Thus the scientific value of a theory lies not only in whether or not it can be "proven" but also in its ability to foster further discussion and dialogue that stimulates scholars to continuously engage its fundamental thesis. Welsing (1991) views her work as facilitating the scientific process when she asserts "the majority of the world's people are looking for an answer...they are looking for a change. Perhaps The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation will help them to make that change" (p. 13-14).

From Welsing's perspective, some of the evident changes and long-term practical implications of the Cress Theory can be: (1) non-white people worldwide will have a basis for understanding the motivational nuances of the behavior of whites; (2) non-whites will cease to be vulnerable to the behaviors of whites; (3) non-whites will gain psychological liberation from white ideological domination; and (4) non-whites will be less vulnerable to being positioned into conflict with one another. Even though Welsing offered these lofty and idealistic expectations, she knew and understood that there would be strong opposition in the forms of intellectual backlash and professional repercussions as a result of publishing her provocative theory. Yet, Welsing was confident that regardless of ideological attacks and/or personal slanders, the ultimate role and function of the Cress Theory would be to provide people with a conceptual framework and a theoretical grounding from which they could begin to think critically about the reality of white supremacy.

Carruthers (1999) discussed the confrontation with white supremacist thought and the scholarship it produces that often informs and influences public policy as intellectual warfare. Welsing positions herself in this tradition and was involved in intellectual warfare by openly debating many of the leading figures of the modern/contemporary Eugenicist movement. According to Zuberi (2001), the eugenics movement perpetuated the belief that "inequality is natural and beyond human transformation, and people are destined by virtue of their native ability to fixed positions in society" (p. 78) and has been "responsible for negative laws, deaths, and sterilizations of non-European people" (p. 78). Both of these eugenic stances are similar and congruent with Welsing's recognition of the European practice of creating myths of African inferiority that are rationalized and/or justified through science and the advocating of sterilization/birth control among people of color as defense mechanisms that maintain white supremacy, domination and control (1991). Hence for Welsing, eugenics theory and the research conducted to support it, is not the wild-eyed fanaticism of mad scientists. On the contrary, eugenics scholarship is the calm and calculated academic manifestation of white supremacy thought and behavior.

One of Welsing's famous direct confrontations with the ideology and practice of eugenics was her classic debate with the eugenicist William Shockley (Black Power, 2015). Shockley's articulation of eugenics and dysgenics in the debate is a prime example of the ideas put forth in the Cress Theory. Welsing's argument that white social scientists use reaction formation in developing myths that parade as theories about Black genetic and intellectual inferiority is on full display in the debate. Shockley attempts to present himself as the objective observer by quoting empirical data from research articles accompanied by tables, charts and graphs. Throughout the debate, Shockley uses numerous academic terms such as "raceology", "scientific analysis", "scientific estimates", "quantitative work", "distribution", "neurological development", "bell shaped curve" and "systematic points" to express and give validation to his eugenic ideas. Welsing deconstructs Shockley's arguments by deftly demonstrating how Shockley hides behind the shields of science, scholarship and sophisticated jargon.

Whereas Shockley argued that social problems in Black communities are genetic in origin and cannot be solved through environmental changes, Welsing countered his genetic inferiority argument by centering the discussion on racism and the racist conditions that contribute to the disproportions and disparities. On several occasions Shockley spoke of dysgenics, a theory which suggests that the deterioration of the human gene pool occurs by increased survival and reproduction of people with undesirable traits. Shockley referred to dysgenics as the most threatening aspect of high Black reproduction rates and advocated for a “humane sterilization” process as the solution. It was almost as if Shockley had read the Cress Theory and decided to collect data, construct theories and offer himself as living testimony and confirmation of Welsing’s thesis. In addition to his elaborate empirical display, Shockley, an award winning engineer “brought all the weight of his Nobel Prize to support his eugenic arguments” (Zuberi, 2001, p. 72). Hence, Welsing called attention to Shockley’s scholarly reputation by informing him that as a Stanford professor with an international reputation, he failed to realize how his training in racist academic settings programmed him to focus on the genetics of people of color with the purpose of destroying people of color (Black Power, 2015).

As Welsing reflected on her position as a 20th century psychiatrist living and practicing in what she referred to as “the power capital of the world” (p. 17), she pondered “Can a greater understanding be achieved in the study of human behavior as it is organized and manifested in the world’s dominant power system/culture” (p. 17). Recognizing the conceptual and theoretical pitfalls and limitations of 19th century European psychiatry, Welsing opines “Western social and behavioral science, particularly psychiatry, has been content with behavior fragment analyses and multiple theoretical explanations for different behaviors” (p. 45). In countering this fragmented approach and proposing her unified field theory of psychiatry (1991), Welsing initiated an investigation that critiques and challenges the foundation of Western social science.

Welsing’s investigation was a daunting task made even more complicated by the intersecting dynamics of race and gender in a racist and patriarchal society. Aware of the iconoclastic implications of her work, Welsing poses a fundamental question that undergirds the significance of this theoretical endeavor when she asks “Is it conceivable that a Black who is also a woman can critique and dismantle the whole of Western psychiatry?” (p. 39). Whether others could conceive it or not, Welsing conceived herself as a Black woman psychiatrist who dared to challenge the dead white men that comprised the psychological canon. Where did this Black woman find the intellectual audacity to question that which was considered off limits and therefore not to be questioned? Welsing’s intellectual confidence and her belief in the intellectual capacity of Black people to think independently of European intellectual traditions inspired her to not only step outside conceptual boxes but to bust the proverbial bubble.

Frances Cress Welsing and Critical Studies of Whiteness

Critical White Studies is an intellectual space that has, with few exceptions, been populated by white scholars. This theoretical and conceptual domination of an intellectual project that seeks to study whiteness has extreme limitations. At a fundamental level, the white domination of the field makes logical sense. It provides a space for white people to critically observe themselves relative to the concept of whiteness that whites created and examine the institutions that were constructed to maintain and support white supremacy. On the other hand, it also has the tendency to marginalize and silence the voices of people who have direct contact with the overt and covert manifestations of white supremacy. Conspicuously absent from many of the conversations are Black people, who through their history of direct contact with and thus intimate knowledge of whiteness and its impact on their lived experiences, are in a unique position to know white people better than white people know themselves. In *Black on White: Black writers on what it means to be white* (1998), Roediger attempts to expose the errors in the conceptual mapping of the intellectual genealogy of the study of whiteness. From enslaved Africans' nuanced understandings of the psychology of their enslavers, through the critiques of whiteness witnessed in the works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett (2012), W.E.B. Du Bois (1920), Langston Hughes (1990), Zora Neale Hurston (1935), James Baldwin (1985), Toni Morrison (1992) bell hooks (1992) and Cheryl Harris (1993), Black people have a long history and tradition of studying whites and whiteness. While seldom recognized as a contributor within this context, Welsing continues this branch of the Black intellectual tradition and is a precursor to formalized critical white studies.

One of the cornerstones of critical white studies is the idea that white people can choose to maintain and perpetuate white supremacy or they can attempt to become active in dismantling and deconstructing systems of white supremacy (Delgado & Stefanic, 1997). According to critical white studies theorists, white people can make a conscious decision to reject and not accept whiteness and the social, political and psychological privileges that accompany it. Ignatiev & Garvey (1996) refer to white people who engage in this process as "race traitors" in that they are traitors to the belief held by many white people that there is something inherently good about whiteness, and that based solely on perceiving themselves as white, are entitled to rights and privileges denied to other cultural groups. Thus, they seek to abolish rather than reconstruct whiteness since the concept of whiteness cannot be separated from white supremacy thought and behavior. Welsing thought this act of race treason would be an anomaly since white people have so much invested in the psychological wages of whiteness (Du Bois, 1935; Lipsitz, 2006). Yet it is important to note that she came to this understanding prior to the current use in popular culture of the buzz-word white privilege and the vernacular associated with "identifying" as a member of a particular group. For example, following Fuller's roadmap, Welsing consistently and purposely utilizes the phrasing "people who classify themselves as white". While not explicit, implicit in this phrasing is the idea that people who classify themselves as white choose to identify and align themselves with and continue to accept the guidelines and standards defined and established by white supremacy.

Similar to Morrison (1992) who discussed the parasitic nature of white supremacy, Welsing recognized the reciprocal relationship between white supremacy and Black inferiority. Whiteness exists as superior only because the status of inferiority is imposed on people of color. For Welsing, without the faulty assumption of inferiority being projected on people of color and imposed through actual systems of white supremacy in all major areas of life, whiteness would cease to exist.

Another critical component related to studies of whiteness that is often overlooked is Welsing's paradigmatic shift in the unit of analysis. Welsing changed the shape of scholarly discourse when she made white supremacy the primary subject of discussion. This move was not a mere rhetorical device but was characteristic of Welsing's approach and indicative of the type of methodology she would employ throughout her career as a public intellectual. Significant for Black intellectuals concerned with studying whiteness, Welsing demonstrated how to transition from victimization studies and/or the dehumanizing impact of racism on oppressed Black people, to the study of the psyche of white people who are doing the oppressing. By placing whiteness under the microscope to be critically interrogated as the subject by a Black scholar, Welsing reversed the one dimensional flow and direction of scholarly inquiry where white academics were considered experts on themselves as well as everybody else on the planet.

Conclusion

Since the early 1990s, the Black public intellectual has achieved the status of sanctioned spokesperson for the masses of African Americans. This spokesperson, highly educated and usually male, takes on the role of interpreting and expressing the ideas, values and social activities associated with contemporary African American experiences. Black public intellectuals such as Cornell West, Henry Louis Gates, Micheal Eric Dyson, bell hooks, Kevin Powell, Melisa Harris-Perry, Marc Lamont Hill and Ta-Nehsi Coates have proliferated the American intellectual landscape and used their positions to influence how both white and Black people view American race relations. Several critical questions surface from observing these phenomena. How does an intellectual become a "sanctioned" spokesperson and who does the sanctioning? Are there certain ideological positions that make an intellectual qualified to receive this status? If so, how does it limit the possibilities and potential of obtaining a platform to articulate ideas if an intellectuals' theoretical and conceptual approach to studying race fall outside the sanctioned discourse? Welsing's public persona lacked the media exposure afforded to many contemporary public intellectuals. Perhaps, this is because her ideas could not be contained inside the accepted paradigm of how Black intellectuals are expected to operate.

Welsing understood that the role of the intellectual is not to produce scholarship for scholarship's sake but to apply that scholarship to the pertinent issues impacting their people at that particular moment in history. The intellectual is in a unique situation in that they "are in a position to expose the lies of government, to analyze their causes and motives and hidden intentions (Chomsky & Armove, 2008, p.2).

In decoding the logic of various strands of racism which are often hidden in plain sight, Welsing exposes the underlying motives and intentions of global white supremacy. She differs from many contemporary popular intellectuals who tend to exert energy and time explaining Black thought and behavior to white people.

Welsing's conscious and concerted scholarly efforts and intellectual production emphasized and targeted Black people as the primary audience. By targeting Black people as her primary audience, Welsing was able to be unapologetically Black in her analysis. When discussing the relationship between Black intellectuals and intellectual autonomy, Frazier (1973) noted "Negro intellectuals have failed to achieve any intellectual freedom...it appears that the Negro intellectual is unconscious of the extent to which his thinking is restricted to sterile repetition of the safe and conventional ideas current in American society" (p. 58). Although Black public intellectuals may acquire popularity, some still remain conceptually incarcerated and bound by the intellectual restraints imposed by Western scholarship. Unlike the scholar seeking tenure, academic acceptance and mainstream notoriety, Welsing was free from fear or concern about the white gaze of academia and the approval or backlash from white influenced intellectual gatekeepers. Thus Welsing escaped falling victim to the crisis of the Black intellectual (Cruse, 1984).

Welsing asked in public what most Black intellectuals only thought to themselves in private. Why is white supremacy the only functional racism and what function does it serve? How do we recognize racism in instances when it is not overt? What motivates white people's racism? And perhaps the most brutally honest question lingering in the minds of Black people that asks why are white people so crazy? In posing these critical questions about whiteness and white people, Welsing positioned white people on her couch to be diagnosed on her own terms. With the exception of Bobby Wright's *Psychopathic Racial Personality and Other Essays* (1984), Welsing's approach was novel and extremely rare even among Black psychiatrists and psychologists. Prior to Welsing, many Black psychologists and psychiatrists from the traditional school were: (1) defensive and/or reactive; (2) concerned with changing white attitudes; and (3) critical without offering alternative conceptualizations for correcting problems (Karanga, 1992). For example, in *Black Rage* (1969), Grier and Cobbs provide the following explanations for why Black people are angry: (1) Blacks understandable and necessary cultural paranoia; (2) Blacks cultural depression and cultural masochism reflecting a general "sadness and intimacy with misery", and (3) Blacks cultural anti-socialism, i.e. disrespect for American laws which are designed to protect whites not Blacks (Karenga, 1992).

The sentiments expressed by scholars in the traditional school of Black psychology hold some heuristic value in explaining aspects of the psychology of Black people living under conditions of white supremacy. They are reminiscent of James Baldwin's (1961) reflective comment that to be Black in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a constant state of rage.

However, the subject of discussion (cultural depression), the fundamental question (why are Black people mad?) and the emotional/psychological tone (paranoid and pessimistic) appear to be intentionally geared towards rationalizing and explaining Black behavior to white society. When compared and contrasted with the approach used by the traditional school, Welsing provides a radically different alternative. The subject matter, manner of inquiry and intended audience for Welsing's work is the antithesis of the traditional school's need to appeal to the conscience of white people through demonstrating the devastating impact of racism on the victims of oppression. Instead, Welsing seeks to locate the root, form and function of Black people's oppression by focusing on the deep-seated racial pathology of whites. Welsing chose the road less traveled and along the path sparked the minds of Black people and equipped them with a new perspective on how to understand the ways of white folk.

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