Chapter Thirty-One
Even the Dirt is Dangerous:
Racism in U. S. American Study Abroad Programs

Peggy Shannon-Baker and Stephanie D. Talbot

[*Editor's Note*: In this chapter, the term "U.S. Americans" is used to distinguish Americans who live in the United States from those in Central and South America.]

Introduction

Be aware that women and small children, as well as men, can be pickpockets [sic] or purse snatchers. […] To guard against thieves on motorcycles, walk away from the curb, carrying your purse/backpack away from the street.

If you have brought back shoes or clothes that have been worn at the project site, you may have to be checked by the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors which is a normal practice to prevent the spread of agricultural diseases.

Water is unsafe.

(Sources: Pre-departure information packets from the college and/or the partner project that we worked with.)

We have seen these direct quotes in one or more of the pre-departure information packets for various international study abroad programs based out of the United States. On their own, these statements sound benign, simply warning U.S. Americans of border practices and policies, of the potential to get sick while abroad, and of how to protect oneself from theft. However, taken together with the reinforcement from program speakers, group leaders, and print sources, these messages perpetuate the stereotype that Others abroad are dirty, carry diseases, and should be feared (for example, Paola & Lemmer, 2013). Therefore, these warnings transmit another message: *Even the dirt is dangerous when you travel abroad.*

Among US students who studied abroad for academic credit in 2012-2013, 76% identified as White (Institute for International Education, 2014). As White American study abroad practitioners who work almost exclusively with White U.S. American student travellers, we see the grave need for international study abroad programs that embody anti-racism. Generally, these programs are used to promote global and cultural competencies through language immersion, multicultural interactions, and other experiences not necessarily possible through locally based programs (see Marx & Moss, 2011; Sharma et al, 2012). However, the success of such programs to increase students' cultural competence has been mixed. One study found that studying abroad only increased students' contact with diverse people, but not their appreciation for diversity nor their comfort in cross-cultural interactions (Salisbury, 2011).

We argue that the failure of this study abroad program to have a more holistic impact on students is, among other factors, a result of the program's limited direct engagement with race and racism. Without conscious attempts to critically engage with race, study abroad programs have the strong potential to feed into American students' stereotypes about the foreign Other. Throughout our varied experiences with study abroad programs, we have been struck by instances of racism that have received only minimal challenge. In response to this, we offer a discussion of examples of racism we have seen—including those we have perpetuated or left unchecked ourselves—with the goal of encouraging more direct engagement with race and racism in study abroad programs.

Our experiences consist of working in a variety of short-term international programs such as: a community service trip to Cameroon to work on a water filtration system; a Tasmanian program for education students to observe in schools and be mentored by Tanzanian teachers; a service-learning trip to indigenous Ecuadorian schools; and a service-learning trip to a racially

diverse region in Guatemala for first-generation college students. We have served in a variety of roles including teacher, organizer/program developer, and student.

We briefly outline several theoretical and conceptual frameworks upon which we base our discussion of racism in study abroad programs. Our framing of racism is informed by Critical Race Theory, which for us emphasizes making race central in our work as study abroad practitioners. In particular, we used Jennifer Ng's (2003) analysis of the *text* and *subtext* of multicultural education curricula as an exemplar in how to analyze components of study abroad programs for racism. Next, we will discuss several examples of racism that we have seen in our varied international educational experiences. Our examples here are notably not an extensive list, but they represent moments that we feel deserve further discussion. Then, we will discuss several ways to disrupt the perpetuation of racism in study abroad programs. Some recommendations o are based on practices that we already embody in our work, and others include ideas we have for our own future practice. We conclude the chapter by highlighting the injurious implications of avoiding the discussion of race and racism in study abroad programs.

Frameworks

Our discussion here is based on three theoretical and conceptual frameworks: Critical Race Theory, analyzing the text and subtext of educational programs, and practitioner-based research. Below, we introduce these frameworks in order to elaborate on the epistemological foundation that influenced our analysis.

Racism and Critical Race Theory

This discussion is based on Manning Marable's (1992) definition of racism as "a system

of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color" (p. 5). This work is also informed by Critical Race Theory, both an epistemology and methodological tool used by researchers interested in exploring race, racism, Whiteness, and White privilege (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Roithmayr, 1999). It was developed in response to critical legal studies (Bergerson, 2003), which omitted direct conversation on how race and racism played a fundamental role in building the legal system (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Among the tenets of Critical Race Theory is the fundamental belief that racism exists within daily lived experiences and institutional structures in the United States. As a result, Critical Race Theory seeks to expose the social construction of race, to critique liberal notions of meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality, and to abolish the grip of White supremacy and racism on our lives by centering race within critical inquiry.

The argument presented here is not based solely on the narratives and experiences of People of Color, a data set that is an essential characteristic of work that "does" Critical Race Theory (Tate, 1999). In addition, we have included some of the comments and experiences of Students and Staff of Color whom we have worked with, as well as data drawn from our own experiences and from program texts such as course syllabi and information packets. Thus, we see this work as "informed by" but not exclusively based on Critical Race Theory. Furthermore, the examples discussed here are based on our own analyses and on those generated from our conversations with others. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all of the potential ways that racism can persist in international experiences, nor were we able to include all of the examples that we collected in this research project. Those that follow are intended to initiate a discussion drawn from a range of perspectives.

The Text and Subtext of Study Abroad Programs

Edward Buendía (2003) highlights how the way in which we discuss and write about race is based in our conceptual frameworks, all of which are entrenched with White racial privilege. In other words, we categorize our lived experiences vis-à-vis frameworks designed to "[protect] privilege, [secure] distance and [laminate] the contradictions" (Fine, 1994, p. 72) between what is dominant and what is Other. In the context of this work, this means that our examples of "racism" in international programs are based in our own frames of what constitutes racism and in our own lived experiences as White women. In light of this, we have tried to maintain openness to discovering our own racist tendencies. Also, as White female study abroad program practitioners, women with lifelong access to White power and privilege, we argue that it is critical that we ask how our programs and practices perpetuate racism.

With this tension in mind, it has been helpful to use Jennifer Ng's (2003) discussion of the texts and subtexts that operate within multicultural education curricula. She argues that one way to evaluate the underlying values of a teacher education program is to consider texts such as the required courses for the program, field experience design, student assignments, and certification procedures. As well, she looks for racism in curricular subtexts such as the messages conveyed during class activities and discussions, interpretations of course readings, and reactions when something unplanned happens in class or in another course experience.

Study abroad programs and their affiliated coursework similarly have texts and subtexts worth analyzing for racist messages. For example, the texts of these programs include course syllabi, advertising materials, applications for admission, documents for pre-departure preparation such as requirements from the Centers for Disease Control, personal packing lists,

and so on. The program subtexts then include messages transmitted through these texts, as well as discussions and activities that students engage in during the program. We selected examples from some of these texts and subtexts that have perpetuated racist messages.

Practitioner-Based Research

Finally, our discussion here is based on a practitioner-based, action research perspective (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Hubbard & Powers, 2003). This perspective emphasizes the importance of our practice as teachers and study abroad program developers. Within this location, we shared with each other our experiences of teaching in study abroad programs, reflected on our use (or omission) of anti-racist approaches, and collaboratively identified anti-racist strategies that we could use in future programs.

Racism in Study Abroad Programs

Racism thrives in environments where racist stereotypes and beliefs not only go unchecked but are exemplified. This is no more evident than in study abroad programs, particularly those that take students to developing countries and are populated primarily by White U.S. Americans who make up the majority of study abroad participants (Institute for International Education, 2014). We discuss several examples here, grouped under larger themes that surfaced in our discussions. These aren't necessarily all the ways racism would manifest in these programs.

Property that is Worth Protecting Versus Disposable Possessions

In all of the programs that we have been involved with, there has been a troubling duality about U.S. American property, or personal belongings, clothing, and other people's valuables.

On the one hand, there is strong rhetoric concerning the loss of one's property. For example, in one of our programs, students were very strongly urged not to bring anything of value with them such as laptops, smart phones, or jewelry. This was couched not only in rhetoric about keeping their valuables "safe" by leaving them at home, but also in the expectation that people "will steal from you". In another program, participants were told that people "will ask [them] for money". Statements like this created an anticipation that the people we would meet abroad were desperate and brazen enough to ask someone for money even though talking about money in the United States is generally frowned upon in polite society.

On the other hand, several of our programs also included rhetoric about disposable property. Take the following quote, for example, from one of the program's information packet: "Consider bringing items that you won't mind parting with, as you will have the opportunity to donate clothing to villagers at the end of the trip". In another program, students were actively encouraged to leave clothes behind as a way to make room in their luggage for souvenirs they would purchase. Also, participants were told to consider leaving clothing behind that might be "contaminated" with dirt from rural areas. We have even heard students colloquially talking about how they purchased most of the clothing they would bring from Goodwill or other second-hand stores with the purpose of wearing and then leaving them.

What kind of message does this act portray about the host community if it is seen as a place where one can leave their dirty, second-hand, disposable clothing behind? Although this act is often described as "helping" the local community, in our experience little forethought is given to clothing that locals actually say they need. Instead, these countries become a dumpsite for programs to leave behind those things they care less about in order to purchase new items and protect the property they do care about. We see this as ultimately connected to the concept of

Whiteness as property that must be protected (Bondi, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1999). In other words, only the property that is associated with the power and privilege of Whiteness is kept safe (e.g. phones, laptops, jewelry, money), while those items that do not embody Whiteness are left to "help" people in developing countries (e.g. dirty and used clothing).

Photographs

Another important area for considering how racism permeates study abroad programs from the United States is in the common practice of taking photographs. Photographs help to describe the experience and memory of a student's time abroad (Caton & Almeida Santos, 2008), and communicate to friends and family back home. Often these photographs carry messages that stereotype the destination culture and community (Roig, 2009), and even go so far as to serve as a postcolonial panopticon, keeping a watchful eye over people in developing countries (Shannon-Baker, in press). By considering the use of the visual field of a photograph, such as what is included and what is omitted from a picture, how it is shown, as well as the way that students describe their photographs, Shannon-Baker argues that photographs transmit racist messages. A typical example is the depiction of African men as "oxen". Other photographs may identify natural landscapes as beautiful and in stark contrast to the rusted tin roofs of cityscapes that are deemed, through a lack of recognition, "unlikeable". As well, presenting photographs of a developing country that only display contrasting types of footwear or women collecting water, *without* also showing the country's vibrant nightlife, local expertise, progressive leadership, and business infrastructures perpetuates a racist image of that country's culture. Without directed discussion about the practices of photography, examination of who is taking a picture, and consideration of who is included and omitted from a picture, this medium will continue to be a

medium of unchecked racial stereotyping.

Choosing and Describing a Study Abroad Program Location

Racism may also be perpetuated through the choice of location. Study abroad is often associated with traditional tours of Europe and Oceania, since these locations are the most often chosen by program developers (Bhandari & Chow, 2011). In conversations with other study abroad practitioners, we have heard comments about how "easy" it is to set up programs in these regions, believing that language will not be an issue and that students will "fit in" better there. We speculate that part of this reasoning is to avoid having conversations about race and racism, especially given that these programs are predominately populated by White students going to westernized countries. The logic goes that traveling to a White region with a group of mostly White students would likely not require a serious interrogation of race, globalization, colonialism, or other regional cultural differences, whereas going to countries largely populated by non-White people might require such conversations. However, it is important to discuss race, colonialism, and globalization in all programs regardless of the demographics of the travelling and receiving populations. What is especially troubling here is the misconception that there is a need for programs to be "easier" because they do not engage in a discussion of race. The choice of location serves as a form of essentialism, thus illustrating the salience of White identity. This assumption underscores our own "silent racism" (Trepagnier, 2001) in which program leaders may not be aware of their racist assumptions.

Without intentional engagement with race and racism, especially in programs going to countries with a colonial history, the program can actually recreate the imperialist image of White U.S. Americans walking through indigenous towns, "roughing it", and purchasing local

crafts. Blatant ethnocentrism may go unchecked as students come to see their work as a "mission trip"—a term that ironically echoes some countries' religious-based colonial history—where Americans come to "help" those less fortunate. Following a return to the US, one student told Stephanie, "I wish the world was all like us here". While this student did not impute ill will toward the people she described, she was also not clear on her own biases of U.S. American exceptionalism. We have also heard comments about how students did not understand how people abroad could be so poor and still be happy. This statement imparts American ideals of success in terms of material wealth as opposed to ideals of collectivist cultures.

Essentializing Students of Color in a Study Abroad Program

Students in a program that Peggy co-led participated in a long conversation about experiences of race, gender, and class on campus. Among the topics discussed was how students of color are essentialized based on their racial and ethnic identities. One student recounted being explicitly asked to speak for a black perspective. Indeed this kind of comment is a common experience among People of Color according to students and our colleagues of color, and is especially the case for students of color in study abroad experiences. For example, a black student talked about others' expectations that she would fit in better going abroad to Africa. Another student, who was of African descent, expected to more easily adjust based on her African identity. Though not an example of racism exactly, her experience signify the beliefs she had that she could bond with others based on a shared "African" identity, while failing to take into consideration how locals first saw her as American. In another program, a Mexican-American student was repeatedly asked to translate in a Spanish-speaking nation. Although she may have been willing to assist others, the expectation (and sometimes demands) placed upon

her caused her to feel essentialized. Thus, not only should programs interrogate racist stereotypes forced onto destination cultures but also those forced onto program participants.

Recommendations for Subverting Racism

We believe that in order for these programs to engage with racism, affiliated courses and other programming should build collaborative relationships abroad, to address race and racism throughout, and to engage in a critique of U.S. American involvement abroad. Below, we discuss several potential strategies for subverting racism in study abroad programs.

Meet Locally Identified Needs

In study abroad programs that work with local non-profits or other organizations, program developers and students should carefully consider their role and relationship with these groups. For example, programs with a service component abroad should consider who identified the local need(s) to be addressed and strategies used. Was the decision on who to "serve" or how to do it made only in the United States or among the people abroad? For instance, Peggy led a study abroad program that facilitated a day-long workshop for primary level science teachers. The topic for the workshop, generating ideas for creating more interactive lesson plans, was one that the local teachers identified through discussions with a local non-profit. Then, after identifying this need, the non-profit worked with Peggy and another teacher from the United States to organize and host the workshop. Rather than imposing what we as White American teachers thought the schools needed for teacher training, this process maintained the leadership power and choices within the local community. We also made sure to plan the workshop through collaboration among everyone involved while using our access to funding and transportation to

help secure resources such as updated curriculum books. Thus, study abroad programs should mobilize their access and privilege in ways that assist communities abroad in ways they need, and via mechanisms they identify. Otherwise, "community service" abroad stands the risk of maintaining a colonialist power over other countries (see Namakkal, 2013).

Address the Intersections of Race with Other Identities

Programs should make it a point to discuss local race relations and the complex intersections between race and other forms of identity. Such discussions take place in the program Stephanie led to Guatemala. For example, the African diaspora was an important lesson for this program because it gave the socio-historical context for the area in which they visited. One African American student was often approached by Afro-Caribbean Guatemalans, *Garifunas*, asking about his family because it was unique for them to see a racially diverse group of Americans. In the program that Peggy co-led to Ecuador, the class spent several weeks considering historical tensions between the higher class *mestizas* of Spanish heritage and rural *indigenas*, or the indigenous population. Reading the novel *Queen of Water*, which is based on a true story about a young indigenous girl sold to a *mestizo* family as a servant, helped students see the impact of family structure, tradition, gender, social class, and education on race relations between the two groups. Building this complex understanding of local culture is also possible through bringing in a variety of speakers to discuss their experiences abroad, including aid workers, local people who emigrated to the United States, and students from past trips. We argue that by addressing these concerns, students can create a counter-narrative to the otherwise singular representation of the local community seen in program advertisements and travel guides. Such discussions also have the potential for students to develop a more complex understanding

of the intersections of race with other identities here in the United States.

The Importance of Inclusiveness

Additionally, programs should be built upon the principle of inclusiveness. In order for non-traditional, first-generation and students of color to feel encouraged to participate in these programs, the recruitment phase should specifically address the concerns of these students. For example, we see it as the responsibility of program leaders to assist students in finding: additional funding (especially when high program costs exclude many students), academic support for any missed classes, and help in adjusting upon return from abroad. Not all students have mentor figures who can assist with these areas that are critical to a student participating in a program without disrupting their other academic, financial, and familial commitments.

Critically Examine the Experiences of U.S. American Involvement Abroad

We strongly encourage programs to not only discuss historical forces of globalization and colonialism, but also interrogate U.S. American involvement abroad. We have found that this can be especially challenging for students, particularly White students, who come to programs with the intention of "helping others". This kind of discussion will entail critical introspection on one's access to privilege on multiple planes—gender, race, citizenship, social class, and others.

Grounding in one's daily practices (such as taking photographs, as discussed above) and interactions with others while abroad, these discussions can promote more thoughtful and anti-racist practices. For example, in one program's information packet, the leaders specifically discuss the potential negative impact of "handouts" or "gifts". Although program participants might feel that bringing hygiene supplies or candy for children could be helpful, this packet

discussed the impact this has on trash and pollution levels abroad. It also discussed how this contradicted the program's intentions to help local communities meet their own most pressing needs. In another example, students in Stephanie's program were encouraged to read historical narratives of the colonizing effects of European settlers in the 16th Century. This led to discussing a recent account of US political involvement in Guatemala and the subsequent genocide of indigenous Mayan groups. Thus, it is important for these programs to place their interaction with other countries within their historical context.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed several examples of racist acts, practices, and rhetoric based on our experiences of a variety of international study abroad programs. For example, we discussed how common practices of taking photographs and leaving one's clothes behind reflect racist beliefs about local communities. We based this discussion on our understanding of racism as both a subtle and an overt mechanism of power over People of Color. Although this is only a small list of examples of racism in such programs, many more certainly exist. For this reason, more discussion is needed about racism in U.S. American study abroad programs. We also offered several suggested recommendations for specific ways in which programs can pre-emptively address racism, such as through meeting the needs of a local community based on what they identify and critiquing the context of U.S. American involvement abroad.

There is a "conservative *ideology of hope*" (Ng, 2003) among White teachers, one that focuses on valuing success and hard work at the expense of recognizing the impact of institutional racism on students of color:

> [B]ehind those words exists an entire reality which protects the professional educators' self-esteem at the expense of the children; protects the educators' status at the expense of

> the community's interests; protects the Whites at the expense of the Blacks; protects the middle class from competition with those who they feel aren't ready, or don't deserve the good things of this glutted society. (Wilson, 1970, as cited in Kailin, 1999, p. 743)

Wilson here states that White teachers' reluctance to directly address racism only serves to protect their own power, privilege, and status. We argue that the same holds true for international study abroad programs from the United States. Simply put, without directly addressing race and racism, these programs protect the existing global imbalance of power and resources. Programs that do not support lasting, community-centered change help to legitimate and perpetuate the belief that developing countries abroad need U.S. Americans to save them from their horrible living conditions. Ultimately, higher education has the potential to greatly impact the ubiquity of racism in our daily lives. One strategy to do this is through the use of international study abroad programs that present a counter-narrative (Milner, 2007) to racist stereotypes about host communities abroad by investigating the complexities of identities, race, colonialism, and globalization. By doing this, programs might then be better able to meet their goals of developing students' cultural competence, and help to dismantle racism on a global scale.

References

Bergerson, A. A. (2003). Critical race theory and white racism: Is there room for white scholars in fighting racism in education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(1), 51-63.

Bhandari, R. & Chow, P. (2011). *Open Doors 2011: Report on International Educational Exchange*. New York, NY: Institute of International Education.

Bondi, S. (2012). Students and institutions protecting Whiteness as property: A Critical Race Theory analysis of student affairs preparation. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 49*(4), 397-414.

Buendía, E. (2003). Fashioning research stories: The metaphoric and narrative structure of writing research about race. In G. R. López & L. Parker (Eds.), *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology* (pp. 49-69). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Caton, K., & Almeida Santos, C. (2008). Closing the hermeneutic circle? Photographic encounters with the other. *Annals of Tourism Research, 35*(1), 7-26.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. N. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.

Hubbard, R. S. & Powers, B. M. (2003). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kailin, J. (1999). Education and race: How White teachers perceive the problem of racism in their schools: A case study in "Liberal" Lakeview. *Teachers College Record, 100*(4), 724-750.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Just what is Critical Race Theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In L. Parker, D. Deyhle, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is… race isn't: Critical Race Theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 7-30). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Marable, M. (1992). *Black America*. Westfield, NJ: Open Media.

Marx, H., & Moss, D. M. (2011). Please mind the culture gap: Intercultural development during a teacher education study abroad program. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(1), 35-47.

Namakkal, J. (2013, August 29). Whose voices get heard? Study abroad as neo-colonial tourism. *Counterpunch*. Retrieved from http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/08/29/study-aboard-as-neo-colonial-tourism/

Ng, J. (2003). Multicultural education in teacher training programs and its implications on preparedness for effective work in urban settings. In G. R. López & L. Parker (Eds.), *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology* (pp. 97-122). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's race got to do with it? Critical Race Theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 7-22.

Paola, R. J., & Lemmer, E. M. (2013). Not merely a matter of academics'[sic]: Student experiences of a South African university as study-abroad destination. *Africa Education Review, 10*(1), 80-96.

Roig, E. M. (2009). *Discussing the role of authenticity and identity in a mass tourism destination's image construction*. Exploring Tourism III: Issues in PhD Research. Proceedings of the PhD Networking Conference (pp. 159-175). Nottingham, UK: University of Nottingham.

Roithmayr, D. (1999). Introduction to Critical Race Theory in educational research and praxis. In L. Parker, D. Deyhle, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is… race isn't: Critical Race Theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 1-6). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Salisbury, M. N. (2011). *The effect of study abroad on intercultural competence among undergraduate college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://www.ir.uiowa.edu/etd

Shannon-Baker, P. (in press). Photographs from abroad: Maintaining or disrupting a panoptic colonial discourse? In L. M. Nicosia & R. A. Goldstein (Eds.), *Through a distorted lens: Media as curricula and pedagogy in the 21st Century*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Sharma, S., El-Atwani, K., Rahatzad, J., Ware, J., Phillion, J., & Malewski, E. (2012). How disorienting experiences in informal learning contexts promote cross-cultural awareness in preservice teachers: Findings from a study abroad program. *LEARNing Landscapes, 5*(2), 281-294.

Tate, W. F. (1999). Conclusion. In L. Parker, D. Deyhle, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is… race isn't: Critical Race Theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 251-272). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Trepagnier, B. (2001). Deconstructing categories: The exposure of silent racism. *Symbolic Interaction* 24(2), 141-163.