

cies or practices that punish those who dare raise their voices in objection to their second-class status. (*Race Talk* 155)

White supremacy, then, is institutional racism. It's structural, seems natural, thus is normalized such that many of us cannot see it as such in our classrooms, in our disciplines, in our ways of reading and valuing student texts. We cannot see, for instance, how holding one standard in our grading practices reinforces White supremacy since all such standards have historically come from one racial formation on the globe. We cannot see clearly how our own grading practices are linked to historically White supremacist ideology and practices, laws and customs, all of which have been maintained and policed primarily by White racial formations and those who embody a White racial *habitus* in our society, schools, and disciplines of study.

Sue quotes James M. Jones' important work on the subject, his 1997 edition of *Prejudice and Racism*. In defining institutional racism, which I'm offering as one way to define White supremacy, Sue quotes Jones, saying that institutional racism—and so White supremacy—are “those established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities in American society,” and these customs, laws, and practices are what Sue identifies as our “standard operating procedures” or SOPs (Sue, *Race Talk* 90). For instance, the privileges that a White racial *habitus* confer in classrooms where language is graded by a single standard gives some unearned privileges, yet those standards are a part of our SOPs in school. How are we to determine a student's progress? How else are students going to be motivated to do work? Isn't it only fair to have one standard and apply it to all students equally? Jones continues: “If racist consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs, or practices, the institution is racist whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions” (Jones 438; qtd. in Sue, *Race Talk* 90). So if our SOPs and the standards for language use within them privilege a White racial *habitus*, then no matter who controls that system, it still produces unfair results, i.e., White supremacist results. The system and its standards are White supremacist by design and results.

So how would I define White supremacy in one sentence? White Supremacy is a product or effect of systems and structures, our SOPs (standard operating procedures), despite anyone's intentions, that produce political, cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance for White people. This means that White language supremacy can be defined as a product or effect of assessment systems and structures, our SOPs in classrooms and other places where language is judged, despite anyone's intentions, that produce political, cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance for White people. The use of labor-based grading contracts, I

believe, changes the rules of the grading game in such a way that White language supremacy can not only be seen for what it is, but effectively countered. This makes for a fairer, more equitable, and inclusive language classroom.

## EDUCATION AS INNER DIKES

So in our current society and educational systems, regardless of who you are, where you came from, or what your intentions or motives are as a teacher, if you use a single standard to grade students' language performances, you are directly contributing to the racist status quo in schools and society. Language only moves in groups of people and people are racialized in a variety of ways in society and history. This is how language exists and how race is a part of our politics of language. Language exists because racialized people communicate among each other, and their languages are always in historical processes that associate those languages with particular social and racial formations in society. While linguists and other scholars agree that there is no single way to communicate effectively, judgments of effectiveness and correctness of language are contingent and contextual. What this really says in a U.S. educational context is that effectiveness and correctness of language is racialized. It has come from White racialized groups in our histories (Ignatiev; Jacobson; Roediger). White people and Whiteness as a set of raciolinguistic dispositions and habits, or White *habitus*, are the context and contingency for effectiveness, or "goodness," or appropriateness, or excellence.

This means all standards for good writing are deeply informed by a White racial *habitus*, which makes grading by such standards White supremacist. I am not saying that you (the teacher) are a bad person, but grading by a standard does make your grading methods and your grading ecology in your classroom racist, and White supremacist. I've argued elsewhere how this is the case (Inoue, *Antiracist*), so I won't repeat those arguments here. Instead, I point to the legal literature on the history of Whiteness as property in the US to further argue the point that grading by a single standard is White supremacist.

Cheryl L. Harris' comprehensive legal account of the ways that laws and the courts in the US defined and maintained Whiteness as property extends to education and literacy, particularly as seen in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions (1954 and 1955), which were an extension of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (1896) (Harris 1746-57). These judicial decisions hinge on questions of Whiteness as property. Harris explains in her conclusion about the *Brown* decisions:

Whiteness as property continues to perpetuate racial subordination through the courts' definitions of group identity

and through the courts' discourse and doctrine on affirmative action. The exclusion of subordinated "others" was and remains a central part of the property interest in Whiteness and, indeed, is part of the protection that the court extends to Whites' settled expectations of continued privilege. (1758)

What Harris shows in her discussion over and over in various legal ways and through court decisions in various realms of U.S. society is the way Whiteness has functioned and been used as property for the benefit of those deemed to be racially White. Whiteness is the property that even a poor, uneducated, or jobless White man can have that has value. Furthermore, Harris argues that "Whiteness and property share a common premise—a conceptual nucleus—of a right to exclude" (1704). Whiteness as property is, therefore, about exclusion. This point is critical in educational settings because most of us proclaim or promote inclusion. Our schools, programs, and even pedagogies proclaim to include raciolinguistically diverse students, but our grading practices, standards, and assumptions function to exclude. And the direction this exclusion takes is a racialized one.

In *Literacy and Racial Justice: The Politics of Learning After Brown v. Board of Education*, Catherine Prendergast argues convincingly that historically in the US the courts have worked from a fundamental premise that "literacy is first and foremost White property," and the logic goes "that no attempt should therefore be made to redistribute the best goods" (167). She looks closely at the logics and consequences of *Brown v. Board*, *Washington v. Davis* (1976), and *The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), all of which demonstrate what Prendergast calls "the economy of literacy as a White property," or a dynamic rooted in figurative or literal "White flight" in places where people of color begin to accumulate. She explains the dynamic: "literacy standards are perceived to be falling or in peril of falling" when too many people of color, often African-American, are included or presence in the place in question, be it a school, police department, community, etc. (41). Where do we find the most calls around "literacy crises"? Schools and communities that are made up of increasing numbers of people of color. What do schools and classrooms have at their disposal to remedy such perceptions of falling literacy standards among their students? Grading mechanisms and standards. Remember the primary goals of grading by a standard are control, enforced accountability, and measurement. Thus, grading is a great way to protect the White property of literacy in schools, while never mentioning race. It's a great way to maintain the White supremacist status quo without ever being White supremacist, yet such standards are White language supremacy.

So if literacy has been, and continues to be, a White property in the US, and if the nature of White property is the right to exclude, and if grading by a standard is always about control, accountability, and measurement, then grading by a single standard is how most, if not all, schools and writing classrooms exercise the historical right to exclude in order to protect literacy as White property, all the while exclaiming and even believing that they are helping their students of color. And how well has that helping really worked out?

Put more directly, in all schools, grades are the means of discrimination, the methods of exclusion, not inclusion, no matter what else we may think they do for our students. Therefore, this book argues to change the rules of the grading game in writing and literacy classrooms, so that your grading mechanisms stop trying to be fair to everyone (i.e., treat everyone as if they are White, as if they have the same proximity to a White racial *habitus*), and start trying *NOT to be unfair*, not to be White supremacist. This latter purpose for grading ecologies in classrooms stems from an assumption that the literacy practices promoted in schools and colleges have and still are conceived of as White property, and that the standards and grading practices we all inherit, or that are forced upon us by principals, disciplines, departments, and programs, are White supremacist and seek to exclude, not include, by their nature and function, by default, regardless of how we justify them or who uses them. Trying not to be unfair is the only way one can ensure equitable and inclusive practices in inherently unfair systems that are by their nature inequitable and exclusive.

I'm reminded of the noted eugenicist and advocate for racial segregation, Lothrop Stoddard and his 1920 book, *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World Supremacy*. Stoddard was a White supremacist. In the book, he argues that increasing populations of peoples of color around the world threaten the White geographical, economic, and political center. White settlements are being taken over, he argues, by various people of color, and this is a bad thing. Strategically, Stoddard notes, there are inner and outer dikes. The outer dikes of civilization are those places in the world that contain mostly people of color, but the inner are those places on the globe that are White settlements in which people of color are increasing, and those areas must be protected. Just like the logic behind redlining to protect real estate property from Black Americans, the White settlements—the White property—that Stoddard speaks of are understood as crucial dikes that need protecting because they are the last defense of the White centers. Education, schools, and literacy in the US are inner dikes.

Stoddard's introduction to this discussion is instructive in how it so easily maps to arguments about holding or raising standards and the logic within the calls about literacy crises in the US today, most of which are attached to grades:

The inner dikes (the areas of White settlement), however, are a very different matter. Peopled as they are wholly or largely by Whites, they have become parts of the race-heritage, which should be defended to the last extremity no matter if the costs involved are greater than their mere economic value would warrant. They are the true bulwarks of the race, the patrimony of future generations who have a right to demand of us that they shall be born White in a White man's land. Ill will it fare if ever our race should close its ears to this most elemental call of the blood. (226)

There is no more fitting analogy to grading by a standard than Stoddard's. Schools, colleges, and universities today are literally and figuratively White settlements (many built on land stolen from indigenous peoples), which have become tacitly, as Stoddard makes clear, a White entitlement, an inner dike to protect. While our terms may be less overtly racialized today, we still talk and think of schools and universities as "true bulwarks" for standards, or as the centers of literacy promotion, which is the White property of those settlements. In Stoddard's terms, this makes educational institutions the "race-heritage" of each generation, or the "patrimony" to be passed on to the next generation—and that generation is racially White by this logic. This makes grading by a standard the method for protecting and cleaning out the inner dike, Whitening it. In short, schools are the inner dikes of literacy as White property. Grading is the gun and bayonet, which are used against all students to cleanse them, to Whiten them or drive them out. Again, the rules for grading must change if we wish to stop trying to Whiten the dike.

When we change the rules for grading dramatically, for instance, as when one stops using a White standard to grade student performances, we realize that we must choose something else to use to determine final course grades. This makes us mindful of our assumptions about grading, mindful about what we assume a paper or written product demonstrates to us about a student, mindful of what we think we can see and what textual markers we use that makes present so-called quality in a draft. It makes us mindful that we use a standard of our own and not someone else's, or something else, like labor or effort or engagement, which arguably are much closer to the act of learning than a draft or portfolio because these dimensions (i.e., labor and effort) embody the experience of learning itself. When we are mindful that we grade in particular ways, we have a better chance to pay attention to details about our own practices and how they happen. We have a better chance not to simply Whiten the dike. Using labor-based grading contracts, I believe, requires, even encourages, this kind

of mindful attention because the rules of the grading game are so dramatically different from conventional, standards-based rules. This book attempts to offer a way to change the rules of the grading game in classrooms.

## ASSESSMENT ECOLOGIES AND ME

In this book, I assume some concepts that come from my theorizing of classroom writing assessment as ecology (Inoue, *Antiracist*), so allow me to summarize the theory briefly here. Any classroom writing assessment ecology can be understood to be made up of at least seven elements: power, purposes, processes, parts, people, products, and places (176). Noticing and understanding these elements can help teachers create assessment ecologies that resist White language supremacy and racism that are structurally embedded in the academy and our society. Labor-based grading contracts attempt to form an inclusive, more diverse ecological place, one that can be antiracist and anti-White supremacist by its nature. The ecology does not use a single standard of so-called quality to grade students, and focuses time, labor, and attention on other elements in the ecology, realizing that these other elements construct more of the ecology than a standard, and even provides students with a chance to critique (through comparison) conventional grading practices and their own standards.

A grading contract, like any grading system, frames and contextualizes all the activities and people that form the classroom ecology. While any ecological element can be considered and manipulated separately, all seven ecological elements are interconnected and consubstantial to each other (93), often morphing into one another at different moments in the historical unfolding of the ecology. An activity (process) becomes a rubric (part) becomes a figurative place of agreement and contention (place), etc. As complex ecological theory explains (Dobrin 144), ecologies are holistic in nature, and any given element in the system is more than what it is. The ecology itself is more than the sum of its parts (86). Understanding the writing assessment ecology of a classroom in this holistic way can help us form antiracist, anti-White supremacist, and other social justice projects through our most fundamental aspect of any course, its assessment ecology. Understanding how my classroom's assessment system is an ecology has allowed me to take advantage of what a labor-based contract offers.

I should note an initial paradox that is not lost on me, and it has significant bearing on my labor-based grading contract ecologies. I realize the oxymoronic, haunting Whiteness, as Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe would say, in my own discourse in this book. This is part of the problematic of writing assessment that led me to grading contracts, which I discuss in Chapters 1 and 2. My own brand of code-meshed English, like everyone's, is a product of my history in