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### Transformative Education as the Key to Dismantling Racism: How colleges and universities are the path to an equitable future

Rachel Whitt

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# RACISM:

## AN EDUCATIONAL SERIES



# Transformative education as the key to dismantling racism

How colleges and universities are the path to an equitable future

By Rachel Whitt © July 25, 2020

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Our country is currently experiencing a monsoon of fear, raining down in torrents day in and day out. Sometimes it looks like a pandemic killing hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Other times it looks like police aggressively restraining one man until he passes out. It comes in the form of friends and families turning against each other on social media, arguing about their right to wear a mask or not wear a mask; carry a gun or not carry a gun; visit a historic statue or tear it down. These daily clashes reflect the battle lines drawn in the war on racism, individuality, patriotism, and supremacy.

A racial hierarchy is a system of stratification based on the belief that one race is superior to another. Just as layers of particles compress to form sedimentary rock, layers of hierarchy and fear-based decisions, policies and practices have solidified into foundations of and racism in our country.

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*“Skin color is only skin deep, but you do see it play out in many different ways in terms of access to resources, equality issues in terms of teaching, hiring practices, staff issues...**racism plays out in the most insidious ways.**” – Jamal Martin, professor of Africana Studies.*

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But the root of all evil is fear, and racism is no different. It is rooted in the fear of anyone who is different from us; and that fear has historically led to the oppression and dehumanization of people.

Our hope for dismantling racism in society lies in education. Teaching and training students that no matter the color of a person’s skin, we are all part of only one race – the human race.

Jamal Martin, professor of Africana Studies at The University of New Mexico, says critical thinking in education and the scholarship of teaching and learning is the key to unlocking racism in our country and around the world.

“The biggest issue I see with racism is that people have been taught to believe there is more than one race,” Martin explained. “Biologically, that’s not true. We have different ethnicities and ancestries, but we are all one human race. We’re all part of one human family.”



Jamal Martin

He says classes that incorporate women's and ethnic studies are essential in peeling back the years of systemic dysfunction and inequities in society.

"We need to not only help students understand critical thinking, but also become critical thinkers. We as faculty need to do a better job," Martin urged. "People are suffering out there, and they're dying. We've been privileged to receive a college education, so how do we use our privilege more effectively."

In his classes, Martin teaches about metacognition, or, thinking about thinking while thinking to improve your thinking.

"I think that if students understand that and act on that, they begin to see how solving complex problems doesn't have to be complex. You can take all different types of knowledge and learning and integrate them in a process of mindfulness and intentionality to help you solve complex problems that plague mankind."

"But what we see happening in America right now is this notion of regression to the average, particularly in American scholarship. Some studies show America's intelligentsia is becoming flat, imitative and predictable, and students are responding to that, so there's an emptiness."

Martin says the foundation of metacognition involves three activities: investigation, interpretation and judgment.

**Investigation** relies on finding evidence of data that answers key questions about the issue; and that data must be relevant and sufficient. **Interpretation** is the act of deciding what the evidence means, and the interpretations must be more reasonable than competing interpretations. Judgment involves making a conclusion about the issue, based on logic.

"I do believe that education can be the key but that means that we have to decolonize minds and decolonize the education system from top to bottom," he said, challenging his fellow colleagues. "If we as educators are supposed to be doing the best for civilization, then we have

## Definitions

### Stratification

strat-i-fi-ca-tion

/,strədəfə'kəSH(ə)n/

noun

1. the arrangement or classification of something into different groups.

### Metacognition

met-a-cog-ni-tion

/,medə,käg'niSH(ə)n/

noun

1. awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes.

to take on a different perspective.”

It boils down to this, Martin says, ‘what do you want them to know, what do you want them to feel, and what do you want them to do?’ Generating critical thinkers is the imperative set before institutes of higher learning across the nation, and the world.

“How do we undo xenophobia and intolerance and discrimination? It has to come about through a revised process of critical pedagogy,” concluded Martin.

The onus is on colleges and universities to bring forth higher learning, deeper critical thinking, and transformative scholarship to counterbalance the fear born of ignorance.

*Note from the author:*

*My deepest thanks to Dr. Jamal Martin for his extensive time and knowledge, discussing this and other topics with me. This article barely scratches the surface, but hopefully will encourage the necessary dialogues to move beyond the fear.*

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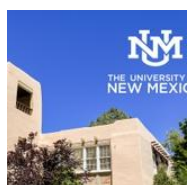
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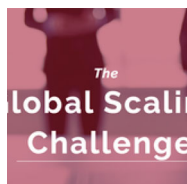
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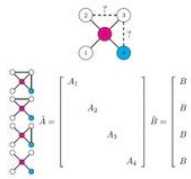


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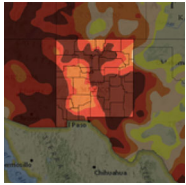
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