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WHITE PRIVILEGE: A HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

by

JACOB BENNETT

Under the Direction of Dr. David Sehat

ABSTRACT

This thesis' goal is to examine the way the term and concept of white privilege has been created in contemporary American society. The argument of the thesis will be that before and directly after discrimination was made illegal in the United States by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, scholars and activists implemented the term white privilege to describe structural and governmentally perpetuated privilege in the United States that had been consciously given to whites. This privilege allowed whites to obtain legal advantages over minorities across the nation. Years after the legislation was passed, however, discrimination was still an issue in the country. White privilege's definition shifted in order to explain the reason for that reality; White privilege was not perpetuated by conscious and explicit efforts, but by white citizen's subconscious. This thesis will show how that shift occurred, using scholarly and non-academic writer's usage of the term white privilege.

INDEX WORDS: White privilege

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WHITE PRIVILEGE: A HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

by

JACOB BENNETT

Committee Chair: David Sehat

Committee: Charles Steffen

Michelle Brattain

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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1. Introduction

The meaning of the term white privilege is one that has always been changing, seemingly never agreed upon in academic treatments or in popular media usage. Our contemporary understanding of the term originates from an article written in 1987 by Peggy McIntosh, a professor of Women's Studies at Wellesley College. Before McIntosh's insightful essay, however, many identified white privilege very differently than the post-McIntosh era has. The objective of this thesis is to discover how the term white privilege has been used in American History, and how the term's meaning has shifted over the past few generations.

The bulk of the research was done using online databases such as Lexis Nexis and EBSCOhost through Georgia State University's online library. Sixty seven separate articles were explored in which the term white privilege was implemented. The articles ranged in scholarly fields from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history and higher education journals in order to understand how different academics began to implement the term. Popular news sources such as the liberal and conservative weekly magazines *The Nation* and *The National Review* were explored, as well as popular periodicals such as *The New York Times, Chicago Defender, and Baltimore Sun*. The objective in comparing these sources was to understand how the concept of white privilege has shifted in American society, and if either forum, popular or academic, has had more of an effect on our contemporary understanding.

The study of whiteness has become an increasingly popular field of scholarship in the past few decades, stemming from the early writings of W.E.B Dubois in the mid-twentieth century and his examination of what it meant to be white in America, and the world. This thesis, however, is not meant to examine the field of whiteness studies itself, but the usage and un-

derstanding of the term white privilege in all fields of scholarship and popular culture. The definition of the term has shifted immensely from how individuals in the past interpreted the phrase. Early writers who employed the concept did so with a very different understanding and objective than contemporary scholars and writers in non-academic forums have. One reason for this shift was explained by Thomas Kuhn's in the core argument of his work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. As Daniel T. Rodgers has written, "Not logic, but interpretive needs create paradigms."[1] White privilege is a paradigm of how the world works in a particular way, however, that way has shifted. Before discrimination in public forums was made illegal with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, writers interpreted and connected white privilege with blatant public acts of discrimination perpetuated and protected by governmental regulations. A paradigm shift came after Peggy McIntosh's 1987 lecture turned journal article, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, when many of the old forms of public discrimination had been deemed illegal. Scholars and non-academic writers alike would now interpret the concept of white privilege to meet their new needs: uncovering the answer to why acts of discrimination were still present in society, even after they were deemed illegal by congressional law. Strongly influenced by McIntosh, the paradigm shifted to understanding white privilege as being perpetuated by Americans' unconsciousness. More of a psychological understanding of discrimination and privilege would become the norm in explaining such things as the continued lag in performance metrics by various minority groups.

As show in the chart below from the online database Google Ngram, the term white privilege was not used much in American literature until the mid-twentieth century, spiking

[1] Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: the Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History*, 79, no.1 (June 1992): 12.

dramatically in the late 1980s.[2] In the time of its early usage, however, the concept was implemented to describe the structural and governmentally organized systems of discrimination perpetuated under segregation in the United States. The spike in the 1980's corresponds directly with McIntosh's publication of her hypothesis about psychological privilege being perpetuated unconsciously in American society.

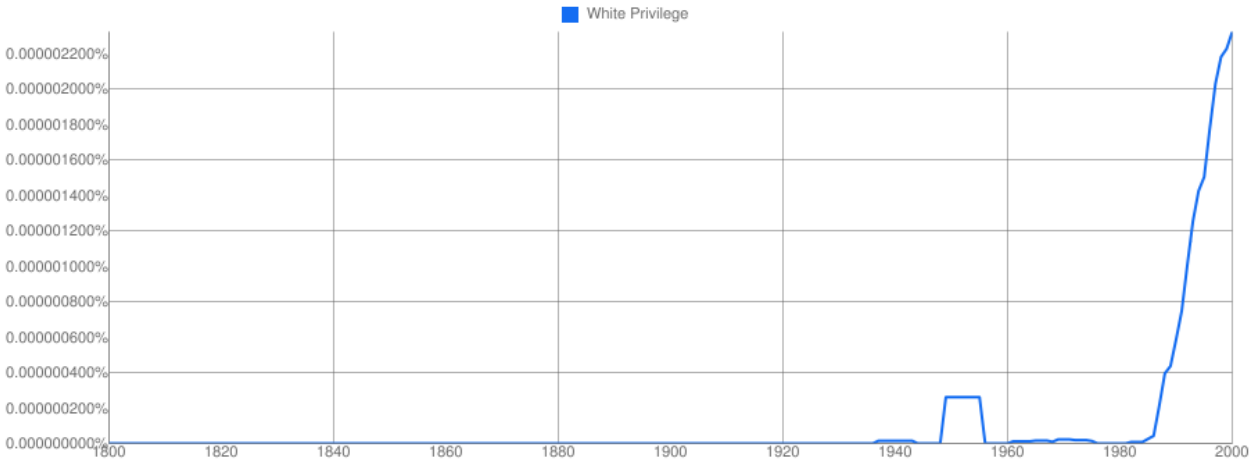

Table 1: White Privilege's usage in American literature (1800-2000)

Other scholars, David Roediger in particular, began to re-examine the concept of whiteness in the early 1990's. In his work *The Wages of Whiteness,* Roediger does well to re-hash the insights of W.E.B Dubois and the creation of a white consciousness, however, Roediger never uses the term white privilege in his work, the only reference to the concept being written in the introduction by Kathleen Cleaver when she wrote "Roediger does not focus here on the material benefits of 'white skin' privilege, but instead examines the agency of working men themselves and the construction of whiteness."[3] Cleaver's introduction shows that the concept of

[2]http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=White+Privilege&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=0&smoothing=3<accessed on [January, 20, 2012]>

[3] Kathleen Cleaver in David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class,* (New York: Verso, 1991), xix.

white privilege was known to Roediger, however, the scholar chose not to deploy its usage in examining the creation a white identity in American culture.

This paper will specifically follow the usage of the term white privilege throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century until the past year, following the paths that the shifts in understanding of the concept have taken and been implemented in American journalism and scholarship. Understanding this shift is beneficial to us in academics for the fact that it illustrates how liberal attitudes have shifted in American society. Culminating with the New Deal, early liberals fought for equal rights to be given by the government to all citizens in the United States. When that goal was accomplished, however, problems of discrimination and prejudice were still realities in America. Recognizing how liberals came to explain the reasons for those continuations through an understanding of psychologically driven white privilege will explain how many who have taken up the "liberal cause" began to interpret the world much differently than ever before. Many negative aspects of our world were not controlled by explicit actions, but unconscious perpetuations of discrimination.

2. Pre-1980

Discrimination and racism have been stains on American culture since the country's inception, when the founding fathers decided against outlawing slavery while drafting the first set of laws for the newly founded nation. With that decision, people of color in the United States would be seen as less than whites from the beginning: property, not people. Into the nineteenth century, whites in the United States continued to be allowed certain legal advantages over people who were unfortunate enough to be born with darker skin. In this period of legal discrimination and prejudice the term white privilege was seemingly unknown in Amer-

ican intellectual and popular culture. Never did anyone place the terms white and privilege side by side, instead refereeing to certain legislative and social benefits given to whites as "the privilege of whites." In an 1837 issue of William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, a column containing minutes from an anti-slavery convention in Boston on June 2 plead to President Van Buren to give men of color those privileges that had been reserved to whites for generations. The constitution resolution began, "Resolved, that inasmuch as the present Chief Magistrate of the United States is a professed advocate of the rights of men . . . [he has] exerted himself to secure the colored man equally the privilege of whites."[4] The privilege of whites meant things like being able to become a citizen of the nation, to vote in elections, to own property, and other legal definitions of privilege. The government of the United States systematically and structurally perpetuated these advantages.

In 1868, President Johnson signed off on the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which sought to bring blacks in the United States the privileges that many had fought for in the bloodiest conflict ever seen on American soil. It would seem that the belief was that by drafting this amendment and giving black men citizenship in the nation the system of racism that had plagued the land of liberty for almost a century would end. Sadly, any hope of privileges being extended to blacks in the United States was trumped less than thirty years later, when a man proved whites were still privileged even with the new amendment becoming law. In 1892, an "octoroon," or a person that had 1/8 African American blood coursing through his veins, attempted to board and sit on a white only railroad car in New Orleans. The man, Homer Plessy, argued that the state of Louisiana was violating the Fourteenth Amendment to the Con-

[4] *The Liberator*, June 2, 1837, p 91.

stitution by not allowing blacks to occupy certain areas of public transportation in the city of New Orleans. An officer of the law who had been hired by the Citizens Committee of New Orleans (the same organization that hired the "octoroon" to undertake the task) arrested Plessy. The committee hoped the arrest would open the citizens of the United States' eyes about the reality of unequal treatment going on even after the fourteenth amendment had been passed. Four years and many court cases later, however, the Supreme Court of the United States of America ruled that the train company who forced Plessy to leave the car was acting in accordance with the U.S constitution and not breaking the laws set by the fourteenth amendment. This event ratified nearly sixty years of legal discrimination in the United States, the Jim Crow regime.

Under these conditions, legal racism ran rampant inside the country of liberty and justice for all until 1954 when the Supreme Court overturned the Plessy decision in *Brown v. Board of Education.* The case exposed the fact that the separate but equal policies put in place by the 1896 decision where inherently unequal, and made segregation in the public schools systems of the United States illegal, paving the way for more civil rights legislation in all social and professional fields of the United States. However again, nowhere in this legislative act or in the ones to follow was the term white privilege utilized to describe the unequal treatment of blacks in American society. White privilege itself would not be widely used in academics or popular culture for another decade to describe these American inequalities.

The landmark legislation that sought to truly end discrimination in the United States and turn years of racism and prejudice around was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The years of unequal treatment, however, seemed to have become more deeply engrained in American society

than most had realized, and certain observers began to explain this reality by using terms like white privilege. To these writers, white privilege was tied to a time of legal discrimination of minorities by whites that had recently ended, and their use of the term corresponded with this belief. A few decades prior and actually during this period, the scholar W.E.B Dubois began to examine what it meant to be white in America. Producing many of the seminal pieces examining the concept whiteness, Dubois explained that many whites in America began to expect to be treated certain ways because of their whiteness and the structural privileges being granted to them. Dubois wrote, "The consequences of [racist] thought were bad enough for colored people the world over, but they were even worse when one considers what this attitude did to the [white] worker . . . He began to want, not comfort for all men but power over other men . . . He did not love humanity and he hated niggers."[5] Dubois, however, never actually used the term white privilege to describe these tendencies of whites in the United States. It is clear that his explanations and understandings are very much in line with the understanding of the time of structural and politically driven white privilege.

In an April 18, 1968 article from the popular newspaper *The Chicago Defender,* associate editor Betty Washington wrote, "clergymen will lead marchers into the 'uncivilized' areas of the city to remind [Mayor Richard J.] Daley and his colleagues and henchmen of the existence of contiguous white 'privilege' ghettos."[6] The term ghetto implied a place inhabited by one ethnicity: in this case, white. Washington understood that even after discrimination had been deemed illegal by the Civil Rights Act of 64', certain habits would be hard to break. White peo-

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[5] W.E.B Dubois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History,* (New York: International Publishing Co., 1965), 12.

[6] Betty Washington, "Chicago to be Hit with Protest Marches: SCLC", *Chicago Daily Defender,* April 18, 1968, p. 3.

ple who decided to live in certain areas of the city were defined as privileged because even though not allowing blacks or other people of color to live there was illegal, the choice to remain in social segregation was still made in Chicago. Much more than mere legislative acts would be necessary to end the social separation that made these white ghettos, and white privilege would now be the term many would implement to describe these extralegal realities.

Other cities as well would continue to remain segregated after legislation had been passed in an effort to terminate it. In 1965, journalist McCandlish Phillips described an all-white neighborhood in up-state New York as being a "lost era of quiet luxury." The residents of the neighborhood attempted to keep the area of Riverdale quiet and luxurious by not allowing any people of color to move in. Phillips wrote, however, that many of the local elite in business and politics wished to end this old pattern of white privilege. White privilege to Phillips and these elites was a leftover from the dark American past in which no one but whites were legally allowed to own property in Riverdale. Now that segregation was illegal, Phillips felt privilege was being perpetuated by social choice, and this needed to be reversed. Phillips wrote, "Many of the biggest names in Riverdale – men in government, law, the arts, and especially the clergy – have come out flat for open housing, and there is a strong consensus among leaders against the old patterns of white privilege."[7] If the legislative act of 1964 had not ended white privilege, then there must be another reason for the continuing racial separations in neighborhoods around the country. It seems that Phillips and these elites believed the continuation of white privilege was a matter of choice; let in minorities or not, and that these families in Riverdale needed to change their decision-making.

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[7] McCandlish Phillips, "Lost Era of Quiet Luxury Survives in the Mansions of Riverdale," *New York Times,* April 15, 1965, p. 68.

In an article from the popular academic journal *The Nation*, also from 1965, historian C. Vann Woodward described how he understood the history of blacks in the United States. Woodward described that since WWII, blacks in America had been trying to find their history and had settled upon three main strategies in doing so: 1) Rejecting all history of blacks in the United States and starting a new, 2) Identifying with the past of another group and attaching themselves to the cultures and beliefs of that group, such as Muslim or Jewish blacks, 3) Making over the past as a crutch for self-esteem and racial pride by highlighting all of the problems African Americans had faced in the United States. In speaking about the third option, Woodward argued that certain eras such as the Progressive Era, which was believed to have been so beneficial to minorities in the nation, did nothing but promote and extend white privilege. Woodward wrote, "The greatest blind-spot of the whole Progressive generation was the Negro . . . They thought about him, but only in defeatist and negative terms. They legislated about him, but only to protect white privilege. They litigated about him, but only to weaken constitutional protection of his rights."[8] Legislative choices to keep minorities as inferior to whites in the country were the way white privilege was perpetuated, and understood. There were explicit decisions being made by normal American citizens and members of the government.

Now that the legal efforts to protect white privilege Woodward spoke about had been made illegal, writers would look to conscious social decisions that perpetuated white privilege. In an article from the *Chicago Defender* in 1969, S.R.W Smith wrote of a janitor at the University of California Berkeley who replied to an essay that had been written by a professor at U.C Berkeley in which he described blacks as being "genetically inferior" to whites. Smith wrote,

[8] C. Vann Woodward, "Flight From History: The Heritage of the Negro," *The Nation*, September 20, 1965, p. 142.

"South-sider Roy L. Brown, of 4137 S. Michigan, rapped the professor and called the paper a 'racist defense of white privilege'." Smith went on to describe the rest of Brown's letter, which ended with Brown arguing that whites pretended they had a minority's best interest in mind, when in reality they were doing their best to handicap minorities and perpetuate the system of white privilege.[9] This was white privilege even after legal privilege had been ended: conscious social efforts to separate whites from blacks in order to preserve the old legal world of white supremacy. If whites were able to make people believe blacks and other minorities were inferior to themselves, then the legal privileges they used to obtain would seem justified. Men like Smith hoped to stop this way of thinking by linking racism with this old legal privileged system.

Religious newspapers of the time also had a similar understanding of white privilege as these secular sources, and some hoped to link old views of legal privilege with racism, just as Smith had done. The bi-weekly publication *Christian Century* published an article in 1970 written by Michael Stone entitled "Roundup: The Year of the Black Manifesto." The article listed arguments for and against reparations being paid to black people in the United States for injustices against them in the past, mainly slavery. The goal of reparations were to make up for ground lost when people of color could not legally own property, take out a loan, or participate in many other financial practices that whites citizens always had been able to be involved in. Stone explained that the leadership of the Church admitted to racism being present in the United States, and that it was one of the main social problems at the time. However, as Stone wrote, "At the same time, they rejected the demands for reparations, stating that the religious

[9] S.R.W Smith, "Southside Janitor Raps Berkeley Professor: He reacts to Racist Report," *Chicago Defender,* June 16, 1969, p. 8.

task is to deal with present sufferings including those stemming from past injustices by ministering to the men and women who today bear in their own bodies' souls the scars of white privilege and white racism."[10] Scars only are seen after the original cut has been made. The scars of white privilege that Stone referred to were the legal days of discrimination; blatant choices made by the courts of the United States to make whites the superior race of the nation. Now that these policies were illegal, the church felt its role was to help those who had faced the wrath of legally endorsed prejudice. Scars of white privilege implied that that sort of privilege was something of the past, and that social and extralegal privileges were not a reality in American culture to church officials. Seeing white privilege through the lens of the past would not only be a way to understand the concept by religious publications, but popular academic journals as well.

In *The National Review*, one writer urged others to understand white privilege in its past legal form in order to battle it in its present condition and the problems that may arise because of it. In a 1971 issue of *The National Review,* a conservative publication started in New York City by the conservative author William F. Buckley Jr., a section of the publication entitled "Focus On" told of the problems being seen in New Jersey of racial riots and strikes by local minority teachers. The article included interviews with two subjects who represented each side of the issue at hand. On the one side, the vice president of the Newark Teachers Union, Clara Dasher, explained her views on the strike. Ms. Dasher declared, "The issue is no longer simply the strike, it is whether or not Newark schools and ultimately the city care to be governed by law or

[10] Michael Stone, "The World Around Us," *Christian Century*, February 11, 1970, 187.

mob violence." On the other side of the argument, the "black militants" as they were described in the article, implored the city to see the strikes in a different light. The article read, "What really is at stake is whether Negro interests are going to be forced to continue subordinate to white privilege. The teachers, the blacks point out, are mostly white and live mostly in the comfortable suburbs. The students are predominantly black and live in the slums of the city."[11] Being forced to subordinate seems to be referencing something that legally cannot be disputed. The year now was 1971 and minorities in New Jersey were still fighting the battles that were fought pre-1964. In order to end those old systems of white privilege, writers like the one above pushed the citizens of the United States to see the problems privilege brought from both sides. By realizing the reason the militants were fighting, better decision could be made to prevent future uprisings. Urging Americans to make better social choices and not continue the privileged systems of the past would be the way writers and academics felt white privilege could be ended, since the legal ban seemed to be ineffective.

A professor at the University of Chicago warned of a "grim choice on the black issue," if those choices were not changed. The professor, John Hope Franklin, gave the warning in his third and final lecture on race relations in America at the 1976 Jefferson Lectures in the Humanities in San Francisco. Dr. Franklin stated, "The basis for division [in the country] had been primarily race, and that it had appeared, by the end of WWI, 'that the formula for dividing equality in such a way that some enjoyed it while others did not was approaching perfection.' The formula called for an unquestioned white privilege, especially in the areas of politics, economics,

[11] *The National Review Bulletin,* April 27, 1971, p. 60.

housing, and education."[12] Unquestioned white privilege in politics, economics, and housing, came from legislative acts that made such privilege legally and socially acceptable. Franklin continued to explain that the attempt to divide equality or hope to grant it completely to some while withholding it from others in the United States would become a major problem in American politics and social life in the twentieth century.[13] To Franklin, few other developments had affected any progress for racial equality in the U.S more than the assumption of some sort of governmental responsibility in the perpetuation of discrimination. Franklin listed the example of blacks being turned away from federal bread lines during the Great Depression because of the color of their skin as an example of those governmental choices.[14] The government was the reason that the races were not equal in Franklins mind, and was a main factor in the perpetuation of white privilege. Now that the government had seemed to change sides on the issue of equality, politically and socially, Franklin urged readers of the *New York Times* to make the right choice in the next step of race relations in the country. The only way the old system of white privilege was perpetuated after 1964 was by conscious choices made by whites who were the majority in America society. To end white privilege, social choices of how to treat other races had to be different than before, and people had to choose to see blacks as equals to whites in all aspects of society.

In 1975, the *Lesbian Tide,* an independent feminist magazine, an article was written entitled "On the Issue of Jane Alpert" in which white privilege was used as a criticism of the feminist movement in America. Jane Alpert was a feminist who went into hiding in the late 1960's

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[12] "U.S. IS CALLED LAX ON RACE EQUALITY: Professor Warns of 'Grim Choice' on Black Issue," *New York Times,* May 29, 1976, p 9.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

after being charged with conspiring to bomb military and war related buildings in New York City. The article for the *Lesbian Tide* was written by an anonymous feminist who was upset by another commentary in the newspaper entitled "Crisis", in which Alpert was accused of selling out many of her feminist sisters to find her freedom. Alpert was also accused of representing, as the criticizer wrote, "A movement based on class privilege, on white privilege. A racist movement completely cut off from our real needs." The column went on to explain that the implication was Alpert had received better treatment in hiding then a black colleague of hers, which the author was quick to point out was an unfounded allegation.[15] This allegation, however, showed that the criticizer of Alpert understood white privilege as conscious decisions being made in an effort to treat whites better than blacks. Legal or not, these discriminatory decisions were occurring all over American society, this one in particular inside the feminist movement, and white privilege was not disappearing as the creators of the 1964 Civil Rights Act had hoped.

Another article in the *Lesbian Tide* from 1977 urged feminists to follow another leader, Bernadine Dohrn, in their quest for women's rights. The article was actually a transcript given to the publication by friends of Dohrn who was at the time, still living underground. On the recording, Dohrn explained the reason why she was breaking away from her previous political organization, the WUO (Weather Underground Organization). In somewhat of an epiphany, Dohrn wrote, "For seven years, I have upheld a politics which is male supremacist and opposed the struggle of women for liberation . . . by standing on my anti-imperialist record in a self-

[15] *Lesbian Tide,* May/June 1975.

satisfied way and self-justifying way, by assuming that I was beyond white privilege or allying with male privilege because I understood it, I prepared and led the way for a totally opportunist direction which infected all of our work and betrayed revolutionary principles." Dohrn went on to explain that the leadership of the WUO felt they were in charge of the whole revolution, and opposed the role of black and Third World groups.[16] Dohrn felt she was guilty of white privilege when she took control over the movement and chose to stop listening to the demands and desires of colored and poorer people in the organization. In order to end white privilege, as other writers before her had urged, Dohrn felt American citizens needed to make conscious efforts to think differently about race and interactions with people of a different color. Dohrn's epiphany, however, is a further shift from past understandings of white privilege for the fact that it is a psychological look at how privilege had affected her as a person. This definition of white privilege: one set in the mind and perceptions of reality in accordance with privilege, would become increasingly popular in the next decade and change the contemporary understanding of white privilege.

Before that understanding could shift, however, a major court case occurred in which the idea of legal/structural white privilege came to be a major deciding factor in a Supreme Court decision. In 1977, the *Atlanta Daily World* ran an article originally printed in a Methodist newsletter in which priests of the church backed the affirmative action policies being practiced at universities around the country. In particular, the church backed the decision of the University of California Davis and their policy of allowing a certain number of minority students to be admitted each year. The school had denied the admittance of a white applicant, Alan Bakke,

[16] Bernadine Dohrn, "Dohrn Denounces Feminist Underground" *Lesbian Tide*, July 1, 1977, 15.

based on the affirmative action policy at U.C Davis of holding 16 of the 100 openings for minority students. The Methodist priests argued that by not allowing Bakke in, the school was not punishing Bakke because of his whiteness, but actually attempting to end past systems of white privilege. The article read, "The United Methodists underlined the NCC [National Council of Churches] argument that in the Bakke case, 'white privilege and minority deprivation are being repressed, rather than whiteness being punished and minority racial status awarded.'"[17] By not allowing Bakke in, the school was attempting to end years of explicit efforts to keep out minorities, and only admit whites. For too long schools had made the choice to not allow minorities to enroll on their campuses, and the Methodist priests felt these blatant attempts to keeps whites as the majority in major learning institutions around the country needed to end. To these priests, the U.C Davis decision to make sure at least 16 minorities were admitted to the medical school was a step in the right direction in ending older school policies of perpetuating white privilege.

The Supreme court of the United States, however, would not share the sentiments of these priests. Eight days after the article was posted in the *Daily World,* five out of nine justices ruled in favor of Bakke, who had sued U.C Davis over violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Bakke argued that his race could not, legally, be the only determinate in the refusal of admittance to the school. The justices concluded that the school did have a compelling interest in a diverse student body and could consider race in its admittance policies, however race alone could not be the sole factor in denial or acceptance.[18] The term white privilege was never used

[17] *The Atlanta Daily World,* October 4, 1977, p. 1.
[18] *Regents of the University of California Davis v. Alan Bakke,* 438 U.S. 265 (1978).

in the case, though the justices' decision showed us their legal understanding of the privileged world: in 1977 when this case was heard, it was illegal for discrimination to take place in the country. Therefore, in the justice's minds, white privilege was a problem of the past, and there was no need for schools to look only at race in seeking to admit more minorities than had previously been allowed when discrimination was legal. Schools needed to have reasons based on other, non-racial achievements, which would determine admittance or denial to campuses around the nation.

Understanding white privilege by comparing it to the days when its reality was realized in a legal sense would continue to be the way non-academic and scholarly writers would perceive its meaning. In a 1978 article for the Ohio State University Education Journal entitled *Theory into Practice,* William E. Nelson Jr., of the department of black Studies at Ohio State University, wrote on the ways white privilege could be observed in our nation's schools. Nelson wrote, "Despite the claims of American educators that schools are democratic institutions for identifying talent and promoting educational achievement, the reality of American education was that schools had functioned to perpetuate social and economic inequalities between black and white Americans to be found in every aspect of American life . . . the blocking of black upward mobility and the institutionalization of white privilege have historically been among the chief purposes of American education." Nelson further explained that the denial of equal educational opportunities to blacks in public schools limited competition between blacks and whites in the market, and many other social and political arenas of American life.[19] Looking to

[19] William E. Nelson Jr.,"School Desegregation and the Black Community," *Theory into Practice* 17, no 2. (April 1978): 122.

the past when white privilege was a legal system of advantage was the way Nelson understood its existence and how it affected life in his world of 1978. Understanding white privilege through these realities as Nelson did - that blacks were less prepared than whites to tackle the capitalist world of competition based on past injustices in education by legal and structural shortcomings - was about to shift however. No longer would these shortcomings be understood as being imposed on minorities consciously, but through a group subconscious in American society.

3. Post-1980

In 1986, Peggy McIntosh, a professor and activist at Wellesley College, gave a lecture at the Virginia Women's Studies Conference in Richmond Virginia in which she outlined the "crude" research she had gathered so far dealing with what she felt was a major problem in American society: invisible privileges that were unconsciously granted to white people on a daily basis. In the lecture entitled "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondences through work in Women's Studies," McIntosh explained how she first came to the realization that white privilege was less of a structural, but more of a psychological problem in our society. McIntosh wrote, "Through work to bring materials and perspectives from Women's Studies in the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged in the curriculum, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. . . Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon within a life of its own, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege which was similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects." McIntosh continued to explain how she had always been taught to

see racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, much like the legal and structural white privilege done. She had never been taught to see one of the "corollary aspects" of racism, however, which put her at an advantage in seeing her own white privilege.[20] The reason, McIntosh believed, that legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, or even the Fourteenth Amendment, had not rid the United States of white privilege was because it went deeper than structural realities. White privilege was a part of an American's subconscious; it was a problem that did not even need to be thought about to be real. In McIntosh's eyes, a person's morals could be legislated, but white privilege was not a problem that could be declared illegal and therefore ended. Understanding of white privilege needed to be shifted primarily in white people's minds of how they perceived their own realities.

A person's subconscious is where white privilege lived, and McIntosh argued that male and white privileges were interrelated phenomenon in American society. Just as males were taught not to see their privileges in society, McIntosh felt that whites as well were blind to the advantages they possessed. In this early lecture, McIntosh described her work as untutored, but felt she was breaking into something that had never been observed before. The lecture was a way to look at her personal experiences with male and white privilege. The goal in these early stages of defining white privilege was not to bring a scholarly work to the table that described white privilege, but to give examples of first-hand accounts as to how privilege had

[20] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of coming to see Correspondences through work in Women's Studies," *Working Paper no. 189*, Virginia Women's Studies Association Conference, April 1986, 1.

affected her daily life.[21] In comparing white privilege to male privilege, McIntosh described white privilege as being, "like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks." White privilege was "invisible" to McIntosh in the way that many who received privileged were unaware of the occurrence; however, once a person was enlightened to privilege's existence, those privileges would become obvious.

Another problem McIntosh explained in writing this lecture was the fact that understanding white privilege as a psychological reality shifted the idea that American society had been a balanced place after legal discrimination had been outlawed. McIntosh's definition of white privilege being an unconscious reality made all whites accountable to the advantages they received unknowingly in their daily lives. McIntosh wrote, "As we in Women's Studies work to reveal male privilege and men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about white privilege must ask, 'Having described it, what will be done to lessen or end it?'"[22] McIntosh went on to list forty six different ways she felt white privilege played a part in whites' daily lives. To list a few:

1) I can if I wish arrange to be around the company of my own race most of the time
3) If I should move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area in which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
6) I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

[21] Ibid. 3.
[22] Ibid. 4.

15) I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

16) I can do well in a challenging situation without it being called a credit to my race.

25) If a traffic cop pulls me over or the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

46) I can choose blemish color or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match the color of my skin.

The list continued on to many other ways that McIntosh felt she had advantages over people of color in American society. McIntosh claimed she had not even thought about all of the examples on the list until she actually took the time to write them down.[23] This would be the way white privilege would be defined in the future: as a psychological reality that was invisible to most whites until they took the time to look for it. The biggest barrier that stood in McIntosh's trying to shed light on her own privileges was the realization that, in facing these possible truths, the myth of an America society being based on hard work and virtue began to crumble.

In making these early claims to unconscious, psychological white privilege, McIntosh also questioned the use of the word privilege itself in describing this newly identified phenomenon. McIntosh described the word privilege as being understood as something that most people desired. In describing her definition of white privilege, the term began to seem too positive. Many of the forty-six examples of white privilege "over-empowered" whites over blacks. This

[23] Ibid. 7-11.

definition was really one of dominance, not privilege, and throughout the rest of the paper, McIntosh wrote privilege as "privilege" to connote the fact that she felt the phenomena she was describing was not something that the privileged wanted, but something that was deplorable and undesirable.[24] Most people understand the world privilege as being something that is desired, but McIntosh was quick to explain that white privilege was not desired at all, it was given unconsciously. In this way, we can see McIntosh's hesitation not to come off as blaming whites for the privileges she laid out. McIntosh seemed to not have wanted to come across as a racist against white people, hoping to urge her listeners to understand that whites did not try and be privileged, but that white privilege was a phenomenon that came to them unintentionally, or without any personal cognizant effort.

In the final section of her lecture, McIntosh connected white privilege with male privilege once again. In a very poignant point, McIntosh wrote, "Our male colleagues do not have a great deal to lose in supporting Women's Studies, but they do not have a great deal to lose if they oppose it either." The same could be said of McIntosh and her white colleagues that might have listened to her lecture on white privilege: if these people denied the definition of white privilege or admitted to it, either way their lives would not be affected too much differently after their revelation, or lack thereof. McIntosh then went on to urge the members of the audience not to be like the males who did nothing to end their privilege, but to go out and work to identify and eradicate white privilege in our society. However, McIntosh actually perpetuated her privilege in the end of her essay when she wrote, "We need more understanding of the way white 'privilege' damages white people, for these are not the same ways in which it dam-

[24] Ibid. 14.

ages the victimized."[25] In calling scholars to look at the effects of white privilege on white people, McIntosh was asking people to once again look through the world and observe how white people saw their advantage, a biased task for the fact that it once again leaves out the feelings of victimized minorities towards white privilege. McIntosh, however, tried to slyly work around this problem by claiming white privilege was not an advantage at all, and was something that most whites would end if they were only aware of it.

McIntosh's definition of white privilege having a psychological existence seems to have caught on almost immediately in many scholarly journals, and a follow up essay by McIntosh for an academic journal in the winter of 1990 truly shifted the paradigm of white privilege. Before that essay would come out, however, in April 1989, Robert Detlefsen, a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University at the time, published an article entitled "White Like Me" in the weekly periodical *The New Republic.* In the article, Detlefsen described a speaker he heard during AWARE (Actively Working Against Racism and Ethnocentrism) week at Harvard that described white privilege using the same analogies McIntosh had in her 1986 speech. Detlefsen actually sought to make an argument against the speaker, whom he claimed never truly proved racism was a reality in American society.[26] Although McIntosh's ideas would take longer to catch on outside the world of academics, Detlefsen's article showed it was not unheard of.

Laurence Watson, who was the assistant dean of academics at the graduate school of design at Harvard, gave a speech in which he listed the elements of white privilege. As Detlefsen wrote, after going through a "litany that included, inter alia, white people's unique ability to purchase Band-Aids that match their skin tone – he offered the following assurance to

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[25] Ibid. 17.

[26] Robert Detlefsen, "White Like Me," *The New Republic*, April 10, 1989, 18-21.

minority students: 'When you experience racial insensitivity in the classroom, whatever way you chose to deal with it is valid . . . Overreacting and being paranoid is the only way we can deal with the system . . . Never think that you imagined it (racial insensitivity) because chances are that you don't.'"[27] Watson seemed to have been implying that a minority's reaction to white privilege through paranoia was the only way to combat its existence since white people most likely did not realize they were being racist. White privilege and racism to Watson were psychological, not physical realities in American society.

Detlefsen, however, would not agree with Watson's speech, and was surprised that no one in the audience stood up to argue against Watson's implication that whites were unconsciously racist. It seems that Detlefsen was not as aware of McIntosh's arguments as Watson had been, and reacted to the speech with anger and disbelief. Detlefsen deplored the minority students at the school who claimed whites were "boring" because they would not debate with any minority. Detlefsen wrote about the white student who seemed too afraid to argue with a minority: "But who can blame them? What can one expect from a group of people who have been insensately told they are racist, and that they must be highly circumspect in their relations with blacks lest their racism reveal itself in the form of an offensive word or two?"[28] This was the problem that McIntosh knew she would run into when formulating her hypothesis about the subconscious: people would have a hard time accepting their own privilege. Detlefsen's denial and Watson's endorsement showed that psychological privilege would be accepted in the beginning by those who may had seen the brunt of structural and legal privilege, finding no solace when those realities were made illegal. Psychological privilege seemed to explain the

[27] Ibid. 20.
[28] Ibid. 21.

reasons those laws had done nothing to stop the spread of white privilege in the United States. Detlefsen, being a white male, may have understood privilege as being an afterthought in post-1964 American society, and therefore found Watson, and inherently McIntosh's ideas, preposterous.

In the winter of 1990, McIntosh published a section of her original lecture in the academic magazine *Independent School* in which she cleaned up her original argument. McIntosh cut her forty six examples of white privilege down to twenty five, and no longer referred to her perception of white privilege as crude or untutored. In putting her arguments in a popular academic magazine, McIntosh would now be able to reach many more people with her sentiments on white privilege. Choosing an educational journal as a platform to expand understanding of her argument was by no mean a coincidence. The fact that McIntosh argued that white privilege was invisible or psychological in our society implied that the first step to dismantling it was to become aware of it. By choosing educators to be the first people who would widely read her arguments, McIntosh most likely hoped to enlighten those who would then enlighten the youth of our nation, creating a future society in which white privilege's invisibility would be wider known, and therefore easier to dismantle.

Understanding white privilege as a psychological phenomenon that most whites in America were unaware they possessed did not catch on immediately in popular news publications. Magazines such as *The Nation, The National Review,* and *The Progressive* published essays in the early 1990's that still described the structural and governmentally driven privileges of the past. In an editorial essay for *The Nation* from 1991, a writer described how affirmative

action had done nothing to threaten the institution of white privilege.[29] The institution of white privilege that the writer referred to implied a time when a school could legally decide to only allow certain races on their campuses. Affirmative action, to this author, had not done anything to change the practices of the past even after legal discrimination had been made illegal. The author linked the failure of affirmative action on campuses around the nation to make minorities more of the majority with conscious choices made by the government to not allow that to happen, and perpetuate white privilege. The editorial read, "the Paradigm people [right wing activists] convinced Bush to veto the 1990 civil rights bill, which dealt with affirmative action, and overall to exploit white fears that blacks will be favored in employment, education and social service."[30] Conscious choices had been made by governmental officials that did not allow affirmative action to be a success which was why affirmative action had done nothing to threaten white privilege. The author continued to explain that affirmative action's ineffectiveness was actually beneficial to both white conservatives and liberals because it allowed them to reduce their feelings of responsibility to educational reform and social change by advocating for token affirmative action.[31] White privilege was not a psychological phenomenon to this author, but caused by explicit choices being made in the government of the United States to preserve its existence on college campuses.

Another popular magazine*, The National Review,* described white privilege in these explicitly perpetuated terms as well. *The National Review* ran an article from the *Washington Post* by a columnist named William Raspberry in 1991 entitled "On the Record." The article de-

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[29] "Lower Education," *The Nation,* January 7-14, 1991, p. 3-4.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

scribed the public's reaction to Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court. Raspberry quoted a friend writing, "Given a choice between two conservatives, I'll take the one who's been called nigger. Thomas is sufficiently acquainted with racism to recognize it when it comes before him on the Supreme Court… and smart enough to find in the Constitution protection against the presumption of white privilege."[32] To Raspberry, the reason Thomas was the best candidate for the job was he was the only one who had truly experienced structural white privilege. Raspberry did not think the reason white privilege was being perpetuated in American society was because of reasons hidden deep in a white person's subconscious, but rather because people called other people nigger: a very blatant act of discrimination, and a conscious choice.

In a 1991 article entitled "Black America in Search of Itself" written for the monthly magazine *The Progressive,* professor of public affairs, history, and African American Studies Manning Marable described his ideas on the question of black identity in America. Harking back to earlier writings such as C. Vann Woodward's piece from 1965, Marable described the different ways that blacks in America had perceived themselves since the reconstruction era. Marable described certain structural forms of discrimination he had seen in his everyday life that he felt were forms of white privilege. Marable wrote, "But the best evidence of the pervasiveness of white privilege is found in daily life . . . They [minorities] feel their worthlessness in white eyes as they wait for graffiti-scarred, filthy trains in urine-stenched stations. They feel the anger held in check, seeing crack-cocaine merchants operate on their street corners as police

[32] "On the Record," *The National Review,* August 12, 1991, p. 10.

cars casually drive by, doing nothing."[33] The reason busses in heavily minority inhabited areas of the city were scarred with graffiti and the stations those minorities waited in where overcome with smells of urine was not because of inexplicit/unconscious decisions being made by someone in a governmental office. Someone, more than likely a white person, consciously decided not to spend governmental funds to try and remove that graffiti, or clean up the stations. Seeing police drive by while they observed crack dealers on the corners did not show psychological decisions, but explicit choices being made by those officers not to stop and intervene. These examples showed continuing structural privilege, a reality that many other black scholars would agree with.

In the winter of 1993, McIntosh published her essay in the education journal *Liberal Education*, reaching a larger audience with her definition of psychological white privilege. In the article, McIntosh rehashed her original arguments for the prevalence of white privilege in society, its connections to male privilege, and how the first step in eradicating privilege was to begin to understand how it was perpetuated subconsciously. Cutting the list down to twenty examples, McIntosh worked to pinpoint the definition of white privilege and end any questions that might have emerged from her first working paper, "White Privilege and Male Privilege." In a seeming "call to arms" at the end of the essay, McIntosh wrote, "As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of privilege, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base."[34] McIntosh seemed sure that by urging people to understand privilege as a psychological phenomenon the perpetuation of the system of ad-

[33] Manning Marable, "Black American in Search of Itself," *The Progressive*, November 1991, p. 19.
[34] Peggy McIntosh, "Examining Unearned Privilege," *Liberal Education,* 70, no.1, (Winter 1993).

vantages would end. Her goal would begin to take shape in the field of education, in which she continued to publish essays describing psychosocially driven privilege.

One of the first large volumes of work to adopt McIntosh's definition of white privilege was Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness.* Published in 1993, Frankenberg attempted to delve a bit deeper than McIntosh and look into how whiteness was constructed in society and the ways that racism not only affected white people, but people of color as well. In interviewing and researching the topic at hand, Frankenberg used McIntosh's understanding that white privilege was perpetuated by unconscious, psychological tendencies by whites in American society. In the middle of the book, Frankenberg interviewed a former feminist activist named Marjorie Hoffman about racism and the effects that race privilege had on her life. In reflecting on the interview, Frankenberg made a point that truly shows how the understanding of white privilege was shifting from structural and conscious examples of discrimination, to psychological parts of a white person's subconscious. Frankenberg wrote, "Marjorie had grown up and been active politically in the era of essentialist racism, while many young white feminists were born into that of color and power evasion. Thus, while Marjorie viewed race privilege as so obvious as not to require elaboration, younger, and especially middle class, white women had experienced race privilege as normalized to the point of invisibility."[35] The normalization of race privilege that Frankenberg was referring to was precisely what McIntosh explained in her 1988 essay and lecture. Since discrimination was illegal in the 1990's, Frankenberg and McIntosh felt the perpetuation of discrimination was due to psychological tendencies that many whites had become numb to.

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[35] Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 179.

In a review of the book, Helan Page explained how Frankenberg went a bit deeper than McIntosh in her explanation of privilege in her attempt to explain *why* white people are oblivious to their privileges in the anthropological journal *Current Anthropology.* Page explained the main idea in Frankenberg's work was that by masking white privilege as something invisible, white people had affectively been able to perpetuate prejudice and discrimination in society. Page quoted Frankenberg, explaining, "Such strategies produce a structural blindness that serve white people and their racial privilege because 'it averts the white gaze from the harsh realities of power imbalance.'"[36] This was how white privilege had continued even after structural and governmental privilege had been made illegal according to McIntosh and Frankenberg: whites had become blind to their privilege, hiding it in the back of their minds and forgetting about its existence until they were reminded.

Frankenberg narrowed her gaze on white women, leaving white men out of the equation all together. Much like McIntosh, Frankenberg used herself as a starting point in understanding white privilege and how she might have accepted many of its benefits unconsciously. In looking at the feminist movement, much like earlier writings from lesbian journals of the 1970's, Page explained that Frankenberg felt white privilege was the problem with the movement's inability to obtain any truly world-changing breakthroughs. Being one of the first to see white privilege as a psychological phenomenon, Frankenberg explained that the inability of white women to see their racism, or claims of being non-racial in their lives, had actually per-

[36] Helan Page, "White Privilege and the Construction of White Identity" review of *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* by Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 179.

petuated racism and discrimination in the United States.[37] Frankenberg then expanded on McIntosh's lecture to include her idea of race and the ways whites had been able to push the ideas of race on other colors, while not looking at their own. This in itself would be considered white privilege today; whites ability to be seen as the norm when it came to the racial makeup of the United States. Page, however, in writing a review of Frankenberg, was also writing a review on McIntosh as well for the fact that many of Frankenberg's ideas of white privilege are directly related to how McIntosh defined them. Writing in an anthropological journal would spread the ideas of McIntosh to a larger audience in academia than may have previously been aware of her arguments.

Frankenberg and McIntosh understood privilege through a white perspective, with Frankenberg actually becoming seen as somewhat of a pioneer in whiteness studies, alongside other academics such as David Roediger. Since McIntosh and Frankenberg understood white privilege in relation to their own whiteness, the duo most likely realized that many scholars and writers who were not white would not agree with their definition of white privilege being perpetuated unconsciously. Rightfully so, to black scholars, white privilege's perpetuation was obvious in their everyday lives, and therefore could not be defined as something that was perpetuated by unconscious efforts. The reason blacks were still treated differently in American society was because whites in America chose to treat them that way.

In an article from the summer of 1995, Robert Staples wrote to the journal *Black Scholar*, arguing in defense of a hot topic at the time: affirmative action. *Black Scholar* is the self-heralded leading journal of black cultural and political thought in the United States, and Staples'

[37] Ibid. 526.

article showed how many minorities defined the concept of white privilege.[38] In the article, Staples explained the many examples of structural white privilege that minorities had been forced to confront in their daily lives. Consciously decided injustices included not being hired for certain jobs based on skin color and the fact that minorities do poorly on standardized tests compared to whites. Staples argued the reason blacks performed worse than whites was because whites were the ones who put together the test itself. Because of that, whites were better prepared for screenings in higher education.

All of these past injustices, Staples argued, had an effect on life in 1995 and were the reasons affirmative action was necessary to level the playing field in competitive job markets.[39] Staples wrote, "The attack on it [affirmative action] is part of a white plan to make people of color their servants again, while they continue to obligate them to pay taxes to subsidize white privilege."[40] The subsidization of white privilege implied governmental programs that perpetuated disadvantages of minorities; conscious efforts by the government to keep minorities in the United States less advantaged than white citizens. Scholars like Staples could not understand white privilege as being psychological in its existence for the fact that its effects were so blatantly obvious all around them.

It cannot be forgotten that 1995 was a highly tense year in dealing with race relations in the United States. In October of that year, African American retired football star OJ Simpson was found not guilty in a criminal trial for the murder of his former white wife, Nicole Brown

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[38] The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research, http://www.theblackscholar.org/

[39] Robert Staples, "Black Deprivation- White privilege: The Assault on Affirmative Action," *Black Scholar* 25, no. 3, (summer 1995), 2.

[40] Ibid. 2.

Simpson and her white friend Ronald Goldman. White and non- white readers most likely took any articles written about racial topics such as affirmative action as highly controversial alike. Even with the trial being headline news for the majority of news outlets around the country, 1995 cover story of *The Nation's* March edition was entitled "Racism Had Its Privileges." The article was written by Robert Wilkins, a professor at George Mason University in Washington D.C. In the article, Wilkins explained how he understood McIntosh's explanation of the unconscious perpetuation of white privilege by white around the country. Wilkins wrote, "I'm not even talking here about overt acts of discrimination but simply about the ways whites intrude on and disturb our psychic space without even thinking about it."[41] Wilkins never described this fact as white privilege, however, but continued on to explain talks he had with other blacks in Oklahoma and their observance of the same phenomenon: walking into a room and being looked at by whites like they did not belong. This understanding between blacks draws upon the McIntosh definition of white privilege, and even Frankenberg's understanding with whites categorizing all other races as the "other" and feeling they are the only ones who truly belong in American society. The difference, however, is that McIntosh and Frankenberg understood these tendencies to be unconscious decisions made by whites. Wilkins on the other hand was under the impression that these decisions were made by individuals who had consciously decided to treat blacks certain ways. Further, Wilkins felt the reason whites felt nervous or uncomfortable when a person of color entered the room was because of how blacks were portrayed in the news. Wilkins wrote, "Journalist institutions often view the nation through a lens

[41] Roger Wilkins, "Racism Has Its Privileges: the Case for Affirmative Action," *The Nation*, March 27, 1995, p. 409.

that bends reality to support white privilege."[42] To Wilkins, blacks were seen as different or the "other" not because whites were reacting unconsciously to their presence, but because the media had made conscious efforts to skew societal perceptions of blacks by only portraying them in a negative light.

In another article by Manning Marable for *The Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*, the minority scholar explained his own perception of white privilege, which again was based on his belief that it was not perpetuated by the white subconscious, but by meticulous planning on behalf of whites. In the article, Marable explained the ways in which blacks had tried to become a part of the dominant culture in the United States. One such way was by blacks voting and electing other blacks into political positions that in the past had been reserved for whites. The hope was that if blacks could obtain these positions they could fight against racism and discrimination in society and use their power to benefit all blacks in the United States. These "inclusionists" as Marable wrote, "seriously underestimated the capacity and willingness of white authorities to utilize coercion to preserve and defend white privilege and property."[43] The reason blacks could not break through and end white privilege in these governmental positions even after becoming part of that government was because of conscious efforts by whites in the government to uphold white privilege. These were not unconscious efforts by those whites, as McIntosh would claim, but acts of discrimination that were planned to the finest detail.

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[42] Ibid. 414.

[43] Manning Marable, "History and black consciousness: The political culture of black America," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 47, no. 3, July/August, 1995, p. 71.

Marable's article was written in 1995, nine years after McIntosh made her initial lecture outlining her ideas of white privilege, and seven years after the lecture was published in academic magazines. The ideas McIntosh conveyed in those articles must have been well known in academics and popular society by this time, judging by the other articles written by men and women describing white privilege as something unseen and more psychological in American society. However, as black men, Marable, Wilkins and Staples never understood white privilege as something invisible and unconscious in white efforts to protect it; white privilege was as clear as day in their everyday lives. Black scholars and citizens would never equate white privilege's perpetuation with psychological reasons, but always structural because that is how they encountered them in their daily lives.

Another black scholar that did not define white privilege as unconscious advantages given to whites but as very conscious efforts was Ahmad A. Rahman. Rahman wrote an article for the *Black Scholar* magazine in 1996 in which he connected the music festival Woodstock with the Million Man March. The Million Man March was a gathering of social activists around the National Mall in Washington D.C. in 1995. The goal of the march was to give the world another perception of the black male, different from the one that had been created on the evening news spoken about earlier.[44] Rahman explained that the final outcome of Woodstock was much different than the people who attended had hoped. Rahman wrote, "For years after that huge musical love-fest, white people would introduce themselves politically by stating, 'I was at Woodstock.' Being at that location on that day meant that you were against the war in Vi-

[44] Million Man March National Organizing Committee (January 1996). "Million Man March Fact Sheet". In Madhubuti, Haki R.; Karenga, Maulana. *Million Man March / Day of Absence; A Commemorative Anthology; Speeches, Commentary, Photography, Poetry, Illustrations, Documents*. Chicago: Third World Press. p. 152.

etnam, in favor of legalizing marijuana, anti-racist and pro civil rights." Rahman continued to explain that even though the event seemed so groundbreaking at the time, Woodstock did not truly have any lasting effect on American society, and was merely a signpost on the way to becoming assimilated into a culture of white privilege.[45] Rahman hoped that the Million Man March would not have the same fate, and that people would actually be affected by the speeches that were given during the event. This was not likely, however, as Rahman explained, because the key note speaker, Louis Farrakhan, failed to realize that when he told the attendants to return to their communities and keep fighting for equal rights, many had come to the march because their local organizations had not done for them what they had hoped, and were looking for another to lead the way.[46]

The use of the term white privilege by Rahman was a reference to the way that American society was organized. Rahman urged the members of the Million Man March not to become an afterthought as the attendants of Woodstock had become. To Rahman, a choice could still be made that the people at Woodstock had long ago let surpass them: the choice to change the way white privilege played a role in American society. The individuals at Woodstock had chosen to become part of the white privileged society they had once been opposed to. Rahman felt the people who chose to come to the Million Man March again had a choice to not let the march's spirit die off in the years to come. The way to eradicate white privilege in our society was to consciously try and alter the structure that privilege relied on to survive. Other

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[45] Ahmad A. Rahman, "The Million Man March: A Black Woodstock?" *Black Scholar* 26, no. 1, (Winter/Spring 1996): 41.
[46] Ibid. 41.

writers, however, would begin to adopt McIntosh's idea that to fight white privilege, you must first educate whites of its existence.

Some minority scholars and writers would adopt McIntosh's definition of white privilege. In a November 1996 article for *LARASA,* a monthly publication on the state of Latinos in Colorado, the author actually took blurbs from McIntosh's 1988 article and placed them throughout the monthly write-up. The author of the article, Georgia Pappas, asked her readers to understand that whites were not conscious of their racial identity, something Frankenberg stressed more than McIntosh in her work. In a section entitled "The Freedom Of Being White", Pappas wrote, "Whites in the U.S. typically think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color, they don't see "whiteness" as a racial identity."[47] In one of the first articles to do so, Pappas actually listed twenty-five of the original forty-three examples McIntosh gave of white privilege's presence in society. Pappas explained that the inability to exchange the word "Latino" for white in being the beneficiary of the list of privileges was testament to the actuality of white privilege in American society.[48]

Pappas went on to explain a few ways that McIntosh and others had failed in their observations of racial realties in America. The first was the fact that when writing on race in the U.S, scholars had only seen black and white. Latinos, however, had many more problems fitting into the privileged culture of American society in Pappas' eyes. Pappas wrote, "Latinos face the same social and economic struggles as African Americans and Native Americans. In addition, Latinos face prejudice regarding immigration, bilingual education, and English only laws."[49] La-

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[47] Georgia Pappas, "Unveiling White Privilege," *LARASA/REPORT,* November 1996, 3.
[48] Ibid. 3.
[49] Ibid. 4.

tinos were racially classified as white in the U.S., and Pappas explained that ironically these "whites" have had more problems than many other minorities in the country.

The second fault of McIntosh and other observers was in the way they perceived the beneficiaries of white privilege: white people. Pappas argued that even if white people obtained white privilege unconsciously as McIntosh had argued, they still received it. Based on this, Pappas explained, "White supremacist is a label usually associated with extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Yet whites who do not acknowledge they are privileged still accept and benefit from unearned public and private power they are given. They embody and enact "White supremacy" regardless of how non-racist they believe themselves to be."[50] Consciously or not, benefits were being given and received by whites in the nation. Pappas went on to explain that McIntosh's examples and definition of white privilege being perpetuated unconsciously allowed whites to escape the penalties others suffered, and gave whites reason not to be upset with racial discrimination.[51] By allowing white privilege to be understood as living in a white person's subconscious, Pappas felt it kept white privilege from being fully recognized in society. Whites had to see how their privilege affected others, which were in very real and tangible ways. Pappas ended her essay stating, "The lack of awareness, denial, and silence about white privilege is the fuel that perpetuated the advantages and freedom whites have . . . White privilege is a concept that is difficult for whites to understand. It is very hard to give up something once the system is working for you."[52] Pappas seemed to be less optimistic about white privileges demise in American society than McIntosh had been. This could be due to the fact

[50] Pappas, "Unveiling White Privilege", 3.
[51] Ibid. 3.
[52] Ibid. 3-4.

that Pappas experienced white privilege different than McIntosh had; not in her subconscious, but in her daily reality.

Into the latter part of the twentieth century, McIntosh's definition of psychological white privilege began to creep into mainstream news sources as well. In a 1998 article for the *Baltimore Sun*, Robert Jensen, a former professor at the University of Texas, explained a conversation he had with a former student who was described as "very bright and very conservative." While talking to the student after class one day, Jensen explained that the student was upset with affirmative action policies around the country, because he was a proponent of equal treatment for all individuals, no matter their skin color. Jensen's reply, which explained his ideas of the meaning of white privilege based on the beliefs of McIntosh, was as follows: "I ask him whether he thinks that in the United States being white has advantages. Have either of us, I ask, ever benefited from being white in a world run mostly by white people? Yes, he concedes, there is something real and tangible we could call white privilege. So, if we live in a world of white privilege--unearned white privilege--how does that affect your notion of a level playing field? I ask. He paused for a moment and said, 'That really doesn't matter.' That statement, I suggested to him, reveals the ultimate white privilege: the privilege to acknowledge you have unearned privilege but ignore what it means."[53] Jensen went on to list different ways that he had personally benefited from the privileges tied with being white, such as getting accepted to graduate school by white people; being hired by an all-white staff at the University of Texas to work in a mostly white department headed by a white man with only one non-white tenured professor in it; and the fact that when he goes out, his whiteness makes him appear less

[53] Robert Jensen, "White Privilege Shapes the U.S," *The Baltimore Sun,* July 18, 1998.

threatening than a minority might be to others. The way Jensen was perceived was based on his whiteness, and that whiteness gave him certain advantages that others who were not white were unable to obtain. Merely seeing Jensen would have been enough for people to have perpetuated privilege unconsciously. The advantages might be relayed into structural realities, such as getting a job or getting admitted to school, but they stemmed from unconscious assumptions made by people Jensen had come in contact with.

A black commentator who read Jensen's article in the *Baltimore Sun* wrote a column for the *New York Amsterdam News* in which he denied the existence of white privilege as Jensen defined it: being based on psychological realities. Armstrong Williams, a conservative black writer and news personality, urged the readers of the weekly newspaper not to look at race as the reason for all the benefits in Jensen's life, but to see class as a more important influence. Williams wrote, "Jensen's contention that his 'whiteness' somehow makes him appear less threatening when he goes out in public ignores the fact that class and upbringing may have more to do with it, than the color of his skin. As additional 'proof' that white privilege exists, he relates how he has always been hired by white people, was accepted into graduate school by white people, hired to teach at a mostly-white college in a nearly all-white department. Such 'proof' actually proves nothing. There are probably dozens of reasons, not connected to race, that show why the University of Texas is predominantly white."[54] This argument was interesting in the fact that it was made by a black scholar, however, it is even more intriguing because it was not arguing what the definition of white privilege was structural or psychological but about its very existence. Williams would be one of many that felt since explicit governmental privi-

[54] Armstrong Williams, "On 'White Privilege'," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 9, 1998, p. 8.

lege had been declared illegal in the United States, the concept was no longer a reality. Other details must have played a role in Jensen's good luck obtaining certain jobs and scholarships that were different than race, because allowing someone admission based on race was now illegal. William's seemed to not even consider psychological unconscious decisions being a possibility in his arguments.

Still, others went the other way. In 1999, an Akron Law review magazine published an article by Sylvia A. Law in which the author hoped to examine the practice of affirmative action through the lens of white privilege. Coming from the field of law, Law took a very legal-like approach to the concept of white privilege, making many statements that may have been observed about white privilege's invisibility and unconscious perpetuation, but never truly written about. In arguing how current laws against discrimination actually perpetuated white privilege in the U.S., Law wrote, "Until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, racial discrimination was blatant and explicit. With the adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, that became unacceptable."[55] Law argued that the reason white privilege shifted from blatant forms of structural and governmental discrimination in the United States to an unconsciously perpetuated system of benefits for whites was because legally, it was obligated to.

Legislative acts in the United States that sought to end discrimination were written to combat blatant acts, such as not allowing a minority service at a restaurant, or to buy a house in a certain area based on their skin color. Legally, the police or any other law enforcement agency could not act to defend minorities unless one of these blatant forms of white privilege occurred. Even deeper than that, as Law explained, "Only conscious intent to discriminate be-

[55] Sylvia A. Law, "White Privilege and Affirmative Action," *Akron Law Review* 32, no. 3, (1999): 603-627.

cause of race counts. The anti-discrimination law replicates white privilege. The only thing that matters is the intent of the white person, not the impact on the Black."[56] Therefore, white privilege was seen in law for the fact that even in the sentencing, the white person was privileged because it was only their actions, albeit negative, that were taken into account when verdicts were reached in discrimination cases. Further, if whites did not notice that certain discriminatory policies hurt blacks, the policy would be seen as non-discriminatory.[57] Legislation created to end discrimination in the United States did nothing to stop the psychological privilege that McIntosh understood. Law seemed to have understood privilege in the same way, and her explanation showed that even though privilege in the structural sense might be a problem of the past, these structural privileges were not the true cause of discrimination. To Law, McIntosh, and the countless other scholars who began to understand privilege as being perpetuated unconsciously, the cause of discrimination was something that the courts could seek to, but never truly never legislate: psychological morals.

Other fields, mainly higher education, also adopted McIntosh's definition of white privilege. Many educational journals in 1999 published articles with teaching strategies that were designed to enlighten students about the actuality of white privilege in their daily lives. Just as McIntosh showed in her early publications in educational journals, the goal was to educate teachers about the psychological reality of privilege in order to transfer the definition to their students, riding the future world of the white privilege of the past. In the fall of 1999, the educational journal *Communication Teacher* published an article by Joy L. Hart in which Hart actually sketched out a lesson for fellow teachers to implement in their classes, designed to expose

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

white privilege. The beginning of the article listed two points that Hart saw as the main goals of the activity: 1) To have students examine privileges of race and gender. 2) To explore common behaviors that many of us fail to analyze or even notice.[58] The second goal in the article showed that to Hart, white privilege had become perpetuated unconsciously in the United States. The goal of this activity, and many other articles in the educational field, would be to expose white privilege first and foremost, in order to stamp it out of our society.

The actual activity that Hart designed included five steps that were aimed at uncovering white privilege and opening the eyes of the white students who had never realized their own privileged lives. Hart listed five rather lengthy objectives and steps that teachers should implement in their classroom to complete the lesson. To paraphrase a few: Instruct students to write a race as the heading of a paper and a gender on another, with the goal of putting certain privileges below that the certain race obtains in society; Remind the students to focus on benefits, not on how race/gender does not benefit – explain these benefits might be invisible; Review McIntosh's definition and examples of privilege from 1988; Highlight that certain benefits/privileges may also have accompanying negatives; Tell students to brainstorm and write as many privileges they can associated with the race/genders on their papers; Give students fifteen minutes to complete the assignment.[59] Understanding white privilege no longer meant questioning its reality, but exposing its invisibility and enlightening youths of the way privilege had been continued unconsciously in the United States.

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[58] Joy L. Hart, "On Parachutes and Knapsacks: Exploring Race and Gender Privilege," *Communication Teacher* 14, no. 1, (Fall 1999): 16.
[59] Ibid. 17.

Not only students, but teachers as well would now be urged to uncover white privilege in their own departments. Not surprisingly, many articles began to surface in psychological magazines, such as the *APA Monitor.* In an article actually published the same day as Hart's, Bridgett Murray explained the way that the field of psychology had been affected by white privilege for years. The fact that whites felt that they were helping minorities find jobs in psychology departments around the country was actually a form of white privilege. Murray, in quoting another psychology professor, wrote, "There's this notion that the majority is helping us, that things are equal,' said Sue. 'But white privilege and mono-culturalism continue to be invisible.'"[60] By whites helping minorities find jobs, they are doing so on their own terms, which fed into white privilege. The solution that Murray gives to get rid of white privilege is ironically similar to Armstrong Williams', who denied white privilege was a problem in society: to spend more time with other races and cultures, exposing oneself to other thoughts and ways of tackling problems in the world.[61]

Into the new millennium, McIntosh's definition of white privilege continued to expand and be adopted by most scholars in academia. Educational journals kept pushing out articles hoping to expose white privilege around U.S. schools, with higher education being the main source pushing white privilege literature. Cris Mayo, a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, implemented a lesson in which he sought to expose white privilege for his students. In a discussion about how racism held back minorities, a black student of Mayo's claimed she would never know how racism might affect her in on the road of life. The students

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[60] Bridget Murray, "Minorities Need More Support in Psychology Departments," *APA Monitor*, October 1, 1999, p. 12.
[61] Ibid. 12.

in the discussion described feeling uneasy when being in groups in which they were the sole or one of a few black women involved. Mayo's goal was to shift that uneasy feeling to the white majority by making them conscious of their white privilege. Mayo wrote, "Moving the burden of discomfort and uncertainty onto white people is a better strategy for confronting the problems of racism than concentrating on making white people comfortable in the struggle against racism."[62] Mayo continued to explain that a tenant of white privilege was the fact that whites did not have to think about race in any situation, much like Jensen had explained in the *Baltimore Sun*.

Echoing McIntosh, Mayo explained that whites did not have to worry about being unwelcome in certain areas or having their knowledge questioned by their peers in accordance with their race. Psychologically, this strengthened a white person's ego and perpetuated any beliefs in society that whites were intellectually superior to other races. Even if a person was not male, possibly Jewish, or from a country other than the U.S., if their skin was white, Mayo wrote, "white people may still strategically, if unconsciously, find refuge from uncertainty in white privilege." A white person did not have to feel awkward when answering a question for example because if they got the answer wrong, the reason for their incorrectness would never be attributed to their race. Mayo sought to coin a new term in understanding McIntosh's definition of white privilege, using Joe Kinchloe and Shirley Steinberg's phrase in describing white people's ignorance of white privilege as "Privilege Illiteracy."[63]

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[62] Cris Mayo, "Certain Privilege: Rethinking White Agency," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook,* January 1, 2004, p. 308.
[63] Mayo, "Certain Privilege," 309.

In an article published four months after Mayo's in the same educational journal, Zeus Leonardo put into words what Mayo had implied in his article: that the concept and study of white privilege over the last decade had reached currency in education. Leonardo explained that even popular culture had embraced the psychological and unconscious understanding of white privilege's perpetuation for the fact that annual white privilege conferences were being held across the country with the aim of enlightening Americans to white privilege's existence. Leonardo referenced scholars like McIntosh by name, writing, "In particular, authors like Peggy McIntosh (1992) have helped educators understand the taken for granted, daily aspects of white privilege: from the convenience of matching one's skin color with bandages, to opening up a textbook to discover one's racial identity affirmed in history, literature, and civilization in general."[64] White privilege was perpetuated without many whites even realizing it, in the books they read, classes they took, and everyday experiences in which Leonardo, just like McIntosh, felt most whites were oblivious to. Leonardo wrote, "In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color."[65] Leonardo did not further explain if he felt that those processes, acts, and decisions being made were deployed consciously or not, but it is safe to assume from earlier arguments in his article his understanding was that white privilege was perpetuated though American's subconscious.

However, Leonardo argued, like Pappas had before him, that to truly understand white privilege, one must look at white supremacy. The problem, Leonardo explained, with white privilege research up to that point, was that in not looking at white supremacy, or not observing

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[64] Leonardo Zeus, "The Color of Supremacy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2, (April 2004): 137.
[65] Zeus, "The Color of Supremacy," 137.

whites who claimed ignorance to their privileged world, privilege was perpetuated by people who could argue they were not racist. Leonardo explained, "The study of white privilege begins to take on an image of domination without agents. It obfuscates the historical process of domination in exchange for a state of dominance *in medias res* [in the middle of things]."[66] By allowing white people to claim ignorance of their privilege, scholars like McIntosh allowed whites to stay dominant in society without taking account of their actions. McIntosh felt privilege was not about blame since it was perpetuated subconsciously. Leonardo, however, seemed to have felt that there must be blame somewhere. In Leonardo's eyes, not blaming whites for their privileges only worked to perpetuate the privileges many whites denied they had.[67]

In the first decade of the new millennium, many articles were published that urged professionals in different academic fields to work at ending white privilege through education. An article from May 2004 in the Journal *Chronicle of Higher Education,* described problems seen with white privilege on campuses around the nation in which minority students were often left behind for the fact that many University systems were geared more towards white scholars. The woman who wrote the article, Julie W. de Sherbinin, explained that when she first became a professor, she was quite oblivious of race on campus. By the late 1990's, however, she began reading more about white privilege and its effects on our society. No doubt the materials she was reading were McIntosh and Frankenberg's arguments about how white privilege was a psychological phenomenon, being taught and perpetuated unknowingly by a majority of Americans. De Sherbinin urged professors at her campus and campuses around the nation to become involved in minority student's lives in order to begin to understand the troubles they ran into

[66] Ibid. 138.
[67] Ibid. 139.

on predominantly white campuses on a daily basis.[68] In order root out white privilege, Sherbinin wrote, "White faculty members whose disciplines have not trained them to think about racism and white privilege need to become active allies of the students of color on their campuses, and of the professors of color who are already advocates for those students."[69] Activism and exposure where the key tools in fixing the problems of racism and unseen privileges given to white students on college campuses. To Sherbinin, it seemed that the more contact white professors had with minority students, the more they would hopefully begin to realize how their minds had been predisposed to understand the world a certain way. More contact with people who had not seen the world in similar ways would change white professor's understanding of their realities.

Professionals other than professors on college campuses would also begin to join to fight against the perpetuation of white privilege in their field of work. In an article written a month after de Sherbinin's, John Berry wrote to the *Library Journal*, a trade publication for librarians. In the article, Berry explained of a meeting that took place for the librarians in the California Public Library Conference. At the conference, the question was brought up about how to make libraries more diverse places. Berry wrote of a women who commented that all that librarians needed to do in order to make the library feel more inviting to a diverse crowed, was simply be nice to everyone. Berry's rebuttal to the comment showed how he understood the term white privilege as being more than just a problem on the surface, easily seen and easily dissipated as structural privilege had been. Berry wrote, in a section entitled "Not Just About

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[68] Julie W. de Sherbinin, "White Professors Can Help Uproot Racism," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* May 7,2004, p. 3.
[69] Ibid. 4.

Getting Along," "She may have had the best intentions, but her statement revealed that the audience still didn't get it."[70] Berry then went on to explain how he decided to use Peggy McIntosh's examples to try and hammer home the real problems that librarians were having in their workplace: not understanding their own white privilege and how they were perpetuating it without realizing it. Berry listed seventeen of McIntosh's original forty three examples of white privilege, and then asked all at the meeting if anyone had answered yes to experiencing any of them. If they had, they were experiencing white privilege. In order to rid the library world of this unfair advantaged system, Berry urged fellow librarians to become aware of their privilege, first working to end it by admitting to having it.[71] By this point, the definition of white privilege McIntosh laid out in the late 1980's had made its way through the professions of education, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and now even into the field of library and information sciences. Popular media outlets as well had adopted McIntosh's definition of psychological privilege, with articles in *The Nation* being published much more frequently than had previously been the case.

In 2005, the director of the New Jersey Project on Inclusive Scholarship at the Williams Patterson University of New Jersey, Paula S. Rothenberg, published, for the first time, a white privilege reader. In the work, Rothenberg gathered what she felt were the most significant pieces of writing that had been published up to that point in time on the topics of race and racial privilege. The collection included sixteen separate essays by individual authors who had researched and written on various topics. The book was so influenced by the ideas of Peggy McIntosh that in homage to her, Rothenberg dedicated the book to the Women's Studies pro-

[70] John Berry, "White Privilege in Library Land," *Library Journal*, June 15, 2004, p. 50.
[71] Ibid. 50.

fessor, who had, she wrote, "led the way."[72] The first two sections of the book were made up of essays that examined the creation of whiteness in America.

Nowhere in the first eight essays of the reader was the term white privilege used. Not until section three, entitled "Whiteness: The Power of Privilege," did Rothenberg include pieces of work that actually used the term. The first two essays of the section examined the term privilege, and what the concept meant in American society. In the first essay of section three, *Making Systems of Privilege Visible,* it was obvious by the title that writers Stephanie Wildman and Adrienne Davis understood white privilege in McIntosh's psychological terms. Similar to Sylvia Law's earlier essay, Wildman and Davis argued that because there were no legal acknowledgement of psychological privilege in the United States, it was almost impossible for citizens inside the country to define and address problems of "systematic unfairness."[73] Legislation had not gotten at the root of the problem by merely making blatant discrimination illegal. Systematic discrimination continued in the United States because the problem went deeper than explicit forms of racism; the problem resided in white citizen's psyches. The two went on to write, "The invisibility of privilege strengthens the power it creates and maintains. The invisible cannot be combated, and as a result privilege is allowed to perpetuate, regenerate, and re-create itself . . . Privilege is invisible only until looked for, but silence in the face of privilege sustains invisibility."[74] Once again, the main goal would be to expose privilege in order to eradicate it. Allowing its existence without acknowledging its reality was a detriment to society, and mankind all together. Americans had to understand that psychological privilege was a fact in society, proof of

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[72] Paula. S Rothenberg, *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, (New York: Worth Publishers, 2005), dedication.
[73] Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis, "Making Systems of Privilege Visible," in Rothenberg, 95.
[74] Ibid. 95.

which could be seen with the perpetuation of tacit systematic unfairness even after that unfairness had been made illegal.

The second essay in the section was Allan Johnson's *Privilege as Paradox.* In the essay, Johnson also exemplified the ideals of McIntosh in his understanding of white privilege. Johnsons' main argument was that in order to receive the benefits of privilege (any type of privilege; race, male, heterosexual etc.) all that a person had to do was convince people they were a member of that certain privileged group. One did not have to male, or white, or straight, to reap the benefits of those majorities, rather a person had to convince those around them that they belonged in those certain categories.[75] Johnson also adopted McIntosh's belief that because white people were privileged, it did not necessarily imply that all whites are racist. Johnson wrote, "That whites as a social category oppress people of color as a social category is a social fact. That doesn't, however, tell us how a particular white *person* thinks or feels about particular people of color or behaves towards them."[76] Although some scholars believed mindsets such as this did nothing but perpetuate privilege, many others still were slow to blame whites for the privileges they unconsciously received.

The third essay in the section was non-other than McIntosh's *Invisible Knapsack* itself. The version of the essay that Rothenberg chose to include in the reader included twenty-six of the original forty-six examples McIntosh had observed of benefits that she received in her daily life which she had no cognition of. Rothenberg had to include McIntosh's essay in her collection for the fact she felt it was the "one that led the way." There was nothing included in the essay that had not previously been written by McIntosh, which showed that even in 2005, her

[75] Alan Johnson, "Privilege as Paradox," in Rothenberg, 104.
[76] Ibid. 107.

words still conjured massive amounts of respect from scholars studying the effects and concept of white privilege in American society.

The fourth essay in the section was the article written by Robert Jensen in 1998 for the *Baltimore Sun*. The article described an experience at the University of Texas Jensen had when speaking to a conservative student who did not feel the benefits he had admitted to receiving because he was white were of any significance. Rothenberg's inclusion of Jensen's article showed how important she felt the piece was, and also proved the way she understood the term white privilege: as an invisible/psychologically perpetuated system of privilege given to whites that needed to be realized and exposed in order to be eradicated.

The final essay in the section was Tim Wise's *Membership Has Its Privileges: Thoughts on Acknowledging and Challenging Whiteness.* The original article was written in 2000 by Wise for *ZNet*, an online forum that described itself on its homepage as "a community of people committed to social change."[77] The article began with Wise's understanding of whiteness being an attribute that people do not have to think about who possess it, being more of a psychologically driven reality. Wise however went a step farther than McIntosh and looked at the economic effects white privilege had on society. Wise argued that not only should we seek to expose and end white privilege for moral reasons, but because of the price we pay in the field of labor. Wise wrote, "In the labor market, we benefit from racial discrimination in the relative sense, but in absolute terms this discrimination holds down most of our wages and living standards by keeping working people divided and creating a surplus labor pool of 'others' to whom employers can turn when the labor market get tight or workers demand too much in wages or bene-

[77] http://www.zcommunications.org/znet

fits."[78] Wise actually never used the term white privilege in his article, however he described these injustices in the workplace and society as racial privileges. These racial privileges were extremely similar to the white privileges that McIntosh and her followers believed as being all too real in our society, and Wise's economical stance on the ills of those privileges expanded the argument for exposure and eradication.

Moving away from large volumes published on white privilege and back to popular news sources, in a 2005 article in the popular liberal magazine *The Nation* we see how much McIntosh's ideas had spread to mainstream American political and social thought. In the article, Gary Younge wrote about many court cases that were being reopened from the 1960's in which blatant acts of discrimination were not prosecuted based on what Younge described as "a generation of people in the United States who committed crimes in order to preserve white privilege."[79] The people who committed those crimes were racists who did all they could to preserve the structural and governmentally driven privileges which were being taken from them by the federally mandated Civil Rights Act of 1964. We can see here how the concept of white privilege changed in the United States by understanding how Younge described these early court cases: as blatant discrimination, explicit, and governmentally perpetuated problems. In describing the shift, Younge wrote, "While the scale and nature of those privileges may have changed, the privileges themselves still exist. You can see them in the racial disparities in health, employment and poverty."[80] The scale and nature of privilege had shifted from conscious forms of discrimination to unconscious in their nature. Although Younge was describing

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[78] Tim Wise, "Membership has its Privileges: Thoughts on Acknowledging and Challenging Whiteness," in Rothenberg, 120.
[79] Gary Younge, "Racism Rebooted," *The Nation*, July 11, 2005, p 11.
[80] Ibid. 11

very visible discrepancies: health, employment, and poverty, the fact that those discrepancies still existed post-1964 seemed proof that they must have been perpetuated by something other than governmental policies.

Now that McIntosh's definition of white privilege had become more widely understood and accepted in the U.S., scholars and popular writers would not feel the need to define white privilege in their work, but rather encourage white people to admit to their own privileges and educate others on ways to end the unearned beneficial system. In another article from the field of higher education, Marguerite Parks explained how she urged her graduate student teachers to come up with activities that would expose the reality of psychological white privilege in their future classrooms. Parks described the "all white" world that her students lived in as being foreign to her before moving to Iowa. Growing up in the racially segregated south, Parks was bussed to an all-black school in Chapel Hill North Carolina, coming face to face with different races from an early age. The students she taught, however, were from a world full of whites and whites alone.

The article Parks wrote in 2006 was an effort to make her graduate students aware of white privilege, and make sure they did not perpetuate white superiority in their classrooms.[81] The fact that many of her students had never met a person of color was the reason Parks felt her students were oblivious to their privilege, and all the more reason to expose it to them. The first step, according to Parks, for her students to understand white privilege, was to understand their white identity. Students must understand that if they walk down the street, as whites, they would never be put into a "racial box" of classification, but seen as individuals.

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[81] Marguerite Parks. "I am From a Very Small Town: Social Reconstruction and Multicultural Education," *Multicultural Perspectives* 8, no. 2, (2006): 46.

In reading her student's papers about their identity, Parks claimed she was "struck" when none of the essays mentioned the words white privilege. Parks wrote, "The papers were filled with the idealistic rose-colored ideals of teachers out to save the world. Papers showed a clear lack of understanding of the present state of racism in America and the existence of white privilege."[82] The students did not understand white privilege because it was psychological in its reality. The idealistic lenses the students peered the world through saw structural privilege as being illegal and a problem of the past, it would take Parks to enlighten these students about the actual world they lived in.

Not only educational scholars, but theologians as well would now understand white privilege in McIntosh terms: living in American's subconscious. An article explained about earlier from *The World Around Us,* a Catholic publication, explained the church's unwillingness to pay reparations to the black citizens of the United States because in their eyes, the church was meant to help with present suffering stemmed from past injustices members bore from white privilege.[83] These sufferings were implied to mean visible scars placed on minorities by racism. However, in 2006, we see the shift in the understanding of white privilege in an article in another Catholic newspaper, the *National Catholic Reporter.* In the article, by Heidi Schlumpf, Peggy McIntosh is actually quoted several times in a section entitled "The Invisible Knapsack." In the section, Schlumpf described white privilege as unconscious advantages given to whites around the nation. Schlumpf described a Catholic conference that was very centered on the idea of whiteness inside the Catholic Church. At the conference, white members of the church were asked to acknowledge their privileges, even though the task may have been a difficult one

[82] Parks, "I am From a Very Small Town," 47-48.
[83] Stove, "The World Around Us," 1970

to accomplish based on the fact many had most likely never realized the privileges they were given, and inversely gave. Schlumpf quoted the organizer of the conference, Margret Pheil, who urged members to acknowledge the fact that they were privileged in order to end the unwarranted system of advantages.[84]

The fact that many whites had a hard time thinking about race in terms of white privilege was due to the reality that many "liberals," as Schlumpf claimed they were, "bristle at the notion that we are racist. Some of us insist that the real issue today is class, and not race."[85] Schlumpf went on to explain how many scholars understood race as a social construction, not being present in the natural world whatsoever, and of their hopes that we lived in a color blind world. Of these beliefs, Schlumpf wrote, "Ah, wishful thinking. The reality is that in this era of so-called 'colorblindness,' racism still exists, more subtle, institutional and covert than before, according to sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva of Duke University. What we have, he said, is create 'racism without racists.'"[86] This quote showed us a few different things about the understanding of white privilege in 2006 religious views that connected the views of others in academics and popular sources. First, the belief that discrimination and racism had ended in the United States after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made structural privilege illegal was false: racism in the United States was actually perpetuated by white citizen's subconscious. The institutions that had now been created to perpetuate racism were not systems such as governmental segregation, but a mindset being taught to generation after generation by teachers who more than likely were unaware school was in session. Second, the fact that Schlumpf was quoting a soci-

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[84] Heidi Schlumpf, "Owning Unearned White Privilege," *National Catholic Reporter,* May 26, 2006, p. 12.
[85] Schlumpf, "Owning Unearned White Privilege," p. 12.
[86] Ibid. 12.

ologist showed that the understanding of white privilege as being a psychological form of racism had spread from the world of Women's Studies in which it was developed to other disciplines in academia.

Not only Catholics, but Jews as well began to publish articles dealing with white privilege and its effect on Jewish culture. A month after Schlumpf's article was published, Warren Blumenfeld published an article in *Multicultural Perspectives* in which he explained how Jews in the United States had reacted to their white privilege. Blumenfeld explained the fact that many Ashkenazi Jews (Jews with ancestors from Eastern Europe, with lighter skin) could pass as white and therefore reap the benefits of white privilege. When those people admitted their Jewishness, however, they were treated as "off-white."[87]

Blumenfeld conducted a study in which he questioned Jews of many different generations that had obtained college degrees in the past, or were working on their degrees at the time of the study, all from the middle to upper classes, and of both genders. In the study, Blumenfeld asked his participants certain questions about race, one of which being if they felt they benefited from white privilege in their daily lives. To this, the participants answered, as Blumenfeld wrote, "Most participants expressed the belief that Ashkenazim, in fact, do have White privilege vis-à-vis persons of color. This privilege, however, is conditional. Participants believed that Jews' supposed "white skin" provides them with certain unearned advantages—for example, benefits, privileges, fewer acts of discrimination directed against them—when they can pass as White gentiles."[88] These participants understood the reality of being granted

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[87] Warren Blumenfeld, "Outside/Inside/Between Sides: An Investigation of Ashkenazi Jewish Perceptions of Their 'Race,'" *Multicultural Perspectives* 8, no. 3, (2006): 15.
[88] Blumenfeld, "Inside/Outside/ Between Sides," 15

certain privileges based on their whiteness and that these privileges were unearned. The study went farther, however, in uncovering how minorities, groups that were not supposed to receive psychological privilege, obtained it. The fact that the Jewish people interviewed explained their privilege was ended once the reality of their Jewishness was uncovered proved that privilege was a psychologically driven phenomenon, however, since Jew's privileges were taken away the allocation of those privileges were not perpetuated by the subconscious, but by conscious decisions as to who could or could not benefit.

Academia was not the only area of society that began to adhere to the idea of psychological privilege. Popular radio and newspaper companies began interviewing guests on the topic of privilege, questioning different members of society and their understanding and observance of the term in their everyday lives. NPR, National Public Radio, conducted a roundtable discussion in October of 2006 on the popular show *News and Notes*, in which host Farai Chideya interviewed guests Walter Fields, CEO and Publisher of Northstarnetwork.com, Callie Crossley, commentator of "Beat the Press," and Pedro Noguera, professor of education at New York University. In the discussion, all three guests were asked to comment on an earlier interview done on NPR dealing with the study of white privilege. In the discussion, Mr. Fields explained that the earlier interview made him think about his childhood, and how he believed that privilege was a learned phenomenon, picked up in our youth by the norms of society.[89]

Ms. Crossley then explained her views on white privilege, calling McIntosh's *Invisible Knapsack* "revolutionary," and describing how she felt McIntosh's essay began the conversation on white privilege by breaking down the privileges whites saw in their everyday lives. Once the

[89] "Roundtable: White Privilege: Cloned Meat," *News & Notes*. NPR National Public Radio, October 19, 2006.

essay had been written, people could see how those privileges affected them and begin to talk about it. The interview then shifted to a talk of immigration and a study out of Vanderbilt University that showed how lighter skinned legal immigrants actually earned higher salaries than their darker skin counterparts. Dr. Noguera never actually used the term white privilege, but did state that "it's not surprising. We've known for a long time that there are advantages to being lighter skinned… I think it's a reflection of the kind of premium this society places on white skin, light skin and on beauty."[90] Dr. Noguera seemed to be alluding to white privilege in the way he explained how our society had always given advantages to people of lighter skin tone, connecting it with beauty and goodness. Dr. Noguera, however, never explained if he felt privilege was driven unconsciously in American society. The implication that lighter skin had always been connected to beauty and advantage referred to both structural and psychological privilege.

4. White Privilege Today

The year before NPR ran this discussion, the largest environmental disaster in generations occurred in the southern United States: Hurricane Katrina. In the aftermath of the storm, thousands of residents in the city of New Orleans were stranded in the flooded city with seemingly no aid being provided by the federal government. This inaction created a firestorm of bad press for the Bush administration at the time. Not helping matters was the fact that many of the people left in the city were minorities. Americans watching news programs watched on as many minorities not lucky enough to have fled the city before the storm searched for food and

[90] Ibid

dry ground. Reactions to how the media portrayed those people, however, would be a point of contention for years to come.

During an hour-long benefit concert for the Hurricane victims, *A Concert For Hurricane Relief*, rapper Kanye West gave his view on the lack of governmental response to the disaster. After explaining that the media had a double standard when it described black families in New Orleans as "looting" while white families were "looking for food," West uttered the phrase, "George Bush doesn't care about black people."[91] Examining West's remarks shows us how unconscious white privilege was seen to have been perpetuated by the news media in the United States, a point made earlier by black scholars. News programs referring to blacks as "looters" and whites as merely looking for food would have had an effect on any viewer watching the benefit concert psychologically. Refereeing to whites as law abiding citizens and blacks as criminals perpetuated the image of blacks being inferior to whites, and was exactly the type of privilege McIntosh and others were referring to as still being present in American society. Not helping the situation, while answering a question on another NPR program *Marketplace,* former first lady Barbara Bush explained her assessment of the people stuck in New Orleans. Most of the residents sought dry ground inside the sports arena the Superdome, where they were given water and whatever food the private arena could provide. According to Mrs. Bush, since many of the people stuck in New Orleans had been impoverished before the storm, life in the Superdome really working out well for them.[92] This comment showed that Mrs. Bush had no conception of any privileges being given to her or others not affected by the storm. Many of the peo-

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[91] Shockrock1, "George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People." *YouTube* video, 1:52. April, 16, 2006, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIUzLpO1kxI

[92] *Marketplace*. NPR National Public Radio, September 5, 2005.

ple in New Orleans, unfortunately, lived in poverty, and therefore being in a covered dome with food and water provided seemed to be a step in the right directions in Mrs. Bush's eyes, there was no more to it.

The events after Hurricane Karina had a long-lasting effect on American culture, and American scholarship. Frances Kendall published a book in 2006 entitled *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race.* Kendall, however, was not an academic, but a self-described activist. The goal was for the book to be used by teachers, businesses, and corporations as a guidebook to accepting racial privilege and creating real social change. Kendall wrote, "[This book] is written for individuals in organizations—colleges, universities, and corporations particularly— who grapple with race every day, as well as for those who believe they don't need to."[93] Those who grappled with race everyday were those understand themselves as having a race, most likely minorities. The latter category of those who believed they did not need to most likely implied whites.

In chapter five of the book, we see Hurricane Katrina's effect on the way Kendall understood the perpetuation of psychological privileges in the United States. Kendall actually referenced the same unequal treatment West had of the media's different portrayals of blacks and whites in the aftermath of Katrina in the attempts to find, or loot, food stores in New Orleans.[94] Hurricane Katrina and the way the media reported on the event was testament to the fact that discrimination was still real in the United States. The media did not describe the actions of the survivors differently because of the structural racism being practiced in New Orleans, rather,

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[93] Frances E. Kendal, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), xi.
[94] Ibid. 81.

because of the psychological and unconsciously perpetuation of privilege Peggy McIntosh laid out in her 1987 essay.

Sociological studies would continue to research the ways psychological privilege affected the citizens of the United States after the events of Hurricane Katrina, however now many of the studies would narrow in on the reaction of whites after their unconscious privilege had been explained to them for the first time. In an article published in the *Journal of Social Work Education,* two women, Laura S. Abrams from the University of California, Los Angeles and Pricilla Gibson from the University of Minnesota wrote, "One of the main forms of stratification in U.S. society is racial stratification, wherein White members of society are systematically rewarded and privileged, and people of color are subject to a host of institutional disadvantages on the basis of skin color."[95] Expanding their observations of white privilege, Abrams and Gibson explained the reaction most whites might have after becoming aware of their privilege for the first time. The duo explained one of the main barriers in teaching white privilege was student resistance. Referencing Ruth Frankenberg and Peggy McIntosh, Abrams and Gibson explained, "resistance to learning about White privilege is even more profound than resistance to learning about the effects of racism, because racism as a problem could conceivably belong to others, whereas White privilege can and should be internalized more personally."[96] The authors concluded that since observing the benefits of white privilege for the first time was such a personal realization for most whites, it most likely would not be admitted without a bit of anger and negativity. Another reaction Abrams and Gibson explained was the view of some whites to

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[95] Laura S. Abrams and Pricilla Gibson, "Reframing Multicultural Education: Teaching White Privilege In The Social Work Curriculum," *Journal of Social Work Education* 43, no 1. (Winter 2007): 147-160.
[96] Ibid. 154.

think that people who taught or studied white privilege were "anti-white." To combat this, the two scholars wrote that teachers and researchers must remember the importance of "maintaining a balance between larger structural and social relations as well as personal responsibility for racism."[97] White privilege, to these authors, had become systematic in America because it was perpetuated without many whites being aware of it. A person who reacted negatively to the reality of psychological privilege was only doing so because they did not understand society for what it truly was.

Abrams and Gibson were also some of the first scholars to explain how they felt people of color reacted to and perceived white privilege. Whereas whites were oblivious to their privileges and their race in general, black members of American society were very aware of their race and the race of others. This fact allowed minorities to observe white privilege much easier than whites, as Abrams and Gibson wrote, "The invisibility of Whiteness as a social category also permits White individuals to personally deny how White privilege benefits their own lives. People of color, on the other hand, cannot avoid seeing, experiencing, and living the manifestations of White privilege and are, therefore, more aware of its existence and consequences."[98] Black people in America would never describe white privilege's perpetuation as being psychological and unconscious because its reality to them seemed to be based on conscious decisions being made that treated minorities as inferior to whites.

As McIntosh's psychological and unlearned privilege became more widely known and accepted, its authenticity began to be questioned. Structural and governmental privileges were hard to deny because they were obvious to see. Psychological privilege, however, was easily

[97] Ibid. 155.
[98] Ibid. 152.

denied because of its inexplicitness. The widely read newspaper the *Seattle Times* published an article in 2007 about a school in Seattle whose students visited a white privilege conference in Colorado on a class field trip. The article described how a question had been raised as to if the school district had broken the law in its decision to send the students to the conference, but gave no reasoning as to why this accusation was brought up. The conference, which was put on by the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and other organizations, was meant to, as the article stated, "Examine and explore difficult issues related to white privilege, white supremacy and oppression."[99] In sending the students to the conference, it seemed that the school district felt McIntosh's understanding on privilege being perpetuated unconsciously was true, and the students of the district needed to be enlightened as to how privilege permeated through our society without any conscious effort.

A response to the article written in the *Seattle Times* by Catherine Gewertz for the weekly journal *Education Week* questioned if the Seattle school district had made an error when it decided to send its students to the white privilege conference. The article explained what the original piece left out: the allegations that were being explored by the Federal educational department. A spokesman for the department, Eric Earling, was quoted explaining that the federal agency would be exploring "allegations of mismanagement of federal taxpayer money" in sending the students to the conference. The article went on to quote a blogger's entry to the right-wing website *Sound Politics* that claimed that the problem with the Seattle school district was that they taught bigotry against white people instead of important educa-

[99] Alex Fryer, "School Trip to White Privilege Conference," *Seattle Times*, April 27, 2007.

tional issues.[100] This sentiment, that the teaching of white privilege was anti-white, was a common response that earlier studies had observed in their findings of a person's initial reaction to the concept of white privilege being a psychological phenomenon. These studies, however, assumed that people would admit white privilege was a reality after being exposed to this explanation of its unconscious perpetuation. What these studies did not foresee, or include in their conclusions, however, was what to do if people never admitted to the concept of white privilege in general.

On such person, the editor of the conservative blog *Sound Politics*, Stefen Sharkansky, asked the question as to whether the Seattle district was wrong in sending its students to the conference. On April 7, 2007, a month before the trip was scheduled to take place, Sharkansky posted the following to his popular blog entitled "White Privilege Conference": "The Seattle School District is sending high school students to attend the annual 'White Privilege Conference.' I still want somebody to explain to me why, if white people have 'privilege', do the Asian students get better grades and test scores?"[101] Sharkansky's response showed one of the common arguments against the psychological white privilege: if it existed, why were other races outperforming whites?

Readers of Sharkansy's blog were quick to respond and endorse his denials of psychological privilege. One such blogger explained that "White Privilege is a myth designed by others as a way of institutionalizing White Guilt in order to keep the race based preferences for non-

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[100] Catherine Gewertz, "District Dossier," *Education Week* 26, no. 36. (May 9, 2007): 1.
[101] Stefen Sharkansky, "White Privilege Conference," *Sound Politics*, April 7, 2007, http://soundpolitics.com/archives/008359.html

whites going.[102] Another echoed these sentiments, stating, "I'd make a fair bet that not a single one of the coerced into attending this conference has ever owned a slave . . . This is just more silly liberal brainwashing meant to create artificial victimhood and race conflict where it doesn't really exist."[103] These bloggers showed that psychological privilege was not accepted by all, and that many in America truly felt that after discrimination had been deemed illegal by the courts, it came to fruition in the United States. Even if some in the conservative world would deny any sort of unconscious privileges being perpetuated in society, others were not so quick to question McIntosh's logic.

Many writers in academia, religious fields, and the popular media would publish articles dealing with the need to expose the invisibility of white privilege and work to remove it from American Society. In the religious field, Jewish and Catholic writers would continue to be the majority publishing articles that urged members of their religions, and society in general, to understand how white privilege was maintained unconsciously. Most of the Jewish people who wrote articles looked at the way white privilege affected them and their Jewishness, much as earlier articles had done. One article in particular, written by Miriam Singer, explained her belief that most Jews in the United States were caught between two worlds; one in which they defined themselves by their Jewishness, and another in which they defined themselves as white. Singer described the fact that in being an Orthodox Jew, she was seen as an outsider by many in the Orthodox community because she worked outside of the Jewish world at the secu-

[102] Pbj, *Sound Politics*
[103] Johnny, *Sound Politics*

lar institution of Fairleigh Dickenson University. At that University, however, once her Jewishness became known her white Christian colleagues again treated her as an outsider.[104]

Singer argued that the systematic perpetuation of white privilege through unconscious acts of giving and receiving advantages in the United States was the reason she did not feel comfortable in her secular or Jewish worlds. There was a time when fellow Jews would come to Singer for advice in education. Now, however, since being given a job at a secular university, that ceased. Her colleagues at the University, on the other hand, still scheduled events on Fridays and Saturdays, making it impossible for her to attend for the fact that she observed the Jewish Sabbath and was unable to work on those days, a fact that many most likely had never considered being a problem. These problems were very different from the problems minorities of color were faced with in battling white privilege since a person's Judaism is not always obvious, and can be hidden. Singer, however, claimed that Jewish people were a forgotten minority inside the world of white privilege. Singer explained, "I may be white, but I live in two worlds, and neither one totally accepts nor understands the other. President Bush just proclaimed May as Jewish heritage month. I read about this in a Jewish weekly newspaper. It did not make the secular papers. Are we not as worthy as those who merit public discussion of Black Heritage Month or Hispanic Heritage Month? We remain a hidden minority amidst white privilege."[105] Singer's anger was once again a response many had exhibited after coming to terms with their own privilege. Singer's anger, however, was grounded under different terms. Singer was frustrated that Jews were not treated with as much sympathy as blacks had been in their dealings with perpetual white privilege.

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[104] Miriam Singer, "A Hidden Minority Amidst White Privilege," *Multicultural Perspectives* 10, no. 1 (2008): 47-51.
[105] Ibid. 51.

Other Jewish scholars writing on white privilege would take a step further than those like Singer and actually look into white privilege's effect inside of the Jewish faith. In a 2008 article the *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies,* Cynthia Levin-Rasky investigated different privileges given to certain Jews based on the lightness of their skin. Levin-Rasky attempted to understand the privileges she was given being an Ashkenazi Jew, after being enlightened about the reality of white privilege. Interestingly, Levin-Rasky found that Ashkenazi Jews in the State of Israel were actually treated better than those with Sephardic (Eastern European and North African ancestry) ancestry.[106] Sephardic Jews are normally darker in complexion than Jews who identify themselves as Ashkenazi. Much like Singer, Levin-Rasky felt that a person's Jewishness made their whiteness an ambiguity. Levin-Rasky wrote, "For Jews, whiteness is an unstable category . . . The privilege ensured by passing/invisibility through social class is an unstable category because it endangers a Jewish selfhood."[107] Because a Jew was both white and Jewish, identifying with one meant a disconnection from the other. Even inside the Jewish world, however, privileges were being granted seemingly consciously to some and not others based on their skin color.

Catholic periodicals as well began to investigate white privilege's affects inside their own congregations. Tom Roberts wrote a very telling article for the *National Catholic Reporter* in 2008 in which we can see that blatant forms of discrimination, so tied with structural privilege, were no longer connected with white privilege. Roberts observed what many other scholars had before him; that the legal definition of discrimination hampered the efforts of riding the

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[106] Cynthia Levin-Rasky, "White Privilege: Jewish Women's Writing and the Instability of Categories," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies,* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 51-66.
[107] Ibid, 63.

world of white privilege. In speaking with a black colleague, Roberts wrote of a conversation in which the colleague explained her belief that all white people who claimed they were voting for Barak Obama in the recent Presidential election had actually changed their pick in the privacy of the voting booth, making a conscious decision to buy into their own prejudices. Being one of the first to call white privilege a sin, Roberts wrote, "The question itself, some would suggest, is an example of the condition (there are those who would call it sin) of "white privilege," the condition that affords whites in a racist culture a certain aloofness to racial realities as well as untold privileges merely because they are white."[108] Interestingly, Roberts' colleague accusation implied a conscious decision made by whites to not vote for Barak Obama, however, Roberts' response showed how he understood white privilege and a white person's perception of the term: aloofness. Roberts was implying that if white people did change their vote in the booth, they did so without truly understanding that the reason was pushed by unconscious urges to perpetuate white privilege.

Roberts went on to show that explicit acts of discrimination were not considered white privilege by writing, "Taking down the 'colored only' signs is satisfying the law; confronting white privilege is getting at the heart of the matter."[109] The blatant forms of benefits given to whites such as white only waiting rooms and water fountains were not examples of white privilege to Roberts. The legal system in the United States was mistaken, in Roberts' eyes, in thinking that stopping these visible forms of discrimination and prejudice would end the white privileged world of America Society. To do that, Roberts and others that had been influenced by

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[108] Tom Roberts, "Confronting White Privilege," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 21, 2008, p. 24.
[109] Ibid. 24.

McIntosh felt you had to dig much deeper. True white privilege was perpetuated psychologically, and the first step in eradicating it was enlightening people of its existence.

Roberts wrote of a preacher who had become enlightened to the "true" definition of white privilege. Roberts quoted Friar Charles Curran and his first realization that white privilege was more than blatant acts of discrimination. Curran became enlightened when he realized his efforts in aiding minority theologians were misplaced. Roberts wrote of Curran, "I was the subject; 'they' were the object. I was graciously doing what I could to help and support 'them'. In reality, the problem was 'I' and not 'them'. I was blithely unaware of how white privilege had shaped my understanding of what was going on."[110] Currans realized that his privilege had made him think of the people he was hoping to help as inferior to himself. His goals were not to actually help these ministers on their own terms, but to help them reach his level. Curran made them the objects of his goodwill instead of the partners in finding it.

In January of 2009, another theologian in the Catholic Church published an article, this time in the academic journal *Teaching Theology and Religion.* The aim of the article was to urge readers to forget about blatant forms of discrimination being connected to white privilege, and understand the term in relation to its invisibility. Jack Hill, a professor at Texas Christian University, began by looking at his own experiences with white and male privilege and how they had affected his life. His aim in doing so, like so many before him, was to teach other professors to change their teaching styles and not get hung up on past practices. Hill wrote, "Finally, my method is 'liberatory' because it aims to use these stories and experiences to liberate all of us as educators from oppressive pedagogical theories and patterns of teaching. It seeks to un-

[110] Ibid. 24.

cover 'liberating resources', or themes, texts, or strategies that prompt a re-envisioning or a re-imagining of how we "see" what is – and what might yet be – the case."[111] Hill felt you could not look at the world as you did before you understood your privilege because that was essentially the definition of being privileged. If people truly wanted to change the system, they had to first start with changing themselves.

In the field of psychology, more studies were completed researching the different reactions most white people exhibited after their first realization of their privilege. In the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, a list of authors described that the first step in understanding one's own white privilege was validation. The usual reactions of anger and resentment that had been found in previous studies were also included in this one, however, now the researchers included avoidance and unwillingness to discuss the concept as well. A common theme that was observed was many reacting to their privilege by trying to dismantle McIntosh's understanding of psychological privilege.[112] These authors and researchers went a step farther than previous studies in seeking to explain why these certain reactions took place inside white people's minds. The trio wrote, "With regard to fear or apprehension, scholars have noted several variations. For example, fear might be linked to potential loss of material benefits, possible downward mobility in the absence of race-based advantages, and fear of losing power . . . Anger responses to White privilege also have been identified in the literature. Anger has been conceptualized as a defensive response coupled with denial of White privilege."[113] Connecting fear

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[111] Jack A. Hill, "Fighting the Elephant in the Room: Ethical Reflections on White Privilege and Other Systems of Advantages in Teaching Religion," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 12, no. 1 (January 2009): 3-23.
[112] Janie E. Penterits, Paul V. Poteat, Lisa B. Spanierman "The White Privilege Attitude Scale," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 56, no. 3 (2009): 417-429.
[113] Ibid. 417-418.

with the loss of privilege seemed to be a logical one to make since a person who was privileged more than likely would not let it go easily. A psychological look at white privileges affect on white people was the only way to truly understand the perpetuation of psychological privilege.

Denials of white privilege were categorized in the study as being parts of the "behavioral dimensions" of white privilege realization. The avoidance behaviors that some of the deniers exhibited in the study were classified as signs of feeling threatened by the advantages that most who denied white privileges existence felt.[114] The study was full of charts and diagrams that the authors called the WPAS or White Privilege Attitude Scale, which showed reactions of certain individuals after being told that privilege was actually perpetuated in our society by a person's subconscious. The authors concluded, "Understanding the ways in which White privilege permeates U.S. society and its institutions, including the counseling psychology profession, is imperative to socially just teaching, research, practice, training, and advocacy."[115] These researchers believed, like so many others, that in order to rid society of these unfair advantages and live in a more socially just world, one must begin to teach the concept of psychological white privilege to their peers, enlightening them of its existence.

In a 2009 article for the educational magazine *Independent School,* Tim Wise and Greg Blackburn acknowledged the fact that some in American society called white privilege "propaganda." The duo wrote, "Yet, because discussions of privilege and inequity can prove contentious, objections are often raised. Some believe there is no such thing as white privilege, and that conversations about such topics are 'liberal' propaganda." The article went on to explain

[114] Ibid. 419.
[115] Ibid. 428.

that these reactions were, much like previous studies had concluded, merely ways to turn a blind eye to reality and hope to live in a perfect world.[116]

In 2010, questions were brought forth in the academic journal *New Directions For Adult and Continuing Education* once again as to how much of a conscious decision white privilege's perpetuation had been in American society. In the article, Scipio Collin and Carole Lund never questioned white privilege's existence; in fact they argued there is no debate in its reality. What the pair did argue, however, was that the assumption that many since McIntosh had made that whites accepted their privilege unconsciously was false. The duo wrote, "There is no debate regarding the fact that many white adult educators make decisions that privilege members of their racial group, peoples of European descent, over the 'other.' As to whether it is a conscious or unconsciousness decision on the part of white practitioners not to accept responsibility is open for future discussion and further research."[117] The goal of the essay was to shift the paradigm not in the understanding of the concept of white privilege, but in the ways people credited its perpetuation. Collin and Lund were not as quick as McIntosh had been in concluding that the only way white privilege was perpetuated in the U.S was through people's subconscious. The reason we did not live in a post racial society, according to Collin and Lund, was because whites had made anything of the sort impossible. In order to take steps towards that society, the authors listed eight bullet point practices that whites were obliged to undertake, two of which were admitting that racism was systemic and institutionalized in the United States,

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[116] Tim Wise, Greg Blackburn, "Addressing White Privilege in Independent Schools," *Independent School* 68, no. 3 (Spring 2009).

[117] Scipio A.J. Collins III, Carole Lund, "The Intersection of White Privilege and Racism," *New Directions For Adult and Continuing Education,* no. 125 (Spring 2010), 91.

and admitting that whites were racist without denial or guilt.[118] These steps seemed to be extremely harsh and accusatory, however, in the author's eyes, this was for the fact that we had not taken responsibility for the privileges whites had received in this country since its inception. An event that occurred two years after Collins and Lund wrote their article, however, showed that many people were still oblivious to their privileged world.

In February of 2011, a blog was creating by a person that claimed to be a "Gay Girl in Damascus." The women explained her story of being born to American and Syrian parents, and traveling to Damascus to live. On June 6, the blog reported that the women who had been posting was arrested, inciting searches and news coverage all around the world. The story, however, proved to be a hoax. The person who started the blog turned out to be quite the opposite of a gay woman in Syria: a white American man living in Scotland named Tom MacMaster. It was clear that Spears felt he could speak on issues a gay girl in Damascus might experience, proving his ineptness in understanding how privileged he truly was.

After the truth was uncovered, NPR interviewed a man named Brian Spears who urged white males not to attempt to speak out as marginalized members of society, such as gay women, no matter how genuine their intentions. Spears argued privileged white males had no way to understand a marginalized individual's mindset. Spears said, "Well, the big reason I think you shouldn't do it, especially in this kind of case, is because you're taking on the voice of somebody whose voice is usually marginalized anyway. As a white male - and, I mean, I'm certainly one of those myself - I have an incredible amount of privilege."[119] The fact that MacMaster attempted to speak for a minority proved he was clueless of his privileged outlook

[118] Ibid. 93.

[119] "White Privilege and the Gay Girl in Damascus," Talk of the Nation. NPR National Public Radio, June 15, 2011.

on the world. Spears' argument was that anyone who was the member of a majority, be that male, white, or anything, could not attempt to see that world through a minorities eyes because they had never experienced it that way. The problem with MacMaster was that he claimed his story was truthful. If he had explained his blog was being done for literary or experimental purposes, there would not have been a problem. However, since MacMaster led people on to believe he truly was a gay girl from Damascus, Spears felt he had made a mistake.[120] MacMaster's claim to truthfully be a gay girl from Damascus proved that many in the United States, even in 2011, were still oblivious to any forms of privilege they may have possessed.

5. Conclusion

White privilege as a concept has changed in the United States from the 1960's when it was first used in popular newspapers and magazines. During these times, white privilege was used to describe visible structural forms of racism and discrimination perpetuated by governmental programs. Structural privileges allowed whites to legally keep an edge over minorities in the country for generations. In 1964, those legal forms of discrimination were outlawed in hoped of evening the playing field in American society between whites and everyone else. Unfortunately, even after these blatant forms of racism had been outlawed, discrimination continued in the United States. Because of this, scholars began to investigate other reasons for the perpetuation of privilege being given whites and held from people of color. During this period, the definition of white privilege shifted to meet the needs of the time. The theory that many would adhere to in scholastics and popular media that explained why discrimination was still a problem in the United States more than twenty years after structural privilege was ended was

[120] Ibid.

created by Peggy McIntosh. No longer were privileges understood as being perpetuated by conscious efforts to keep minorities in lesser positions of society, but psychological and unconscious advantages given to whites by other whites. The primary goal of activists and scholars from this point would be to expose the way that discrimination had been continued in American society through a citizen's subconscious

Into the 1990s, McIntosh's ideas spread throughout the academic and popular media avenues, with countless scholars adopting her definition of psychological white privilege and hoping to enlighten those around them of its existence. Popular news sources would be the first to publish articles in which white privilege's definition as a psychological phenomenon was utilized. Over the years, however, academic journals and magazines took the reins in perpetuating the new concept of privileges being given unconsciously around the country. Once the definition had become engrained in popular thought, exposure was still the primary goal, however, now questions would begin to crop up about white privilege's unconscious perpetrators. Were white people truly innocent bystanders in a society that gave them their privileges without their knowledge? Many would claim yes, but a few in the academic world felt that this was a cop-out, a strategy that allowed the privileged system to continue without the perpetrators finding justice. Scholars and writers with this sort of understanding felt that until whites came to terms with themselves and their racism, the non-blame game would continue to perpetuate white privilege in the United States.

McIntosh's definition of white privilege being more of a psychological than structural and governmentally perpetuated phenomenon would remain the principal method of understanding the concept into the new millennium. The reason the shift occurred was in order to

explain the reality in the United States that laws had not made discrimination and preferential treatment problems of the past. Studies would begin to appear that hoped to explain how privilege was perpetuated unconsciously, and how enlightened people could expect other whites to react when they were first confronted with what their subconscious was doing. Psychological, sociological, and educational papers would all be published that dealt with how white privilege affected people in the United States. Religious periodicals and forums would investigate privileges effect on their congregations as well. Jews and Catholics would publish the bulk of papers dealing with psychological white privilege in hopes of ridding the perpetuation of unconscious privilege by educating people of its existence.

Jewish writers, however, looked at privilege through a different light being a minority themselves. Articles and essays began to surface about a Jew's whiteness, and how it affected their Jewishness; the consensus seemingly being one could never truly be the other. Interestingly, Jewish scholars began to see white privilege as many black scholars had understood it: being consciously perpetuated by whites. There were reasons why certain busses in minority neighborhoods were graffiti stained and stunk of urine: white people in government had chosen not to allocate the necessary funds to those areas of town to fix the problems. There were also reasons why Jews felt they lost their privilege when their Jewish-ness was revealed: whites consciously decided to withhold it from them.

Events in the late 1990's and early 2000's proved that the media as well was perpetuating certain stereotypes about minorities and whites, consciously or not. After Hurricane Katrina, blacks being described as criminals and whites as law-abiding citizens pushed images into the nation's minds of blacks being lesser citizens than whites. Citizens of the United States

were being fed images of very similar occurrences, and being told two very different stories about each. At the close of the first decade in the new millennium, some understood white privilege as McIntosh had presented it in 1986; as a psychological problem in the United States that was engrained much deeper than anyone had believed prior. Others felt those privileges were not as unconsciously perpetuated as McIntosh would lead people to believe.

The concept of white privilege shifted because it needed to. No longer could discrimination be explained by looking at legal forms of prejudice being practiced around the United States. Times changed, and the need for a new understanding of discriminations perpetuation was required. Once again, Daniel T. Rodgers wrote, "Not logic, but interpretive needs create paradigms."[121] The needs of the nation had shifted, and understanding white privilege as a psychological reality was necessary to take the next step in dismantling the privileged systems that have been a part of this country since its inception. Once that system was created by the government and perpetuated by law-abiding citizens. Now privilege was understood as being created by law-abiding citizen's subconscious, making it much more difficult to be prevented by the government.

White privilege's definition and understanding shifted in the United States in conjunction with the ideas of liberalism in American political society. Early liberal activists pushed for certain things like worker rights and fair wages. As Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore wrote, "After 1937, the liberals' job was to manage the system [American economy] toward the

[121] Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: the Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History*, 79, no.1 (June 1992): 12.

Keynesian dream of full employment and broad-based consumption."[122] After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, those goals had seemingly been met by legislative acts that gave all citizens an equal shot at the American dream. Discrimination, however, was still a problem in the United States, and many liberals felt it their duty to understand why. No longer would the working class be the basis of liberal activism, but an aim to be accepting of all races and creeds would be the new liberal sentiments.

Some scholars, including American literary theorist and University of Illinois, Chicago professor Walter Benn Michaels, have felt this shift has been detrimental to American liberalism. Michaels argued in his 2006 book, *The Trouble With Diversity*, that the American left's insistence on acceptance and multiculturalism made us forget the true problem in American society: economic inequalities. Michaels wrote, "The intellectual left has responded to the increase in economic inequality by insisting on the importance of cultural identity . . . Celebrating diversity of American life has become the American left's way of accepting their poverty, of accepting inequality."[123] The definition of white privilege shifted directly with this new liberal mindset. Understanding white privilege as being perpetuated psychologically coincided with the changing of liberal ideals in the United States because in order to become more multicultural, it had to be understood why discrimination was a problem after it had been outlawed in 1964.

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[122] Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74, (Fall 2008): 8.
[123] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity, and Ignore Inequality,* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 7.

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