Peabody Journal of Education

ISSN: 0161-956X (Print) 1532-7930 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hpje20

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To cite this article: Anthony L. Brown (2018) From Subhuman to Human Kind: Implicit Bias, Racial Memory, and Black Males in Schools and Society, Peabody Journal of Education, 93:1, 52-65, DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2017.1403176

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2017.1403176

Accepted author version posted online: 13 Nov 2017.
Published online: 13 Feb 2018.

PEABODY JOURNAL OF EDUCATION
2018, VOL. 93, NO. 1, 52–65
https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2017.1403176

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

From Subhuman to Human Kind: Implicit Bias, Racial Memory, and Black Males in Schools and Society

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that implicit racial bias regarding black males is a manifestation of a long trajectory of Western racial memory and anti-blackness where black males have been considered subhuman or as human kinds. The author draws from theological, scientific, and social science literature to illustrate how racial discourses have historically constructed black males as subhuman or as *human kinds* (Hacking, 1995). The central argument of this paper is that current practices in schools and society that engage in racial bias are tied to durable racial discourses of power that have consistently rendered black males as feared and dangerous.

Thelma Golden (1994), curator of the 1994 Whitney Museum exhibition *Black Male*, argued that "one of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century is the African American male— invented because black masculinity represents an amalgam of fears and projections in the American psyche which rarely conveys or contains the trope of truth" (p. 19). Central to this notion of an invention is the constructed idea of race, which has helped to create and sustain categories of personhood. Beginning in the early 1990s, as social theorists were trying to understand the constructed nature of race, a new theorization emerged around the need to analyze race and racism. Although numerous theories about race have emerged, it is critical race theory (CRT) that has the most significant impact on the field of education, particularly pertaining to issues of racial inequality.

In 1995, with the publication of the essay "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate set in place a new theoretical discourse for understanding issues of power and race in education. The central task of this essay was to outline the key precepts of CRT and to show how its use in the field of education would go beyond existing theories about power and inequities in schools and society. The most vital theoretical turn in this essay was the idea that racism is permanent—a striking analysis of racial inequality. Much of the discourse in education, and in social theory as a whole, historically treated issues of race and racism as an indication that America was simply not living up to its highest ideals of democracy. From this standpoint, racial inequality was a mere breach of an otherwise perfect social contract that left certain racialized communities excluded from the body politic. Legal scholar Derrick Bell (1980), however, found that *Brown v. Board of Education* and all other racial remediation efforts during the 18th and 19th centuries were put in place only to advance the interests of white elites—not to redress the inequities faced by African Americans. He further argued that such cases are an indication that racism is a permanent and interminable aspect of American society.

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Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) similarly argued that racism is endemic and deeply engrained in American life and education. They explained, "if racism were merely isolated, unrelated, individual acts, we would expect to see a few examples of educational excellence and equity together in the nation's public schools" (p. 55). In essence, they argued that education is a vital mechanism in anchoring and sustaining the process of racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2014). This is an important turn in educational theory, in that much of the discourse on race in education has focused on racial exclusion as an unnatural consequence of an unfulfilled American democratic society. In contrast, CRT scholars, including Bell (1980) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), maintain that racism and racial exclusion are engrained in the very foundation of American democracy. So, whether racism reflects explicit bigotry or is challenged to make for a more equitable society, white interests will prevail.

In keeping with the above assertions, scholars have drawn from these meta-propositions for over a decade to illustrate the complex macro and micro aspects of racism in schools (Chapman, 2007; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Donnor, 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). However, one area of education has not received much attention—the notion that the durability of race and racism has taken form through a long, historically racialized discourse. Racial discourse is written words and ideas used to give ontological meaning to racialized groups that, in turn, justifies their material realities. In other words, a key aspect of racism is the act of classifying people into racial categories. For example, one cannot understand the history of lynching in the United States without exploring the discourses and imagery that define black males as savage and libidinous as a beast. For example, from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, theologians used biblical and scientific reference to suggest that God ordained African Americans the ethnological status as "nonhuman" or as "beast" (Payne, 1867; Carroll, 1900). Discourse of this kind worked in concert with ideas about black men as being sexually libidinous and an endangerment to white society (Fredrickson, 1987). In this essay, I argue that ideas are advanced through a system of reason that is seen as legitimate—what Michel Foucault (1980) calls regimes of truth. Once truth is ascribed to a racial subject, the ontological meaning becomes normalized. I argue that black males' subjectivities in school are not just informed by teachers' explicit and implicit racial bias, but are held in place by a durable historical discourse on black male deviance that can be traced to the beginnings of Western modernity.

There is a growing view that black males' educational experiences in school reflect an implicit bias that undergirds the racial realities they face in classrooms around the nation (Dumas, 2016; Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2009). For example, scholarship about the overrepresentation of black males in special education and the literature on expulsion and suspension notes that an implicit racial bias informs the actions of teachers and administrators (Collins, 2011; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015; Mills, 2003; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Psychologists (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008) who study issues of implicit bias against black males argue that implicit bias is informed by repetitious associations about racial groups over time—what Goff et al. (2008) call cultural memory. In this paper, I advance one central argument: the social realities black males currently face in schools are endemic to long-standing racial discourses. This is consistent with CRT, which notes that black males' experience is informed by a durable racial contract (Mills, 1997) in which the continuity between race-making that took form from the 1500s to 1900s is directly tied to the implicit racial bias black males today face in schools.

In this paper, I briefly discuss my approach to historical inquiry. Next, I lay out the key theories that guided my historical analysis, including how consistent they are with the theoretical turn offered by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). I then offer a brief overview of the literature on implicit bias vis-à-vis black males in society and school. I draw from this literature because of the attention it gives to black males, and because the leading scholars in this area of research argue that history plays a key role in understanding how ideas or phenomena become normalized or implicit over time. Then, I examine three historical contexts where race-making has taken form around black males—theological discourse, scientific discourse, and social science discourse. I conclude by discussing why old and durable discourses of deviance and difference about black males are important to understanding the racial bias black males currently experience in schools and in society.

A word on methodology: Historicizing knowledge

The conception of history applied to this study is based on the belief that trajectories of the past inform how "ideas of the present are constructed" (p. 18)—what Thomas Popkewitz (1997) calls historicizing of knowledge. This is sometimes referred to as cultural history or a history of the present (Popkewitz, 2001). This conception of history recognizes that ideas or social phenomena help to produce a common sense of how the present is defined and conceptualized. In other words, a collective memory of ongoing ideas and knowledge frames how present practices are deployed. This is not to say that the past is a linear progression to the present, but in employing a history of the present I also provide a glimpse back at how ideas about black males have been constructed in a Western context over time.

Black males' experiences in the present are implicitly tied to problematic narratives of deviance and difference, and the past illustrates two important ideas about this group. The first is how implicit bias must be understood relative to a long history of making and remaking black male subjectivities—a making that produced a durable narrative about black males and enclosed them ontologically within the proverbial "societal problem," albeit differently conceptualized in different periods and disciplines. The second important point is that the discursive meaning of black maleness is informed by varied systems of thought or disciplinary knowledge. In this essay, I show how specific theological, scientific, and social science discourses about black males were both endemic to different time periods and able to sustain the black male trope of the archetypical menace and social problem.[1]

Theoretical considerations

The CRT construct regarding the permanence of racism is employed in this paper. Derrick Bell (1980) argues that all key policies providing racial remediation for African Americans, including emancipation in the North, Reconstruction policies, and civil rights legislation, benefited white interests more than they helped to redress the durable legacies of racism and white supremacy. The durability of racism lies in its ability to change over time. In this sense, I argue that one indication of racism's permanence is how the racist discursive formation (Ferguson, 2001) of black maleness has changed over time, while remaining tied to the binary of whiteness and blackness. I further argue that for an idea or phenomenon to become permanent, something must intervene to sustain its meaning over time. The notion of *permanence* is key to my analysis because it suggests that black males are enveloped by long-standing meanings of racial discourse that are sustained over time and seek to permanently establish black males as the archetypal anti-citizen. In this regard, Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of a stereotypical racist discourse is useful because it draws attention to the construction of the racial Other as a process informed by historically situated discursive practices.

The Other in this context enters an ideological field of meanings where the racial subject is constituted as a fixed social phenomenon—what Michel Foucault (1972) refers to as a discursive formation. However, what I find most useful to this project is Bhabha's notion that stereotypical racist discourse can manifest only through the process of knowing. Once the racial subject is sealed ontologically, any form of social and political control is possible. As he describes:

> Racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of power. Some of its practices recognize the difference of race, culture and history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledges, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalize a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 83)

Bhabha maintains that all stereotypical racist discourses are situated within a historical moment that produces a new meaning of difference. I further maintain that particular systems of thought have constituted the black male within what Bhabha calls negative difference or a lack of humanness. Historically,

[1] Where the "Negro" is referred to in a generic sense, the word is often a code for "black male." For example, late-19th-century discourse in the sciences and popular culture talked about the Negro population collectively, but then referred to their temperament and proclivity toward raping white women. Therefore, discourse about black people as sex-crazed brutes in fact referred to black men.

the question of humanness has been engaged as a scientific question, a theological question, and a social science question. The process of lumping black males into a single category of meaning or stereotypical racist discourse was often mediated by different idea systems employed to give meaning to black males.

Black males' social status is bound to the notions of racial Othering, where different historically situated social practices (e.g., lynching and segregation) were directly tied to black males' humanity. Therefore, examining past racial discourses is vital to understanding the experiences of black males in the present, specifically because they serve as powerful illustrations of the permanence of racism. Derrick Bell (1993) soberly explains that constant to black peoples' experience in the United States is a kind racial marking as a "dark and foreign presence, [and] always the designated 'other'" (p. 578). In the following sections, I describe the different ideas about black males that emerged in various time periods, helping to hold in place meanings about black male deviance and difference, which became naturalized over time and recapitulated in the context of present classrooms.

On implicit knowledge and black males in schools and society

Connected to the notion of the permanence of racism is the apparatus of knowledge that helps to hold meanings of racial Otherness in place over time. For example, according to Sylvia Wynter (2006) the deployment of ideas within post-Medieval modernity provided descriptive meanings of man and citizenship, which established the definition of who is a citizen (and who is not one). Wynter calls this *homo politicus*—the rational, logical individual able to self-govern. As several scholars have noted, this notion of man and citizen was embedded in meanings of whiteness and blackness (Fanon, 1967; Yancy, 2008). The tacit meaning of citizen and man was white and male, which produced a seemingly natural non-citizen. Within this framework, the black male was made into the proverbial non-citizen who was unable to self-govern. In this sense, black men became the "non-man" in a field of analysis that privileged white males as the personification of citizenship. Philosopher Tommy Curry (2017) refers to the condition of black males as the *Man-Not*, which he defines as "the negation of the humanity and personhood of the Black male" (p. 34).

These theoretical constructs are vitally important to understanding the implicit bias black boys currently experience in elementary classrooms, determining who they are and what they can do in school. For example, the policy report, *We Dream a World* (2010), authored by the Center for Law and Social Policy, reported that black boys are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than white peers. They also found that black boys are 2.5 times less likely to be placed in gifted and talented classes, even when their academic ability shows they can succeed. The educational scholarship has cited racial biases to be significant in shaping black males' schooling experiences. However, as scholars (Goff et al., 2008) note, bias becomes implicit when meanings and constructions are repeated over time, enabling our association to that phenomenon to become fixed. Therefore, if the black male remains enclosed in a racial trope as a libidinous, impulsive menace, it is not surprising that manifestations of these old tropes appear in the present contexts of school and society.

The notion of implicit bias has received quite a bit of attention in recent public discourse. The death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and the subsequent deaths of black men and boys across the United States has catalyzed a public discussion about why police officers are killing so many unarmed black citizens. The question scholars, journalists, and activists are pursuing is whether some internal impulse is causing law enforcement officers to react to black males with deadly violence. However, this is not a concern within law enforcement alone; many education scholars (Collins, 2011; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Howard, 2013 Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015; Mills, 2003) have addressed bias in the ways teachers make decisions about black males in school settings, which has been a concern for quite some time.

In 1904, W. E. B. Du Bois posed the question of what it felt like to be viewed as a social problem, referring to the way society read and constructed the "Negro" (Du Bois, 1904/1994). Du Bois understood that this construction was made and remade by a binary of blackness and whiteness and deployed by multiple mechanisms until "Negro" was ontologically sealed within the fixed category of "problem." In Du Bois's (1920/1999) words:

> The theory of human culture and its aim has worked itself through [the] warp and woof of our daily thought with a thoroughness that few realize. Everything great, good, efficient, fair and honorable is "white." Everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating, and dishonorable is "yellow," brown and black. The changes on this theme are continually rung in picture and story, in newspaper heading and moving picture, in sermon and school book, until, of course, the king can do no wrong—a white man is always right, and the black has no rights which a white man is bound to respect. … All through the world this gospel is preaching; it has its literature, it has its priests, it has its secret propaganda, and above all—it pays. (p. 25)

Fanon's (1967) work on "blackness" also highlights how the notion of implicit bias has its roots in black social theory, and he was one of the first to establish a framework for the subtle ways blackness is read. Fanon explains that an overarching ontology affixes meanings to the black body, which makes and remakes them into the proverbial racial Other. It is through this process of locating the black body within the colonial racial discourse that the "Negro" can become knowable. Fanon makes the case that an ontology of black people takes form "out of implicit knowledge" (p. 111) and through the external gaze of the white world, eventually becoming internalized in the psyche of black people. In recent years, social scientists concerned with racial bias have been able to empirically support what scholars and activists have been discussing for most of the 20th century—that racial bias is anchored by subtle and implicit meanings of blackness.

Over the last ten years, a powerful strand of research in social psychology has examined the ways implicit bias informs the experiences of black males. Before this, however, a substantial body of literature addressed the pervasive tendency to associate black Americans with violence and criminal behavior. This body of work essentially argued that "the mere presence of [a] person can lead one to think about the concepts with which that person's social group has been associated" (Eberhardt et al., 2004, p. 876). Jennifer Eberhardt and her colleagues (Eberhardt et al., 2004) explain how this example can be used in the context of black males:

> The mere presence of a Black male, for instance, can trigger thoughts that he is violent and criminal. Simply thinking about a Black person renders these concepts more accessible and can lead people to misremember the Black as the one holding the razor. Merely thinking about Blacks can lead people to evaluate ambiguous behavior as aggressive, to miscategorize harmless objects as weapons, or to shoot quickly, and at times inappropriately. (p. 876)

In this case, the symbol of black maleness helps trigger an association with objects and phenomena associated with crime and violence, such as guns and aggression.

Legal scholars (Alexander, 2012; Armour, 1997; Brown, 1998; Gilbert & Ray, 2015) argue that this kind of racial schema has a devastating impact on blacks accused of crimes. The legal literature on racial profiling, as well as numerous scholars, have noted that black men are pulled over, searched, and sometimes arrested because of preconceived ideas about their criminality and presumptions that they are drug dealers or car thieves. Weatherspoon (2004) explains that stereotypical racial profiling of black males has a high correlation with incarceration rates. In addition, he found that traffic stops for African American males "may enhance their sentence for other crimes if the traffic violation is considered in determining their penalty" (p. 449). In 2011, 55% of the 700,000 traffic stops in New York City were of African Americans, of which only 2% resulted in the collection of contraband. So, in this case, "9 out 10 Black males stopped by the police were innocent and engaged in no wrongdoing" (Gilbert & Ray, p. 133). Legal scholar Katheryn Russell-Brown (1998) has referred to the stereotype that black men are violent and dangerous as the "criminal blackman." She maintains that this stereotype is attributed to "racial hoaxes" that portray black men as the "symbolic pillager of all that is good" (p. 116). The negative images of black men as criminals are striking in their ability to capture the significance of racial profiling.

Much of this legal research focuses on the ways black males have helped to trigger historically laden concepts, but scholars in recent years have tried to make sense of how people can access historical racial bias without having explicit knowledge of the association between certain individuals and concepts. Eberhardt et al. (2004), for example, maintain that implicit racial associations between social groups and concepts of threat are bidirectional. In other words, while black males can trigger thoughts of crime, thinking of crime can also activate thoughts about black males. In a series of experimental studies, Eberhardt and her colleagues utilized a diversity of face and object imagery detection exercises to solicit the kind of associations participants made between criminal-relevant objects and black male

faces. Eberhardt et al.'s results across five studies found that crime-related objects helped to solicit associations to threat-relevant objects such as guns and crime that attached directly to black male faces. For example, Eberhardt et al. (2004) found in one study that "Black and White primes tune the detection of crime-relevant objects, yet in the opposite direction" (p. 881). In other words, participants associated crime-related objects such as guns with black male faces whereas white male faces "inhibited the detection of crime-relevant objects" (Eberhardt et al., 2004, p. 881). In another study, participants were asked to identify the location of black male and white males faces that quickly flashed on a screen. In this study, they found that participants who were first subliminally primed with crime-relevant objects such as guns and knives were faster to detect the location of black male faces that flashed on the screen than participants who had not been subliminally primed. In each of the studies, their hypotheses were confirmed about black male faces soliciting stimulus related to crime. As Eberhart et al. state, "Not only are Blacks thought of as crime. Crime is thought of as Blacks" (p. 883). Some scholars (Todd, Simpson, Thiem, & Neel, 2016; Todd, Thiem, & Neel, 2016) have drawn from this research paradigm in their examination of the extent to which these experiences affect the lives of young black boys.

Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, and DiTomasso (2014) studied whether black boys' childhood innocence is protected to the same extent as their white peers. The most striking finding from one of Goff et al.'s studies is "that Black boys can be misperceived as older than they actually are and prematurely perceived as responsible for their actions during a developmental period where their peers receive the beneficial assumption of childlike innocence" (2014, p. 540). Another group of studies (Todd, Simpson, et al., 2016; Todd, Thiem, et al., 2016) on black boys examined whether the race-based associations of threat found in the research on black men were true for youth as well. These studies also found that associations with a threat of aggression were made automatically with five-year-old black boys' faces. Similar to the extant literature on racial bias with black men, this work found that when images were shown of young black boys, similar negative associations to threat and aggression were made (Todd et al., 2016). In other words, age and childhood innocence had no effect on associations of a threat. This research supports conceptual and empirical claims by Dumas and Nelson (2016), Ferguson (2001), and Goff et al. (2014) that black boys go through a process of adultification. The implications of these claims are that black boys' behavior in school becomes hyper-visible to teachers and educators.

A recent study at Yale University (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016), illustrates the implications of racial bias making black boys hyper-visible, even in early childhood settings. In the Yale study, the participating early childhood educators were called to take on two tasks. The participants were told that they would observe some challenging behaviors in a classroom—although, in fact, there were none. Then, they watched a video of preschoolers in a mixed-gender and mixed-race classroom. Participants were tasked to push a key to identify every time they saw a "challenging behavior." A key methodological innovation of this study was the use of an eye-tracking device that enabled the researchers to measure the amount of time participants gazed at a student. The striking findings revealed that when expecting to see challenging behavior, participants gazed longer at black boys. Consistent with the studies on black men, as seen in this study, black boys tend to be implicitly associated with the idea of "challenging behavior."

The implication of this work is that bias is so deeply entrenched in racial memory that, even without having explicit knowledge about this racist association, participants still made the connections to long-standing stereotypes about black men. For example, Goff et al. (2008) argue that because the ape-black connection is "maintained in metaphors, visual tropes, and through the convergence of related stereotypes" (p. 294), such associations can still surface without any explicit awareness. Eberhardt et al. (2004) support this idea of racial memory, arguing that bidirectional racial associations are anchored in place by long-standing ideas about black males. This scholarship alludes to the idea that explicit and implicit racial knowledge are held in place by ongoing and durable ideas about racial groups that enable racial associations to be made. In this sense, the black male is deviance, and deviance is the black male—the two become ontologically bound to old racial knowledge. In thinking about the permanence of racism, these findings show that black males are enclosed by old racial ideas of deviance, difference,

and fear that help sustain the meaning of black and male over time. In the section that follows, I show how different mechanisms of racial power intervened on the subjectivities of black males, which helped to justify ideologies of anti-blackness over time.

Western modernity's racial other: The black male

Some of the earliest and most enduring attempts to justify black males' status in society come from theological discourse. It is important to note that before African males were theorized and studied, notions of darkness and blackness were constructs already associated with evil and sin. However, when it came time to understand the place of the Negro in the Great Chain of Being, such preexisting ideas about lightness and darkness were employed (Tokson, 1982). The Great Chain of Being was a construct developed during Greek antiquity used to classify all inanimate and living creatures into a hierarchal system that ascended to its peak at the level of God (Jordan, 1968). Furthermore, it was in the context of early Western exploration and the development of European political systems that modern ideas about non-whites as man would surface. Sylvia Wynter (2006) argues that notions of man and non-man took form in the early context of Western modernity, where the social imagery of the black male became known. In this era, the philosophical ideals of reason and logic led to the classification of every aspect of the human world, including the very meaning of "human."

Wynter (2006) maintains that the idea of human is a modern invention that helped fix various categories of personhood. For example, medieval Latin Christian Europeans who sought to define non-Christians created new theological classifications for nonbelievers, such as inter alia, heretics, pagans, idolaters, or Enemies of Christ (p. 124). Wynter argues further that such theological discourse helped set in place subsequent ideas about the racial Other. When the monarchical European state systems emerged, new notions of citizenship were tied to overarching conceptions of humanness, which established a new classification system that was concerned with the capacities of the rational subject or citizen. Therefore, it was in the context of European Christian doctrine that the ideology of what constitutes a "citizen" would emerge, and would later come to delimit the ontological meanings of black people. Within modern philosophical discourse, the Negro was constructed as the antithesis to the logical and rational citizen of post-Enlightenment Europe, and this definition of the African male has remained in Western systems of thought (Jordan, 1968). In the context of Eurocentrism, all categories of good and righteous were defined and measured through the constructs of whiteness and blackness. So, it is within the framework of medieval Christendom discourse and European expansionism that new technologies were employed to make sense of the racial Other. Theological discourse and biblical exegesis would continue to serve as a powerful justification for the debasement of black male life within several historical epochs, and the mechanism of theology helped give credence and sustainability to the idea of white racial dominance. In this discourse, which assigned sub-human status to black males, it was the black male's soul that was in question. This further anchored racial antagonism toward black Americans, and males in particular, through the Modernist notions of "human" and "citizen."

Christian racial discourse: The curse of ham or pre-adamite beast?

Historian Winthrop Jordan (1968) maintains that some of the first encounters between English explorers and Africans entailed observations of the so-called bestial nature of black men, who were discussed in journals, letters, and sermons as being libidinous and incapable of functioning in civil society. The Englishmen who first encountered Africans attempted to make sense of their dark complexion and determine whether African men and women were a different species. According to Jordan, one way the explorers made sense of the Africans' color was to draw on biblical references: "From the beginning, … many Englishmen were certain that Negros' blackness was permanent and innate and that no amount of cold was going to alter it. There was good authority in Jeremiah 13:23; 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin/or the leopard his spot?'" (p. 15). It's important to note that this preoccupation with skin color would become part of racial theology in the context of slavery and post-emancipation America. However, at the core of all theological arguments about the black man's place in society was the question of whether he was

in fact a man. Theological discourse situated the black man as a "beast of burden" as defined by God's word.

The book of Genesis was used most pervasively to define race from the 1600s through the 1800s—what was commonly called the Curse of Ham. The book of Genesis and the story of Noah's son Ham provided biblical evidence of African males' ordained status as slaves. Ham witnessed his father's nakedness and was punished with eternal servitude. Proponents of slavery maintained that the descendants of Ham were the Black Kushites of Africa. Thus, they were accursed and condemned to enslavement. Historian David Brion Davis (2006) explains:

> Given this emerging precondition, ingenious reinterpretations of "the Curse" provided divine sanction and justification to an emerging or existing social order for well over a thousand years. Thus, as we shall find, it was not originally racist biblical script that led to the enslavement of "Ham's black descendants," but rather the increasing enslavement of blacks that transformed biblical interpretation. (pp. 66–67)

This narrative was perpetuated through sermons and speeches that offered detailed descriptions of the predetermined servant status of the African male. Discourses of this kind led to the conclusion that the patriarchal institution of slavery must control and maintain the lustful and bestial ways of the Negro male. The intention of those who invoked this story in the American context was to create a link between slavery and God's will.

The condition of man as sinful and corrupt was embodied in the Negro male, who was constructed as naturally bred for slave labor and in need of patriarchal guidance to quell his libidinous ways. This early theological discourse would continue the repression of the American Negro male even after emancipation. In addition, it is important to note that specific attention was given to black males due to their so-called natural inclination to sin and violence, and their most egregious act—preying on white females. In the post-emancipation period, black men were constructed as menaces ready to prey on and destroy white society, and many theological arguments cited biblical references to give credence to the pervasive ideologies of anti-blackness.

Theological discourse played a vital role in constructing and justifying the image of the dangerous and libidinous black male, and Bible scripture served at least three primary purposes. The first was to justify enslavement of blacks as a natural outcome of God's providence, mainly through the narrative of the Curse of Ham. The second was to question and define black males' humanity. "Human" in this sense was referenced through an ideologically driven exegesis of the Bible, in which black males were located before God's creation of Adam, perpetuating the discourse of black men as beasts. Thus, from a biblical standpoint, the Negro was a "pre-Adam" creation (i.e., nonhuman). However, the notion of black men as "beasts" in the racist discourse of Christian theology was not simply a pejorative use of language; writers during this time (Carroll, 1900; Payne, 1867) were drawing from biblical nomenclature to claim that God's word defined black men as beasts. What is interesting about much of the 19th century- and early-20th-century racial discourse is that there is a convergence between religion and science that helped to defend racial hierarchies. Drawing from the notion that racism is permanent, I maintain that racism required multiple mechanisms to sustain black inequities over time. In this context, theology and biblical exegesis helped to locate black males' social status at the bottom, as confirmed and validated through the providence of God. However, one mechanism alone cannot sustain the meanings of "race." It must recapitulate through different systems of reality. Scientific racial discourse also engaged the question of black humanity via the biology of black males. In the following section, I illustrate how the black male became a specimen of racial Otherness, which helped to support and sustain the hegemony of anti-blackness.

The science of black maleness

Like the ideas of race that surfaced through theology, Western scientific discourse helped confirm ideas about the Negro as beast. However, scientists were preoccupied with the actual black body and a specific discourse about black males—what Arthur F. Saint-Aubin (2002) calls a "grammar of Black masculinity." Saint-Aubin states, "I want to suggest how a particular black male body has been presented and

ordained as 'natural,' even though it is in fact a body that has been culturally produced" (p. 247). Western scientific thought occupies an important context that requires a specific examination of the historical discourse of black men. Racial science was concerned with finding evidence of why all blacks, both men and women, were inferior to whites. As Saint-Aubin (2002) explains, "science was obsessed with black men and white women because they threatened white men with expectations and demands for political enfranchisement" (p. 249). He explains further:

> All of the efforts to observe and classify black male bodies were ultimately and invariably about power and desire; moreover, these efforts reflect both a psychic as well as a social reality. European scientists of the eighteenth century resorted to the male form, and they dissected the male body to construct their theories of race in part because, as I have indicated, "man," the male gender, was believed to be the natural, universal norm from which women deviated and white men set the standard. (p. 253)

As I described in the previous section, science played a vital role in defining who man was in the context of scripture. Science actively sought to define the black body as subhuman, although not from a biblical standpoint. The early scientific discourse of English explorers' first impressions of Africans initiated the documentation of what they considered a peculiar people. Skin color provided the most striking contrast to Englishmen and helped conjure the idea that black skin color was equated with barbarousness, incivility, and idolatry. As Jordan (1968) explains, black skin was said to be the rationale for and cause of what English explorers perceived as savage and uncivilized behavior.

Of greatest concern was the claimed libidinousness of African men, so scientific discourse was preoccupied with the black male body—specifically genitalia. In the scientific view, the anatomical differences of the black male penis became a common discourse of comparison in scientific arguments about the "natural" racial order of white male versus Negro male. Jordan (1968) outlined the troubling analysis of prominent scientist Dr. Charles White:

> His case for Negro inferiority rested upon an unprecedented if not always reliable array of physiological detail. To discover whether the Negro was in fact a highly sensual creature, for example, one had only to turn to White's scientific evidence. "That the PENIS of an African is larger than that of an European," he announced airily, "has, I believe, been shown in every anatomical school in London. Preparations of them are preserved in most anatomical museums; and I have one in mine." (p. 501)

This focus on the penis was a recapitulation of what had been part of Western thought and arts since the 16th and 17th centuries.

The hyper-emphasis on the penis was not merely an observation to propagate the belief that black men were in fact subhuman. It also helped define black men as menaces to society. By the late 1800s, a new creation had emerged through science and the enduring discourse of theology—the Negro as menace and the proverbial anti-citizen. Therefore, the sexual anatomy of black men was not just a justification for their enslaved status in society, but also helped promote the idea that black men were sex-crazed criminals who would prey on the paragon of white American culture—the white woman. In this sense, the anatomical differences of black men were now tied to social psychological theories about the *"furor sexualis"* or the uncontrollable urges of black men (St. Aubin, 2002). This kind of commentary can be found in the book *Sexual Crimes Among Southern Negroes: Scientifically Considered* authored by medical doctors Hunter McGuire and Frank Lydstrom:

> When all inhibitions of a high order have been removed by sexual excitement, I fail to see any differences from a physical standpoint between the sexual furor of the negro and that which prevails among the lower animals in certain instances and at certain periods … namely, that the *furor sexualis* in the negro resembles similar sexual attacks in the bull and elephant, and running amuck of the Malay race. The *furor sexualis* has been especially frequent among the negroes in States cursed by carpetbag statesmanship, in which frequent changes in the social and commercial status of the negro have occurred. (Cited in Saint Aubin, 2002, p. 264)

Discourses of this kind persisted throughout the early 20th century. Different theories emerging from ethnology, social Darwinism, and eugenics suggested not only that black men were less than human but that their capacity to think and self-govern was defined by pathologies in their blood, genes, bones, skull, and skin. It was this kind of "scientific" legitimacy that made it possible to create racial myths about black males to help advance ideas of racial exclusion and violence. Although different from the racial

theology of previous historical periods or commentaries on science, the 20th-century discourse in the social sciences provided a new language and way of reasoning about black males concerned largely with the qualitative experiences of black male life.

Black males and the contemporary social imagination in the social sciences

The ways the black male has been imagined in social science literature can be thought of as a fiction or, as Bhabha (1994) asserts, a stereotype discourse. Notions of the "absent father" and the "endangered" black boy constitute a sociological meaning about black males that circulated through the social, political, cultural, and educational discourses during most of the 20th century and into the present (Brown, 2011; Dumas, 2016; Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2009). What also appears clearly in this literature is the fixity of race, meaning to explain particular phenomena in black males' lives, such as living without fathers and engaging in maladaptive behaviors. The difference is that social scientists of the 20th century were less inclined than the scientists and theologians of the 19th century to question the humanity of black males, although they helped to construct them into human kinds (Hacking, 1995), which philosopher Ian Hacking (1995) defines as a "classification that could be used to formulate general truths about people; generalizations sufficiently strong that they seem like law about people; their actions or sentiments" (p. 352). In this sense, the social sciences have offered recursive stories about black males' lives in almost every facet of society over the last eight decades.

Asking no explicit questions about the humanity of black males, the social science discourse of the 20th century presented the black male as a peculiar human enclosed within his own cultural norms. It offered the same old stories (Brown, 2011) of the alienated, economically deprived, and psychologically damaged black man, whose offspring reproduce the male parent's dysfunctional behaviors. The black male subject that emerged was inserted into a historical discourse of the "Black-skinned male." Bhabha (1994) explains that the skin of the black subject is the key signifier of cultural and racial difference. He further contends that the skin is "the most visible of fetishes, recognized as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political, and historical discourses" (p. 78).

The shadows of the past remained embedded in the subjectivity of the black male. Such an articulation about the role history played in constructing the social imagery about the black male is crucial to understanding the ways the social sciences have constituted him. One way of seeing the literature of the social sciences is to argue that all cultural, historical, and political spaces are consumed by an impermeable racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2014) that is fixed and unchanging, regardless of time and place. Therefore, whether the black male is described as inadequate, absent, or endangered, these discursive formations are all predicated by an ideology of race that will always render him as culturally deviant. The articulation of how the black male has been constituted through the social sciences could be thought of as a play between the same old stories of the Negro male and an analytical apparatus that delimits how one can define and conceptualize the problems of black males' lives. The fetishism of the black male is a central apparatus of the social sciences. The desire "to know" and "to possess" the subjectivity of black maleness reemerged in the late 1960s through the belief of sociologists, urban ethnographers, and psychologists that the black male was difficult to research. So, not only was he constituted as "absent" from the home, but the black male was viewed as elusive from scientific measurement. Liebow (1967) depicted the black father as a shadowy figure who comes in and out of the life of the black family:

> At the purely practical level, the lower-class Negro man is neglected from a research point of view simply because he is more difficult to reach than women, youths and children. He is no more at home to the researcher than he is to the case worker or census taker. And apart, perhaps, from his contacts with the police, he is less likely than women and children to come to attention of the authorities. (p. 7)

The obsession to know the black male has produced different discursive formations that have circulated through various fields of identification. The field of identification within social science discourse was the black family, and the question was what role the black father played in its persistent poverty. By analyzing the black father through the norms of "man," "father," and "provider," researchers began to produce various meanings of black male difference based on his lacking qualities of fatherhood and

manhood. Researchers regularly argued within sociological discourse that the family was the key determinant of the economic stability. Although most researchers, including Moynihan (1967), acknowledged that structural factors associated with race and class impacted the experiences of African Americans, scholars generally saw the culture of the black family as central to its poverty. In short, the problems of poverty were placed squarely on the black family, and particularly on the shoulders of the black father.

By the mid-1960s through 1970s, the absence or presence of the black father was seen as the key variable in the pathology of the black family. Researchers found that when the black father was absent, the black son did not learn proper sex role behavior (Katz, 1969; Moynihan, 1967; Pettigrew, 1964). As a result, the boy looked to black men on the street for models of manhood. The following quote taken from Barry Silverstein's *Children of the Dark Ghetto* (1975) offers a common analysis of black male life:

> Boys in *every* community who do not have fathers or other male models (e.g., older brothers) in the home will seek out male models wherever they can find them. For many fatherless boys in the ghetto the most available male models are enmeshed in the streets. Sometimes these models are older brothers or cousins; sometimes they are simply men "on the corner." To many young ghetto boys, these male models seem very excited and powerful. Displays of hip, cool, "tough" aspects of masculine power. (p. 84)

However, even when the black father was stable, present, monogamous, and a provider, he was still found to be ineffective and peripheral in the socialization of the black boy, who would again search outside the home for a model of manhood. This obsession to know the black male increased with the emergence of soul literature, which attempted to isolate the culture, behavior, and expressive speech of the black male. Soul literature was a group of studies focused on the social and cultural habits of black men and boys (Hannerz, 1970; Keil, 1977; Kochman, 1972; Rainwater, 1970). These studies often separated the effects of "soul" into two psychological categories: (a) behaviors that were a means of survival and (b) behaviors that were compulsive, deviant, and maladaptive. By the mid-1980s, it was rather common for the public and social science discourses to argue that the black male young adult, adolescent, and child were endangered and in crisis (Young, 2004).

The stereotype discourse of the endangered and in-crisis black male constructed new knowledge about him, particularly within educational spaces. As Bhabha (1994) argued, the process of constructing a stereotype cannot be thought of as one impermeable ideological construction. It is a process of overdetermination that repeats itself through different historical and discursive junctures. This construction illustrates a point often made by Popkewitz (2001) that history aims to grasp the conditions that allow one to see something as truth. The construction of the endangered and in-crisis black boy within the educational discourse uses discursive strategies that tell the truth about a social condition while also producing a new truth or stereotype about the black male.

Overall, while the social science discourse differed from past theological and scientific ideas questioning the humanity of black males, the intent and purpose of the social science literature was to provide qualitative and quantitative descriptions of their families, social interactions, linguistic styles, and relationships. This, in turn, helped produce one of the most powerful racial narratives about black male lives, in which presumptions about black males remain enclosed in a fixed story of absent fathers, poverty, and a maladaptive culture. In keeping with Bell's (1993) thesis about racism being permanent, social science discourse helped sustain the categorization of "black male" as the quintessential racial Other, as defined through the sociology of the black family. Although this historical juncture changed the social imagery of black males by examining their cultural milieu, it did little to alter black males' positionality as the proverbial racial Other.

Concluding thoughts

So, what does all this have to do with black boys in schools today? Is there a link between the kind of implicit bias black males now experience in school and the barrage of theories, commentaries, and ideas that have followed males of African descent for centuries? The point of this essay is not to make a linear argument between the past and the present. I am arguing that, if a defining feature of implicit racial

bias is repetition and memory, then understanding the history of ideas related to black males is vitally important. One durable narrative from the 16th century to the present is the belief that, or the question of whether, black males are ontologically different from white males. The norm within Western racial thought is to understand black males in juxtaposition to white males. In some periods and systems of thought, black maleness remained conceptualized as oppositional to the norm. However, this difference took on new meanings when employed by various disciplines. The subjectivity of black males has been read and reread over time as either repulsive or impulsive, as defined by his status as subhuman or as a human kind.

If a key feature of implicit bias is currently defined by psychologists as a by-product of memory, then the significance of old racial theories is vital to deconstructing how black boys in schools remain implicitly tied to being considered "troubled," "at risk," or "challenging." The most striking illustration of this comes from the Yale study (Gilliam et al., 2016), in which black boys were overwhelmingly constructed as exhibiting challenging behaviors, even when there were no such behaviors in the classroom. The kind of bias expressed in this work illustrates how insidious and subtle it can be. When a black boy walks down the street, plays in a sandlot, or drives a car, his presence immediately conjures up associations of fear, threat, aggression, and danger.

Fear and danger represent a durable racial trope of Western thought expressed in theology, science, and social science. I am not suggesting that the discourses discussed in this essay represent the entirety of ideas that have conceptualized the black male. Other ideas could be brought into this discussion, including the role popular culture played in creating the Sambo, the thug, the gangster, and the sexual predator through theater, novels, poetry, film, and music. However, my intent is to offer a glimpse into some of the dominant discourses of the past and show how many of them remain with us today in the deep recesses of collective American memory—most notably expressed in Goff et al.'s (2008) findings where black men are implicitly associated with apes.

So, as suggested by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) more than a decade ago, race is a pervasive construct of society. For the purposes of this essay, the permanence of racism could also be called the durability of racism, which helps give discursive meaning to the proverbial racial Other—the black male. Race is America, and America is race. For CRT scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Tate, placing race at the center of examining inequalities in schools was a necessary theoretical turn because it required focusing our attention on the natural location of racism within the American body politic. Black males are not just the miner's canary gauging the toxicity of this nation. They are the very substance of Western thought located in perfect juxtaposition to white male nationhood (Nelson, 1998). They are bound to such historically situated racial scripts as devils, villains, menaces, and endangered species, and are consistently placed at the bottom of the racial contract (Mills, 1997).

The consistency of this trope is so strong it almost makes it inevitable that what black men and boys experience presently with teachers, doctors, police officers, and everyday citizens is, in effect, an outcome of the *longue durée* of Western racial memory and anti-blackness—the black male made subhuman and then reconstructed into a human kind. Understanding the racial discourses that inform bias in schools is an important and vital step toward changing black males' schooling experiences. To help teachers and school officials understand that the past is enveloped in our present ways of thinking about black males could help to disentangle some of the implicit associations made about black boys' behavior in schools. The dilemma of seeing black males as implicitly dangerous or as someone to be feared is an age-old construct beset with centuries of racial discourse, which, in the words of Ralph Ellison (1947/1994), has produced a "peculiar disposition of the eyes" (p. 3), fixed on seeing black males as a perpetual American problem.

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