RACE resilience

Achieving EQUITY Through Self and Systems Transformation

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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Race Resilience, by Victoria E. Romero, Amber N. Warner and Justin Hendrickson.

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Foreword

This inspirational book is a powerful tool for educators who want to make a difference in the lives of students, in particular, students of color. When George Floyd, an African American man, was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, his death triggered a racial reckoning within this country. The summer of 2020 will be remembered for the demonstrations proclaiming that "Black Lives Matter" throughout the United States and the world. Since that event, concerned individuals of all ethnic and racial backgrounds have searched their own hearts and minds for ways to make a difference and change the racial disparities in this country. Educators in schools in urban, suburban, and rural communities have asked themselves the question, "How can we help to make schools positive environments for ALL of our children?" The authors of this book responded to that challenge by creating a roadmap for change that will lead to race resilient schools for children and educators of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. Through this book they have rekindled the hope that our schools can fulfill the promise that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated so well in his "I Have a Dream" speech more than 50 years ago.

Victoria, Amber, and Justin take readers on a journey through the transformational process of creating a race resilient school. They begin with change on an institutional level and provide a guide for those in leadership to create a commitment, shared by staff at all levels, to become a school that is supportive of children from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. The examples they provide of high-performing, high-poverty schools that have accomplished this goal are truly empowering.

One of the most important premises of this book is the recognition that everyone living in the United States has been racialized, irrespective of our own ethnic or racial backgrounds. Each of us has our own implicit racial biases that influence the way in which we view others, including our students and our colleagues of different cultures and races. Unlike other books on educational change, this book does not stop there. It provides us with a clear understanding of how racialization affects each of us and gives us techniques, exercises, and strategies for exploring and addressing these issues within ourselves and within our schools. The sharing of transparent and honest examples of this exploration by the authors provides models of this process for all of us.

I was particularly impressed by the creative use of mindfulness techniques that address issues of implicit bias and affirm the dedication to redesigning schools to meet the needs of students of color. This chapter includes a number of deeply satisfying guided meditations that honor our diversity and affirm the healing and well-being of all racial groups.

The types of courageous conversations that are needed for this transformation to occur are modeled throughout this book. They illustrate the power of systemic change within our schools and the personal process of self-exploration that will help us to explore our own conscious and unconscious biases. It is a gift to all of us who share a social justice commitment and a heartfelt determination to change the trajectory for so many students of color in our schools.

Nancy Boyd-Franklin, PhD
Distinguished Professor
Rutgers University

Preface

"Race and racism is a reality that so many of us grow up learning to just deal with. But if we ever hope to move past it, it can't just be on the people of color to deal with it."

Michelle Obama
44th First Lady

This may sound strange to say, but there are some constructive consequences resulting from the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. As school districts around the country quickly adjusted to keep educating students, we felt it might be helpful to create a guide to support administrators' focus on the social-emotional needs of staff. The initial proposal we sent to our editor, Jessica Allan, gave an overview of *why* superintendents and principals needed to create a culture that focuses on staff well-being and resilience.

But after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and the January 6, 2021, attempt to take over our Capitol, we felt compelled to **REVIEW** our feelings, **RETHINK** our intent, and **REDESIGN** our proposal. In both protests—Black Lives Matter and the Save America rally—race was a common denominator. America's racial and political divide was front and center (McCaskill, 2021; Page et al., 2021). We felt the time had come to focus our attention on the racial inequities in our educational systems. Our sense of agency or efficacy must be grounded in the belief that we can make a positive difference in the lives of our Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students. What happens in schools *is* within our locus of control.

"Well, first is to recognize how is it that we have absorbed the messaging of caste. How is it we've absorbed the

> *messaging of who is ranked where in a society? What do*
> *we expect a person to look like if they are in the corner*
> *suite of a corporation? What does it look like if they are in*
> *the mailroom? What does a person look like if they are the*
> *janitors? We have all absorbed the messaging through the*
> *generations as to where people are presumed to be."*

Isabel Wilkerson
Author of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*

The focus of this working book was redesigned to provide a guide to examine, as educators living in a racialized society, how *we have absorbed the messaging of a racial caste*. This is true for all of us. Our racialization impacts our conscious and subconscious thinking. Our thinking influences the decisions we make in our policies, procedures, and practices. We have created systems that perpetuate structural racism.

The good news, however, is there are evidence-based processes and strategies we can use to increase our racial and cultural awareness and mitigate implicit bias to improve the academic and social-emotional outcomes in every preK–12 school in America. This working book shares many of them.

> *"Standing still is never an option so long as inequities*
> *remain embedded in the very fabric of the culture."*

Tim Wise
Author of *White Like Me*

We changed the emphasis of our work to focus specifically on racial disparities for the following reasons:

- The achievement gap persists when comparing Black and white students from middle-class backgrounds attending the same schools (Ogbu, 2003).

- Schools are a microcosm of our society and are impacted by other institutions such as religion, family, and politics.

- Some white Americans feel marginalized and fear losing majority control (Edsall, 2021; Jacobs, 2019; Klein, 2018; Sommers & North, 2011).

- In a survey conducted by *Education Week*, educators were asked to cite the reasons for the achievement gap between Black and white students.

  o   Three-quarters of the predominately white educators responded that motivation, parenting, home, and neighborhood environment were major influencers.

  o   Approximately 29% attributed the gap to genetics.

  o   39% said genetics was the reason Asian students outperformed white students.

  o   Less than 50% said discrimination played a role. (Samuels, 2020)

- 80% of American educators are white (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019).

- 51% of students in American schools are non-white (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019).

- 51% of students in public school are from low-income homes (Stand Together Foundation, 2017).

- Nationally, 15% of Black fourth graders were proficient readers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

- Nationally, 3% of Black fourth graders were advanced readers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

- There are schools successfully educating Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) students (Chenoweth, 2017; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Ibarra, 2020).

- There are ways we can mitigate explicit and implicit bias, learn how to engage in courageous conversations about race, and minimize the opportunity gap we've created.

Our theoretical premise is simple: Systems change when the people working in them change. Systemic modifications must be **second-order change.** Evidence that second-order change is rooted in the system's infrastructure is when students are successful learners because their educators behave, think, feel, and practice differently. When educators become racially and culturally aware, they are able to think in new ways and design a school culture with policies and procedures that work well for white students and students of color.

The three authors of this working book represent three racial perspectives from their professional and personal lives that we hope will be helpful to you. Chapter 8 shares additional testimonies of a superintendent, an elementary school principal, and two administrators of an organization that provides workshops in mindful practice for educators and students. All of them are currently leading, teaching, and striving for racial equity in their respective professions.

Race Resilience takes a deep dive into the attributes and cultures of schools that are successfully meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of their students, especially those that serve BIPOC students. It also explores the following concepts of racialization:

- Epigenetics, historical and transgenerational trauma

- Stereotype threat

- Microaggressions

- White identity orientations

- Internalized racism

- Implicit racial bias

- Mindful meditation to facilitate **post-traumatic growth**

Race Resilience shares a process to begin courageous conversations about how racialization and racial positioning influence our thoughts, behaviors, and expectations. There are videos and guiding questions to encourage self-reflection or group reflection to look within our professional selves as *racial* beings.

Race resilient educators work continuously to grow their awareness of how their racial identity impacts their practice. Their political and religious **ideologies** are not barriers in their work. Race resilient educators are intentional about striving to be the educator *all* students will remember as having made a positive contribution to their lives.

Each chapter in *Race Resilience* begins with LEARNING INTENTIONS the authors aspire readers will achieve. The guiding questions in the RETHINK, REVIEW, REDESIGN sections are integral to the process. They are designed to encourage self-reflection about the information

you have just read and examine the implications for your current practice, school policies, and school procedures.

Race Resilience is about our collective efficacy as educators to teach and lead in such a way that

- more of our students,

- across more of their differences

- achieve at a higher level

- and engage at a deeper level

- more of the time

- without giving up who they are. (Howard, 2016)

For Your Consideration

Can we agree on the following statements? Please add to this list.

1. Public education plays a critical role in a democratic nation. Our mission as educators is to prepare our students to become responsible citizens and contribute to the greater good of the country. We want every student to have the academic foundation and emotional intelligence needed to improve social conditions and promote cultural unity. Our goal is to do no harm to their academic growth and well-being (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

2. We want the preceding statements to be true for *all* students, not just *some* students.

3. Staff in high-performing, high-poverty schools work smarter, not harder. We are empowered by their example to REVIEW, RETHINK, and REDESIGN our policies and procedures to do a concerted effort to mirror their attributes in our classrooms and schools. It is our goal to know each student by name and need.

4. We abhor the brand school-to-prison pipeline. We do not want a complicit relationship or to be thought of as partners with the criminal justice system.

5. These are uncertain times for public education. In 2020, more than half of the U.S. states have some form of alternative educational options for families (e.g., tax credit or deductions, vouchers, tax credit scholarships, education savings account (EdChoice, 2020). During the 2020–2021 pandemic, homeschooling more than doubled (McDonald, 2020). According to an *Education Week* survey, 12% of parents whose children are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch chose to homeschool their children during the pandemic school closures (Prothero & Samuels, 2020).

6. All that we learned growing up in our families, the people in our extended communities, and distorted images in media racialize us. As a result, regardless of our ethnicity, we have blind spots about other groups based on their race, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, gender, age, and other factors. In our work, blind spots adversely impact our decision-making.

7. Like our colleagues in health care, we, too, wish to *do no harm* when working with any student or colleague, especially those who are different from us.

8. Humans are social beings. It is imperative that each student, especially in middle and high school, has an authentic relationship with at least one adult staff member. Belonging is a protective factor that enhances resilient behaviors (Benard, 2017; K. Hall, 2014; Romero et al., 2018).

9. We want to strive to make this statement true—*I am willing to do what it takes **not** to be that educator who creates a bad memory for any student.*

10. This working book focuses on mindfulness as *one* evidence-based technique for minimizing implicit racial bias. You may have heard of others. That is okay.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

Arthur Ashe
Tennis Champion

"The reality is that race in the United States operates on a spectrum from Black to white. Doesn't mean that people who are in between don't experience racism, but it means that the closer you are to white on that spectrum, the better off you are. And the closer to Black that you are on that spectrum, the worse off you are."

Alicia Garza
Cofounder of Black Lives Matter Network

Chapter 1. The Implementation Process: Steps to Becoming a Race Resilient School

We begin with the REDESIGNing stages or a suggested implementation process. Implementation is our starting point for several reasons. The flow of *Race Resilience* moves from whole to parts. In our framework, the first year of implementation is devoted to reading, talking, and analyzing. It is about building a foundation of knowledge about racialization and developing a culture and environment that is trusting and resilient. Chapter 1 sets the stage for planning with the end in mind. Envision what the attributes of a race resilient school will look like and use them as benchmarks to monitor your progress.

Chapter 2. The NEED: Societal Changes Change School

Understanding how changes in our society shape our perceptions and influence who we are as racial beings is crucial. For some, the election of our first Black president was a hopeful sign of progress; others felt wary. We are a nation in which multiple perspectives coexist. Schools are microcosms of our society. We can use the time we have with students to help them learn how to coexist with others who look and think differently. Chapter 2 begins the self-reflection conversation about how we create a space where all of these divergent views feel psychologically and emotionally safe.

Chapter 3. Creating the Culture for Developing a Race Resilient Climate

There is a reason we do not shout fire in a movie theater. Theater etiquette requires us to respect others by silencing our phones and not

talking loudly so everyone can enjoy what is on the screen. That's an example of a cultural agreement we make with strangers every time we go to see a movie. To create spaces where each racial group is psychologically and emotionally secure, the climate has to feel safe and protective. In order for the climate or environment to feel safe, everyone has to know what the cultural expectations are. Chapter 3 emphasizes the importance of culture and climate in REDESIGNing a school that is trusting and emotionally protective and values racial diversity.

Chapter 4. Educators' Emotions Matter: Building Up Stamina for Developing a Race Resilient Culture

It would be great if we educators could just stick with the mechanics of our jobs and focus only on content and leave our human complexities at the door. But as Parker Palmer said in his book *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life,* teaching encompasses our humanness. We bring all of who we are into our workplace. We are complex beings capable of learning, logical reasoning, abstract thought, using language, and self-awareness (Flamand, 2017). Working with so many other humans, there are many moments when we can be triggered negatively and too few that spark positive feelings. This chapter shares the importance of learning how our physiology controls positive and negative emotional responses. It adds another layer to addressing why being intentional about a healthy school environment minimizes distress and enhances eustress (i.e., positive stress).

> *"I want to learn how to hold the paradoxical poles of my identity together, to embrace the profoundly opposite truths that my sense of self is deeply dependent on others dancing with me and that I still have a sense of self when no one wants to dance."*
>
> **Parker Palmer**

Chapter 5. Racialization Can Be Blinding; Chapter 6. Race Has Mattered in the Schoolhouse

Chapters 1 through 4 set the foundation for the *HOW* in the implementation process. Chapters 5 and 6 share the *WHY*. Both chapters take a deep dive into how each of us, living in America, has been

racialized and how racialization positions us, influences our perceptions of others, and affects our coping mechanisms. Within these two chapters, we add depth to the concepts of racialization, including epigenetics, historical and transgenerational trauma, stereotype threat, microaggressions, white identity orientations, internalized racism, and implicit racial bias.

It is the authors' intent and hope that after you read both chapters, you will see historical trauma and transgenerational trauma are our shared common ground.

> *"The danger of oppression is not just being oppressed; it's becoming the oppressor."*

> **Jon Stewart**
> **Comedian, filmmaker, political commentator**

Chapter 7. Mindful of Race

Once we have rediscovered the historical roots of our racial positioning, we can use the information to seek ways and opportunities for post-traumatic growth. One of the ways we support each other is the practice of mindfulness because it has been researched and proven to be effective in redirecting cognitive thinking and functioning.

Mindfulness is used by physicians and therapists to help patients manage chronic pain, quit smoking and drug use, and lose weight. Fortune 500 companies offer workshops for employees. Mindful meditation has proven to reduce the effects of negative stress. And critical to our work, there is a growing body of research proving the effectiveness of mindful meditation in minimizing implicit racial bias. Chapter 7 shares the basic concept of mindfulness and what it does for the brain. The chapter also provides articles and videos to help further understanding and knowledge of mindfulness.

Chapter 8. Educator Resilience, Educator Race Resilience, and Mindfulness for Racial Equity

We asked four educators to share their experiences in leading for transformative systemic change to address issues of racial equity. Dr. Remy is the superintendent of West Des Moines Community Schools

in Iowa. After a series of racial incidents in her district, she contracted a company to provide professional development for administrative teams in every school in the district. Dr. Remy shares her educational philosophy and how it guides her work.

Mary McDaniel is the principal of Madrona Elementary School. Madrona is located in a community that is gentrifying. Sixty-four percent are BIPOC students, 49% qualify for free/reduced-price lunch, 17% are English language learners, and 13% are without permanent or stable housing. After experiencing high rates of teacher turnover during her first five years, she changed her practice and that changed the culture in her school.

Kim Armstrong and Tai Velasquez are practitioners of mindfulness. They use their expertise to provide workshops for educators and students. Space Between uses evidence-based practices to rewire the brain to improve focusing, learning, and making better choices. Their testimony begins with feedback from educators and families who have participated in their sessions.

We invite you to read all of the testimonies first. It is our way of letting you meet some people who have already started the journey to become racially responsive and resilient.

Appendix A. Process for Racial Awareness

The purpose of the Process for Racial Awareness tool is to

- explore thoughts and feelings you are having as they relate to situations you have encountered where you were racially triggered,

- gain a deeper understanding of your feelings and thoughts,

- practice mindfulness by focusing on the emotions you felt during that encounter, and

- use your findings as a guide to create an action plan to respond, cope, and thrive in a more culturally responsive way.

The process is not intended for you to change, blame, shame, help, or emotionally harm yourself or someone else. This exercise is for you to begin to gain a deeper, more tangible estimate of where you are in the

situation and uncover any beliefs, values, or lessons that you are not conscious of in your professional role.

Appendix B. Race Resilient School Checklist

Treat the Race Resilient School Checklist as a *suggested* things-to-do list. It is designed to parallel the implementation process outlined in Chapter 1, but it should be tailored to meet your school's unique needs. It can be adapted into a digital format for all staff to review and add evidence of completion.

Victoria, Amber, and Justin