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## **Our home by the sea: Critical race reflections on Samuel Chapman Armstrong's accommodationism through William Watkins' White Architects of Black Education**

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## OUR HOME BY THE SEA:

### CRITICAL RACE REFLECTIONS ON SAMUEL CHAPMAN ARMSTRONG'S ACCOMMODATIONISM THROUGH WILLIAM H. WATKINS'

#### *THE WHITE ARCHITECTS OF BLACK EDUCATION*

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Summer 2015, the field of curriculum studies lost a significant scholar, Dr. William H. Watkins. Dr. Watkins' work centered on race and curriculum history. Unlike many scholars in the field of curriculum, the history of race in relationship to knowledge and curriculum influenced his curriculum, his knowledge, and his life's work. There were many dimensions to the person we knew as Dr. William H. Watkins. Watkins studied Political Science as an undergraduate student at California State University, Los Angeles and taught high school history in New York. He spent some time as a professional wrestler and wrestled with civil rights issues through the vehicle of protest. He traveled the world while teaching, researching, and lecturing. He was both a parent and a spouse as well as a teacher and a student. Watkins was, indeed, a multi-dimensional individual.

We are both former students of what was known as Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). Additionally, we are natives of the same large metropolitan city geographically situated in the northeast region of the United States and scholars of social, historical, cultural, and critical foundations of education. Both of us experienced scholarly, professional, and personal engagements with one another as well as with Dr. Watkins and his work through the lenses of our experiences. As we shared our

reflections about our “home by the sea”—Hampton’s unofficial motto—we discovered that our similar critical perspectives assessed our experiences as confining and repressive. Hampton just didn’t feel like the home we left, the home we desired, nor a home that we should come to cherish. For us, Hampton failed to acknowledge the multidimensionality of our being. Each of us found critical race perspectives to be a comfortable home for our scholarly and intellectual endeavors.

From our perspective, Dr. Watkins was the embodiment of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF). (Please note that from this point forward in the article these two traditions of scholarship are referred to through their initialisms CRT and CRF, respectively.) He would likely disagree with this characterization, and he would also offer critiques of these scholarly positions. Despite this, we argue that he embraced the anti-essentialism, multidimensionality, intersectionality and counterstoried lived experience of being a Black man born in Harlem, raised in Los Angeles, and nurtured by a Pentecostal minister.

The work and words presented are a reflection of such multidimensionality. It is one story of his work in the context of his life. This story will be framed similarly to the way Watkins framed his chapter on General Samuel Chapman Armstrong in Watkins’ seminal work, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*. The decision to use this framing is based on the direct connection we have with the institution highlighted in this chapter. It seemed logical to frame this work in such a way that would allow a story of our relationship with William H. Watkins to be read through our relationship to his work.

This work, a critical auto-ethnographic narrative, will begin with a historical context to the relationship we have with Watkins and the relationship that General Samuel Chapman Armstrong had with Hampton Institute. Next, this work will provide a description of critical auto-ethnography and narrative inquiry both as independent research approaches that are combined for the purpose of our work. The work will continue with: a discussion about the purpose of knowledge for Blacks at Hampton; the culture of the Hampton experience; the role of politics, race, and education in Watkins’ work; and our personal memories. The work will conclude with a positionality statement that will summarize the work in the context of our present voices and the absent yet ever-present voice of Dr. William H. Watkins.

**The Historical Context:  
Me, Watkins, and a Summary of *The White Architects of Black Education*  
Theodora Regina Berry**

I met Dr. Watkins as a graduate student while working on my doctoral degree at a medium sized, private university located in a large metropolitan city in the Midwestern region of the United States. He had taught several of the professors who were teaching in my doctoral program and had come to my home institution to speak to a class that I was in. Honestly, I don't remember which one of the classes where he was present, but I clearly remember our class dialogue around "Black Curriculum Orientations" (Watkins, 1993). I remember questioning the seemingly "one sided-ness" of the way he presented the history of race and education, especially concerning the motivations of White people. I had trouble accepting the fact that all White people used education (or the absence of it) to control the actions, beliefs, and values of Black people in the United States.

Yet in Watkins' (2001) work, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*, he clearly articulates the reality of this situation. "While Blacks had the desire to uplift themselves, join the social movement of American life (Tyack, 1974), and break forever with the bondage of the past, they lacked the resources to achieve either education or their larger freedom" (p.22). Watkins asserts that education was a tool that taught Blacks to understand their social status in the post-Civil War industrial era and that wealthy political accommodationists utilized their monetary power to get Blacks to "accept the world the way it was" (p.23). As many other scholars would verify (Pressly, 2006; Wesley, 1998; McCluskey, 1989; Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1904; DuBois, 1903/1993), Blacks who failed to accept the world "the way it was" (Watkins, 2001, p. 23) were provided with strong reminders regarding the role of power, politics, and knowledge in a racist society. Research on such Black educational issues presents a curriculum of tragedy that connects the life and murder of Trayvon Benjamin Martin (Berry & Stovall, 2013) to accommodationist notions of knowledge and power. In illuminating these connections, I honor the life's work of Dr. Watkins and recognize that some things haven't changed, yet.

### **Michael E. Jennings**

I first encountered Dr. Watkins when I came to visit the University of Illinois-Chicago as part of a job talk that I was giving in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. I was a doctoral student who had done little if any work on my dissertation, but I found myself on the job market trying to secure a position as early as possible. This was my first job talk, and I found myself nervous about how to handle such an important undertaking.

Dr. Watkins was an intimidating figure who asked numerous questions about my work. Because it was a job talk situation, I assumed that he was coming after me as I endured the barrage of questions regarding my research. I didn't quite understand why this imposing Black man seemed to be so hell-bent on poking holes in my work. After I endured the experience with him at my research presentation, I thought I could relax and take the time to get to know this man who was also an intense scholar. Nothing could be further from the truth! The dinner conversation led to more questions and intense inquiry regarding my work. If I had one word to describe this initial introductory experience with Watkins, it would be daunting. As many academic scholars would know, a job talk, in isolation, is an overwhelming experience. My job talk experience with Watkins felt insurmountable.

Despite my experiences with Dr. Watkins at the job talk, I ended up befriending him as a like-minded colleague. We frequently saw each other at professional conferences and engaged in deep conversations about research, philosophy, history, and the life of the mind as experienced by African-American faculty. It was in these conversations that Bill offered the support that I could not find from senior colleagues at my own institution. In this way, Watkins' mentorship and scholarship both informed not only my own research but also my development as a critical scholar.

#### **The Significance of Story in the Context of Culture: Critical Auto-Ethnography and Narrative Inquiry**

To begin discussing the conceptualization of a critical auto-ethnographic narrative, it is important to understand three significant parts of this methodological approach: auto-ethnography, narrative, and critical. An ethnography is the study of a culture and an auto-ethnography is the study of a culture to which the researcher is a member.

Hughes (2008) provides clear historical context of this qualitative research approach, stating:

Autoethnography is a relatively new research tool in education born in the discipline of anthropology only fifty years ago (Patton, 2002). Raymond Firth introduced the term “auto-ethnography” in 1956 when talking about ... [Jomo] Kenyatta’s auto-ethnography. Kenyatta’s (1966) *Facing Mt. Kenya* is indeed recognized today as the first published autoethnography (Hayano, 1979) ....” (p. 76)

Jones (2005) indicates that “autoethnography works to hold self and culture together” (p. 764). Ellis (2004) further clarifies by stating that auto-ethnography is:

Research, writing, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection ... [and] claims the conventions of literary writing. (p. xix)

Understanding auto-ethnography means understanding that when researchers discuss the culture of which they are a member, they are not only telling their own story but also telling the stories and sharing the realities of others who are also members of their cultural group. Hughes (2008) asserts

rather than seeking to escape subjectivity, authors considering autoethnographic techniques should do so precisely because of the qualitative genre’s capacity to engage first person voice and to embrace the conflict of writing against oneself as he or she finds himself/herself entrenched in the complications of their positions. (p. 77)

In this work, we delve deeply into the memories of our experiences as college students at a particular historically Black university. We contextualize these experiences by connecting them to the ways in which Watkins (a scholar with whom we have memories of experiences and experiences with) discusses this university in a critical historical context. Our work will illustrate the complicatedness, the

multidimensionality, intersectionality, and counterstoried lived experiences with both the university and the scholar driving at positions articulated in CRT and CRF as relevant scholarly traditions for continued engagement in the present moment.

We fully acknowledge the subjectivity of this work. Each of us read Watkins' (2001) *The White Architects of Black Education* while the scholar was still living. Each of us read and interpreted this text through a lens laden with our own memories of Hampton University. Each of us has re-read the text after the passing of this scholar. This second reading is now rendered more complicated with the memories we have of the scholar and Hampton University, "our home by the sea".

This is where we have to begin to unpack notions of critical theory. CRT and curriculum theory scholars often refer to the critical in relationship to power, oppression, and conflict. As adherents of the Frankfurt School, we ascribe to this ideology from that lineage. Leonardo (2004) informs us that "critical theory found in the Frankfurt School ... under the leadership of Max Horkheimer ... sought to make theory critical insofar as it exposed the dialectical tensions in modernity.... Its project is centered on the function of criticism and its ability to advance research on the nature of oppression and emancipation" (p. 11). For this work to adhere to measures of critical and auto-ethnography, we critique our experiences at the university as well as the work of Dr. Watkins in the context of our shared cultural experiences as students at the university and as colleagues of Dr. Watkins.

Narrative inquiry involves story and storytelling. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) address narrative as "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Educators and learners are, indeed, storytellers. In this work, we are telling our stories as both educators and learners. Additionally, we are telling our stories about members of a specific cultural group to which we not only have membership but also with whom we shared in these cultural experiences. We are, in fact, fully engaging in narrative as both phenomenon and method. In other words, narrative is both the story (phenomenon) and the research engagement (inquiry) (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

For the purpose of this work, we define a critical auto-ethnographic narrative to be a story or stories of one's culture or cultural experience where power, oppression, and/or conflict within the story are critiqued. Critical auto-ethnography adds to memoir and

tribute a critique within a cultural space in ways that are not centered in memory work or tribute. This story of our experiences is critical because we question and critique the legacy of power in historical and contemporary context. This story is auto-ethnographic as we engage in the work from a shared experience and perspective as members of a cultural group—former students of a particular historically Black university. This story also expresses a shared experience with a scholar and his work, with each of us engaging with this work from the shared perspective of being former students. As such, we share a unique insider knowledge, which we feel privileged to critique as unique members of another cultural group—CRT and CRF scholars.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)/Critical Race Feminism (CRF)**

CRT, the source of CRF, connects race with power, oppression and conflict (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Building upon foundations from Critical Legal Studies, legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman believed that the token integrationism advanced by the Civil Rights Movement cemented the racist foundations of history on people of color on an international scale.

There are several tenets/elements of CRT: (1) addressing essentialism and anti-essentialism/intersectionality; (2) the normalization of race and racism; (3) addressing interest convergence; (4) dismantling color-blind notions of equality; (5) addressing race as a social construction; (6) using storytelling/counter-storytelling for voices-of-color.

CRT has birthed several outgrowths, among them CRF. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) define CRF accordingly:

[CRF] addresses issues of intersectionality....It also examines relations between men and women of color, sterilization of black, Latina, and Indian women, and the impact of changes in welfare, family policies, and child support laws. It also analyzes the way the “reasonable man” standard that operates in many areas of the law incorporates a white male bias. (p. 83)

According to Wing (1997), CRF makes connections of power, oppression, and conflict at the intersections of race and gender for women of color. Supporting the definition



provided by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRF “examines the intersections of race, gender, and sometimes class within a legal or multidisciplinary context” (Wing, 1997, p. 2). CRT and CRF adherents utilize narrative or storytelling as counterstories to the master narrative, the dominant discourse. However, unlike many foundational CRT adherents, CRF is multidisciplinary as it draws from “writings of women and men who are not legal scholars” (Wing, 1997, p. 5) as evidenced in the social and political writings of Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 1998), bell hooks (1990) and Joy James (1999). As CRT/CRF scholars, we have found strength in the works of these Black women as well as such scholars as William Banks (1996), Louis Catzenell & William Pinar (1993), Angela Davis (1983), John Dewey (1933/1998), W.E.B. DuBois (1903/1993), Paulo Freire (1974), Nikki Giovanni (1994), and Audre Lorde (1984).

Anti-essentialism/intersectionality, normalization and ordinariness of race and racism, and counter-storytelling are key elements in CRF. In addition, CRF addresses the complexities of race and gender with notions of intersectionality and multidimensionality (Wing, 1997). Berry and Stovall (2013) explain:

Intersectionality of identity occurs when individuals possess two or more social markers simultaneously (e.g. race, gender, ethnicity, class). Multi-dimensionality of identity occurs when individuals possess two or more individualities that function at the same time, informing one another in practice (e.g., teacher as parent, teacher as parent and community member, historian as traveler). (p. 590)

In the theory and practice of identities, intersectionality and multi-dimensionality are inextricably tied.

Finally, and in continuation, CRF values both abstract theorizing *and* practice. While advocates of CRF are concerned with theory, praxis is central to this theory; theory and praxis must be a collaboration. “As representatives of groups oppressed on the basis of both race and gender, they cannot afford to adopt the classic White male ivory tower approach to abstract theorizing, removed from the actual needs of their communities” (Wing, 1997, p. 5). CRF scholars believe what they know co-exists with what they do and the ways they engage. We believe in what we do and we practice what we preach.

### Critiquing Knowledge and Power: Historical and Contemporary

In the section of the text entitled *Part II: Architects of Accommodation*, Watkins (2001) begins with the life and work of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, founder of what was known as Hampton Institute (currently Hampton University). As former undergraduate students of this institution, we learned a particular version of the history of the founder and the college. The version of the history we learned was intended to make students feel proud about being selected to attend such a prestigious institution with a rich tapestry of history. This history presented the college's founder as a kind, benevolent benefactor who supported the uplift of Blacks and American Indians. This version of history spoke of a grateful student population forever indebted to the generosity of a great man. This version of history also lionized the life and work of Booker T. Washington as an alumnus who every Hampton student should emulate if we were to survive in the world after college.

*O Hampton, a thought sent from Heaven above,  
To be a great soul's inspiration;  
We sing thee the earnest of broad human love,  
The shrine of our heart's adoration.  
Thy foundation firm and thy roof tree out spread,  
And thy sacred altar-fires burning,  
The sea circling 'round thee, soft skies overhead,  
Dear Hampton, the goal of our yearning!*

#### Refrain

*O Hampton, we never can make thee a song  
Except as our lives do the singing,  
In service that will thy great spirit prolong,  
And send it through centuries ringing!*

*Kind mother, we'll treasure the dear happy days  
We've spent here in life's preparation,  
Yet go with brave hearts upon our chosen ways,  
Of service to God and our nation.  
Still wearing thy colors, the blue and the white,  
As pledge that our fond hearts will cherish  
A love which for thee ever shines true and bright,  
A loyalty that ne'er can perish!*

The words of the school song implied that Hampton, as our new home by the sea, was to be a beautiful departure from the homes where we were raised. However, the version Watkins presents in this seminal text is a history of conversion and assimilation. Watkins (2001) notes:

Armstrong's vision for Hampton was multidimensional. It would be a manual labor school. It would provide badly needed teachers for a mostly illiterate, alienated, and displaced Black population. It would provide training in character building, morality, and religion to "civilize" the "childlike" and "impetuous" Negro. (p. 48)

But, let's be clear. In both cases, the history has a singular purpose: giving Black students a singular identity regarding their "place" in the world. The "proper" place for Black people during this era required a curriculum that would emphasize their second-class status. The Western epistemology of curriculum is centered on the definition and position inspired by key curriculum scholar Ralph Tyler that identifies curriculum "as a plan for action or a written document that includes strategies for achieving desired goals or ends" (Orstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 10). In other words, curriculum is a specific and prescriptive plan for learning. Watkins' (2001) work clearly identifies the "plan for learning" as one prescribed by White philanthropists and educators for Black people as a means of ensuring a productive and proper place for Black American citizens during the early Reconstruction period. Watkins' (1993) earlier work clearly identifies the ways in which Black people in the United States moved from what was prescribed for them to a conceptualization and implementation of ways they desired for themselves. Such movement in Black higher education aligns well with reconceptualist notions of curriculum. Reconceptualist curriculum scholars re-framed curriculum in the late twentieth century. Reconceptualists' notions of curriculum theory occurred in the second historical movement in U.S. contemporary curriculum theory. This movement, from curriculum development to curriculum studies, forced a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn, 1962) from bureaucratization to the interdisciplinary study of lived educational experience. Curriculum at this stage connects to experiences—past, present, and future— in terms of what we know, what we need to know, and who determines what we need to know. This is an understanding "that enables an interpretation of our personal and collective lives" (Carson, 2009, p. 146). What is important to note here are the voices within the curriculum. In response to the

questions of what knowledge was worth knowing and who determines what knowledge is most worth knowing, the power remained with White people and, as the title of this text indicates, those White people possessed money, power, and influence.

While we were students at Hampton, more than 50 percent of the members of the Board of Trustees were White. However, as a private university, there is no publicly available information detailing the actions of the members of the Board of Trustees, past or present (Hampton Roads Daily Press, 2016). At the time that Theodora was a student, U.S. Senator John Warner (who was married to Elizabeth Taylor at the time) was the most notable member of the board. This reflected the power of Whiteness that prevailed not only in the establishment of the institution but also in the initial maintenance of its early growth and development.

During the early years of Hampton, one of the strongest supporters was Northern businessman and philanthropist Robert C. Ogden (Watkins, 2001). Ogden was a major figure in supporting education in the South for African Americans during the post-Civil War era and helped to found Hampton in 1868. In particular, Ogden was very influential in the early years of Hampton's development because of his relationship with Hampton's founder General Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Watkins (2001) describes the influence of Armstrong on Ogden stating that "While Ogden was interested in civic and commercial issues, Armstrong was focused specifically on questions of race and social development. It was he who dramatized the race questions for Ogden" (p. 142).

Ogden's close relationship with Armstrong led him to be heavily involved in supporting Hampton amongst White Northern philanthropists (Anderson, 1988). He was named as a trustee at Hampton in 1874 and remained the school's most active trustee until 1894 when he became president of the Board of Trustees (Anderson, 1978). Ogden believed that industrial education was particularly necessary for African Americans who would help support an "underdeveloped and underindustrialized South" (Watkins, 2001, p. 142) in need of an "orderly citizenry and trained work force" (p. 143). He felt that the industrial model of education developed at Hampton was necessary to train African Americans because they possessed "childish characteristics" (Anderson, 1988, p. 92) that reflected their tendency to be "thriftless, careless, shiftless, and idle by disposition" (p. 92).

Ogden remained active in shaping Hampton as the school's Board President up until his death in 1913. In addition to his own involvement with Hampton, Ogden was influential in garnering the support of other White Northern industrialist like George Peabody who he influenced to become a member of Hampton's Board of Trustees in 1884. Anderson (1988) describes Peabody's strong support of Hampton's model of industrial education because of its capacity to "help build a strong Southern economy on the backs of submissive, nonpolitical, cheap black laborers" (p. 375).

### **Creating a Hampton Culture**

As students at Hampton, we participated in a number of "traditions" on the campus. Watkins discusses the creation of culture at the institution as a means of assimilating Black students to an appropriate lifestyle for their place in the world. Watkins and Berry frequently discussed his aversion to such conventions, and he questioned her continued participation in two things: a women's membership society (sorority) and religion (the Catholic faith). Bill would have also questioned the notion of a Black man like Michael whose scholarship also focuses on the Black experience, particularly in higher education settings, subscribing to multiple identities that he believed were conventions of Whiteness (i.e., membership in fraternal societies and adherence to the Christian faith).

Our lives as students at Hampton were not unlike how Watkins describes this institution's historical culture. Watkins notes that Hampton "sponsored a number of activities such as choral groups, fairs, and various celebrations" (p. 49). As freshman students, we both participated in the campus' Fall Convocation. This annual celebration recognized those students starting their senior year and celebrated the beginning of college life for the newly matriculated freshman students. We suspect that each of us participated primarily due to a sense of obligation rather than excitement.

Berry participated in a number of campus activities during her tenure as a student at Hampton. First semester freshman year, she joined both the marching band and the college choir. During that time, directors of both groups discouraged membership in the other due to the amount of time each required. However, as a Music Arts major who played a brass instrument, a percussion instrument, and sang, she saw no reason to forego one identity for another. Berry's multiple identities presented themselves in

the totality of her academic life as she attempted to enroll as a double major in Music Arts and Mass Media Arts. At the time, the institution had no mechanism in place for this type of enrollment and advisors from both academic areas looked upon the other with disdain, proclaiming that her divided attention failed to identify her as a serious student of either field. Subsequently, Berry joined the concert choir. The Hampton Institute Concert Choir has traditionally been one way “to show off the school” (Watkins, 2001, p. 50) both locally and nationally while also serving as a means to raise money. Concert Choir national tours were “orchestrated to impress and extol the benefits of the Hampton experience” (Watkins, 2001, p. 50) to many people, both Black and White. It also reflected the ability of Blacks to learn complex subject matter and it reinforced the notion that “Black people could indeed be cleaned up and made polite and useful” (Watkins, 2001, p. 50). This unit’s rehearsal and traveling performance schedule conflicted with band rehearsals, thus ending Berry’s membership in the marching band. After taking guitar lessons for her string instrument requirement, Berry formed an unofficial ensemble with a couple of classmates that performed around the Hampton Roads area.

Jennings was active in a campus cultural studies group known as the African Studies Cluster. The purpose of the cluster was to study the history of the African diaspora and to undertake an active role in advancing the welfare of those who were members of this same Diaspora. The organization invited lecturers to campus and spent time studying the ideas of radical thinkers like Malcolm X, Maulana Karenga, and Francis Cress Welsing. These discussions led to questions regarding what was going on with the African-American community broadly, but more specifically it led its members to interrogate what they interpreted as the conservative nature of the university administration at Hampton. Protests of any sort were strongly discouraged with a policy that required all protests to be planned events that had to be pre-approved by the university administration. During Jennings’ time at Hampton, this policy was challenged when students protested the presence of President George H.W. Bush as the university’s commencement speaker in May 1991. Although many students, staff and faculty on campus were disgruntled with the idea that President Bush would speak at Hampton, the vast majority declined to get involved in an organized protest because they feared reprisal from the university administration. Statements were issued by both the university president and the vice president for student affairs, warning students not to get involved with any protest activities. Despite this, when Bush gave his

commencement address many students remained seated and did not applaud his remarks or rise in the traditional sign of respect usually accorded to commencement speakers. A much smaller number held their clenched fist in the air as a sign of protest and defiance. These “quiet” and somewhat “dignified” forms of protest, while not embraced by the university administration, were still nationally lauded for their civility and politeness.

During this time period, Jennings did not have an understanding of the complex history of Hampton, nor did he have an understanding of Hampton’s role in developing a historical model of education that emphasized discipline, conformity, and political moderation. These factors provide strong support for the continued enforcement of what Higginbotham (1993) termed the “politics of respectability” (p. 187). At Hampton, the politics of respectability involved the careful monitoring of individual behavior by university officials “as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform” (p. 187). By enforcing these policies, the Hampton administration hoped to reach and influence two audiences. First, the administration wanted to promote racial uplift by encouraging students, faculty and staff to be respectable in their personal behavior and deportment. Second, the administration wanted to show the larger White society that African Americans could in fact be respectable according to the norms and standards of Whiteness (Higginbotham, 1993). Arguably, the university enforced this politics of respectability while simultaneously asserting traditional forms of protest in past years. However, during the time Jennings attended Hampton, administrative support for historical traditions of protest seemed to be dormant.

### **Politics, Race, and Education: Watkins, Berry, Jennings, and Hampton Institute**

Finally, Armstrong and Hampton played no small role in creating a Black compradore class for the twentieth century. As commented on by Watkins,

They have been pious, conservative, obedient, and loyal to the sociopolitical order. They have supported gradualism, incrementalism, and non-violence over revolution. They have provided a sometimes prosperous middle class without which capitalist economy could not have stabilized. They have acted as a buffer in the South, providing business services, education, religion,

fraternal order, and hope to a people battered by slavery, sharecropping, violence, and four centuries of oppression. (Watkins, 2001, p. 61)

As northeastern-born and raised Black people, we were the antithesis of this compradore class.

Compradore is a term that usually refers to an individual or group who act as intermediaries between a colonized society and a colonial power (Tsai, 1981). The compradore is part of the colonized society, but has a strong interest in facilitating the will of a powerful colonial entity. In terms of the Black South, compradores have anchored the Black South through assertions of their own self-interest which effectively meant “facilitating the white exploitation of the black masses” (Dawson & Wilson, 1991, p. 189). As undergraduate students, we asked “why?” We were staunchly liberal. Berry questioned authority. She promoted and incited change and was not willing to be patient for it. The history of Blacks in the United States generally and the American South in particular was a source of intense anger and resentment for both Berry and Jennings. However, both valued loyalty and chose to address issues in a non-violent manner through dialogue first. The differences in Berry’s actions, values, and beliefs from those at this historically Black institution were more than enough to make her decide to transfer to another university.

Jennings, on the other hand, stayed and graduated. Berry’s decision was not an easy decision because she understood the value that Hampton and other historically Black colleges and universities offered to Blacks in America and particularly to those in the American South. However, her identity extended beyond the confines of the role and purpose of Hampton as articulated by Watkins. Jennings stayed, reluctantly, as he remained disgruntled about the experiences he had in relationship to the education he believed he was receiving.

In short, Watkins’ work speaks to Hampton’s identity, historically and presently. Watkins (2001) clearly articulates the ways in which Hampton embraced essentialism, singularity of identity, and the master narrative. However, his work, particularly in *The White Architects of Black Education* (2001) and in “Black Curriculum Orientations: A preliminary inquiry” (1993), highlights several important points including: the



importance of anti-essentialist ways of thinking about the educational experiences of Black people; the complexity and multi-dimensionality of Black educational experiences; and the ways in which these experiences counter the normal (often racist) narratives of what Black people should know and be able to do.

### Conclusion

In the beginning of this work, we identified Dr. William H. Watkins as a critical race theorist and critical race feminist, while fully recognizing that he would completely resist and reject these labels. As stated earlier, CRT connects race with power, oppression, and conflict (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRF is an outgrowth of CRT and includes and honors all of the tenets of CRT. Additionally, it incorporates notions of multidimensionality and intersectionality of identity.

Watkins' work was significantly influenced by his identities as a raced person and a community activist who participated in both intellectual work and protest movements. These identities place him in a select group as activist-scholar. However, this identity is informed by his multiple and intersecting identities as curriculum theorist, curriculum historian, Africana scholar, and Black educator. In *The White Architects of Black Education*, Watkins (2001) clearly denotes the normalization of race and racism, particularly among the White philanthropists. The master narrative of the Black educational experience revolves around the idea that Black people were to be educated in ways that would keep us in our place and be useful to mainstream (White) society. Clearly, this master narrative was focused on essentialism. However, implicitly, Watkins also identifies the multiple and intersecting identities of Black students at Hampton. Not unlike the experiences of Berry and Jennings, Black students at this institution were historically expected to "perform" Blackness in particular ways, which shifted based on the audience and the tasks to be performed. However, in many cases, both Berry and Jennings embraced other ways of being as Black people. Watkins' work was not a performance of Blackness but rather a reality of Blackness in the United States. His work was a focus on anti-essentialism.

As mentioned earlier in this work, intersectionality and multi-dimensionality are inextricably tied. This is, indeed, the case for Dr. William Watkins. He not only possessed intersectionality of identity, but his identities and experiences are deeply

connected to the scholarship he has produced. *The White Architects of Black Education* is informative as it highlights the desires of Blacks to be educated during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction era through the lenses of power oppression in a majoritarian White supremacist society. This work is an effort to push back against the past (and current) power structures in education. Watkins' work often pushed back against power structures in education. He taught, researched, examined, critiqued, and protested about the ways in which racism, power, and oppression existed in education. Often, we would hear him say "this is not new" when he spoke of these issues. His identities as educator, researcher, scholar, parent, and community activist converged here and informed work to illuminate early Black educational structures in an effort to show what is often left unknown or unaddressed.

*The White Architects of Black Education* is also a counterstory to the master narrative concerning the development of Black higher education, particularly Hampton. Berry and Jennings clearly remember the normative narrative of Hampton's establishment connected to the benevolent White people who wanted an education for Black people. Watkins' work not only validates the master narrative of Hampton as the "home by the sea," but also provides trustworthiness to the centrality of the memories of our experiences. Our memories are centered on the juxtaposition of our identities as northern raised, social justice minded individuals often in conflict with Hampton's mission. This identity dissonance frequently made us feel as if there were something wrong with us. Hampton was created with a particular mission—to educate Black people toward the benefit of White society. This mission is directly connected to CRT's notion of interest convergence. Interest convergence, also known as material determinism, addresses the limited incentives to eradicating expressions of power and forms of oppression on the part of Whites, with exception to where such cases prove beneficial to most Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In doing so, it clearly addresses that progress toward equity and equality in the United States has: (1) Had no major impact on the daily lived experiences of White Americans; and (2) Served the interests of the United States in social, political, and economic ways. Much of what appears in this work clearly is positioned to address this particular tenet of CRT. Highlighting such interest convergence is, in itself, a counterstory.

Watkins' work incorporates, supports, and validates the ways in which curriculum development in higher education for Blacks was used as a tool of power and

oppression. As such, it supports and validates the educational experiences of Berry and Jennings at Hampton as they grappled to embrace anti-essentialism, intersectionality, multi-dimensionality, and counterstory in hegemonic space. This work, and much of Watkins' earlier work, re-emphasized the normalness and ordinariness of race and racism as well as the necessity to engage anti-essentialism, intersectionality, multidimensionality, and counterstory.

In the concluding chapter of *The White Architects of Black Education*, Watkins (2001) provides some insights on what he deemed to be his legacy. We have, in some ways, begun to carry the legacy of the work of William H. Watkins. In describing how we have attempted to carry out his legacy, we borrow from Watkins' words: (1) "I have always accepted that Black, and all, public education was a product of historically, politically, and socially constructed ideas" (Watkins, 2001, p. 179). Each of us, as scholars, has continued to engage in the multiple realities of Blackness and Black education as scholars, intellectual mentors, and academic activists. The multiple realities of Black education have consistently existed with ideas at the intersection of history, politics, and social construction. (2) "We know that African Americans embraced education in significant ways" (Watkins, 2001, p. 179). Our scholarship centers Black experiences from multiple perspectives and encounters with Whiteness from various sources in various spaces that are confining and oppressive. (3) "The people chosen represent much more than action; they represent ideas, theories, and power" (Watkins, 2001, p. 180). We have mentored (and continue to mentor) graduate students and junior scholars with social justice agendas that promote anti-essentialism, multidimensionality, and activism. We are both involved in local and academic communities that demonstrate their allegiance to the kaleidoscope of Black experiences and knowledge. (4) "[T]he creation of a Black middle class has been indispensable to the country's racial politics" (Watkins, 2001, p. 182). As (former) students at Hampton, we clearly understood that our social class afforded us the opportunities to attend this long-established, private, historically Black institution for an undergraduate education. Since our departure from this campus, our home by the sea, we have since learned that there is no monolithic experience or way of being as a member of the Black middle class. One of the many valuable lessons we have learned along the way was the significance of using our privilege to benefit others, using our power for good, and to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Our scholarship and activism honors the work and legacy of Dr. William H. Watkins. As critical race scholars, we not only appreciate the ways in which Watkins has critiqued our particular theoretical stance but, through his work, supported both CRT and CRF. By offering intersectional, multi-dimensional, and anti-essentialist counterstories of Black curriculum development and orientations, Watkins has become a standard-bearer for ways in which scholars must address and acknowledge the complex history of curriculum in Black education. This is significantly important to us, as beneficiaries of Black education and critical race scholars, who prepare the next generation of scholars in Black education.

As a closing memorial, Theodorea Regina Berry offers this poetic tribute to Dr. William H. Watkins:

**Power and Light**

Voices of the past  
speaking to oppressions, like the glass,  
to be broken  
by the revealment of truths  
supporting the experiences of our youth.  
You are one who brought light  
to our Blackness and our knowing.  
You are one who brought light  
to our experiences and our growing.  
And we thank you  
for your work,  
for your words,  
for your wisdom,  
for your wanderings,  
for your watchfulness,  
for your wonderment,  
for your a'wakenings,  
for your warmth.  
For giving light to power,  
for giving power to light.  
Rest. In Power.

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