

The Pedagogy and Politics of Racial Passing: Examining Media Literacy in Turn-of-the-Century Activist Periodicals

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how we can use African American activist media to theorize the role of pedagogy in the public sphere. Focusing on how racial passing stories expose the limiting (and often tropic) binaries through which racial identity is deciphered, this analysis further highlights the extent to which these binary constructions of identity are learned through media narration..

Using the December, 1912, issue of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Crisis Magazine* as a touchstone for investigation, this analysis considers how pedagogy is taken up as both a theme and project in the magazine. Foregrounding the degree to which *Crisis* critiques and counternarrates the demeaning and derogatory portrayals of African American identity in early twentieth-century media, this article suggests that Du Bois's magazine not only indicts dominant visual systems of seeing and evaluating African American identity but also reveals the extent to which such systems of seeing and interpreting blackness are learned and can be remediated through media intervention.

The ultimate aim of this article is to derive an interpretive framework that understands pedagogy as not simply a method for inscribing pre-existent dominant norms but rather as a means for intervening, questioning, and challenging dominant systems of representation and public articulation. Moreover, this analysis intends to reveal the hidden pedagogies within dominant cultural paraphernalia for the purposes of advancing an approach to media literacy that recognizes and endeavors to transform the tropes and archetypes applied to marginal and minority communities.

Keywords: Media Activism, Pedagogy, Public Sphere, Race, Giroux, Du Bois, African American, Print Culture

In a *New York Times Magazine* article chronicling the public shaming of Rachel Dolezal, the former head of the Spokane Washington chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. who came under fire for allegedly “misrepresenting” herself as African American, author Daniel J. Sharfstein writes:

...Dolezal’s exposure comes at a time when racial categories have never seemed more salient. The same social media that is shaming Dolezal has also aggregated the distressingly numerous killings of African Americans by the police into a singular statement on racism and inequality. In this moment, when blackness means something very specific—asserting that black lives matter—it follows for many people that categorical clarity has to matter, too. (Sharfstein)

Asserting that Dolezal’s story is not as anomalous as mainstream media outlets have claimed, Sharfstein’s article, entitled “Rachel Dolezal’s ‘Passing’ Isn’t So Unusual,” frames Dolezal’s case among countless historical incidents of passing.¹ Citing genealogist Paul Heinegg, Sharfstein traces the phenomenon of passing to a 17th-century Virginia law that assigned racial classification based on the status of the mother. According to Heinegg, passing was initially a matter of deciphering the identity of mixed race individuals. In order for mixed race families to access the resources associated with white privilege, which included being kept out of bondage, white mothers were compelled to prove their whiteness through legal means. However, as racial categories and tensions became more stringent, passing garnered greater cultural attention in magazines and newspapers and came to be understood as a phenomenon in which individuals misrepresent their purported racial, ethnic, or gender identity for cultural, intellectual, material, or personal advancement. Yet what is especially noteworthy about Sharfstein’s genealogy of racial passing is his case for “categorical clarity,” which is symptomatic of a larger gesture by mainstream presses to evaluate and interpret blackness (and not whiteness) as an intuitive and fixed racial category.

We can see this trend in many of the headlines announcing and exposing Dolezal’s reverse passing. News about Dolezal treated the activist as either a punching bag, punchline, or both, placing an inordinate amount of attention on Dolezal’s physical appearance by focusing on her hair, nose, and lips. *Gawker* even published an article entitled, “Rachel Dolezal Identifies as Medium Spray,” which poked fun of Dolezal’s spray tanning habits. Other media outlets focused on the existential requirements of racial identification, as the *Daily Mail* ran an article entitled “Race Faker Rachel Dolezal Talks Racial Identity on Chat Show and Says She Ticks Both the Black AND White Box on Forms.” Less vitriolic media coverage tended to define authentic blackness through the lens of cultural and institutional marginalization and historical discrimination, experiences that Dolezal’s biography was ostensibly lacking (see *The Guardian*’s “I Became a Black Woman in Spokane. But Rachel Dolezal, I Was a Black Girl First” by Alicia Walters; *Salon*’s “What We Can’t Afford to Forget About Rachel Dolezal: A Master Class in White Victimology” by Chauncey Devega; and the *New York Times*’s “The Delusions of Rachel Dolezal” by Charles Blow).

The goal of this article, however, is not to answer these concerns about racial identity with a definitive framework through which to understand blackness and whiteness as either authentic or constructed subject positions. Instead, this analysis is framed with Dolezal’s example because it exposes the central role that media plays in teaching citizens what constitutes appropriate or “authentic” racial identity. While one might take

[1] Sharfstein’s article primarily focuses on reverse passing cases, such as those of Rachel Dolezal, Dan Burros, the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan whose family identified as Jewish and who was considered a “star bar mitzvah student,” and Forest Carter, also a member of the Ku Klux Klan and speechwriter for George Wallace who authored a Native American “memoir” under the penname Asa Earl Carter (Sharfstein). Although Burros and Carter’s cases derived some media attention, the purpose of this article is to unpack how the phenomenon of passing exposes larger cultural assumptions about racial identity, particularly the extent to which we rely on aesthetic or phenotypic markers as a means for interpreting racial identity.

issue with Sharfstein's assumptions about the necessity to solidify racial boundaries, this analysis builds upon his genealogy of passing by considering how the phenomenon of passing is taken up by activist media for the purposes of challenging the institutional bodies that have traditionally defined racial performance. Focusing the analysis at the turn of the twentieth century—a moment in which categorical clarity retained particular import in determining who could inhabit certain public spaces—this article suggests that popular media outlets provide a consequential pedagogical arena for learning, interpreting, and evaluating race identity. Concentrating on three articles written for the December, 1912, issue of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Crisis Magazine*, the primary media organ of the N.A.A.C.P., this article suggests that stories of passing (which become visible through our media outlets) intuitively teach readers how to inhabit and perform racial identity, assigning what Sharfstein defines as “categorical clarity” to these purportedly different identity formations.

It is important to note that this analysis is not offering a comparative view of white versus black passing. Rather, this article addresses the role of activist media in calling attention to reductive characterizations of race identity and in revising (and counternarrating) how blackness comes into view within public forums. This analysis locates itself at the turn of the twentieth century for two reasons. First, the twenty-five years between 1890 and 1915 is especially fertile ground for examining the role of African American media activism. The commercialization of periodical literature and the growing popularity of monthly magazines in this period marked a sea change in American aesthetic values, political consciousness, and forms of public engagement, which stimulated conversations about social justice and marginal and minority activism. These conversations also inspired dialogue about and among marginal and minority activists. Second, studying how these cultural transitions offered space for marginal and minority bodies to theorize the terms on which one could engage and become visible within a public sphere of representation can help shape our own thinking about contemporary mass media technologies, including digital technology. Especially relevant to contemporary scholarship are concerns about how these technologies contour our notions of who gets to participate within a public sphere of representation, where we find and engage this space, and how to make this space more open and accessible to a wider range of readers and writers. Such questions were also taken up by African American activist presses nearly a century earlier as a result of the growing accessibility of print magazines and the increasing regularity of print advertising and half-tone printing technologies, which significantly altered not only who could access these texts but how these texts were consumed (see Anne Ardis and Patrick Collier's *Transatlantic Print Culture: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms* and Amy Helene Kirschke's *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*). Moreover, concerns surrounding the stakes of making oneself, one's suffering, and one's experience visible through public writing was highlighted by African American media in reaction to the increasing influence of visual imagery on print media, such as lynching photographs. It is therefore productive to turn to such texts in order to outline how African American media activism intervened in these consequential questions regarding race and public visibility.

Public Culture, Public Pedagogies, and Media as an Object of Analysis

Mainstream public culture, viewed through the lens of magazines, newspapers, and social networking sites, not only offers an arena for understanding how race identity comes into view (or is made viewable) through dominant systems of representation and articulation but also acts as an alternative pedagogical forum, one that grants access to the means of literary production and consumption outside of traditionally academic venues. Therefore, magazines and newspapers can be seen as pedagogical or “teaching” texts—that is, texts that either critique or instantiate structures of power by introducing and inculcating new, popular, or alternative habits of mind. Using Henry Giroux's “Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals” as a touchstone for unpacking the latent pedagogical functioning of public culture, this

analysis suggests that activist periodicals both expose and reinscribe the pedagogical imperative of cultural paraphernalia through the production of counterdiscourses. These counterdiscourses help to construct new pathways for accessing educational resources beyond dominant and hegemonic institutions of knowledge.²

According to Giroux, public culture is a fluid and dynamic arena for understanding the performative dimensions of identity and agency, rendering visible the political forces influencing identity construction. In other words, public culture is a space for mediating, accommodating, and contesting dominant social hierarchies by highlighting the material relations informing and constructing a politics of representation. Framing this politics of representation through a discourse of pedagogy, Giroux's "Cultural Studies" points to the hyper-fabricated nature of subject formation and, more specifically, citizen subjectivity. As Giroux notes, "the primacy of culture and power should be organized through an understanding of how the political becomes pedagogical" (62). Thus, political agency necessitates a process of learning whereby individuals come to understand themselves in relation to cultural artifacts and institutions.³

Consequently, Giroux's formulation attaches pedagogical significance to this process of subject formation.⁴ More pointedly for Giroux, the pedagogical encounter reveals the political forces influencing how individuals come to articulate themselves within cultural institutions by underlining the degree to which these systems of power are artificial and ideologically driven. Making explicit connections among public culture, pedagogy, and subject formation, such work highlights the centrality of pedagogy in understanding and revising systems of power.

Recognizing the pedagogical imperative underlying the circulation of print media allows print culture scholars to better account for the ideological function of such material, especially as such material engages in the work of narrating which bodies can and cannot retain and garner visibility within a public sphere of representation. In other words, paying attention to the ways in which print culture teaches its readers how to *be in the world*—particularly in terms of how to differentiate oneself from gendered, racialized, and ideological others—is a fundamental aspect of acquiring and advancing a progressive approach to media literacy. Primary, however, to these questions regarding identity formation, pedagogy, and public culture is

[2] My use of the term "counterdiscourse" borrows from Nancy Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." "Subaltern counterpublics," according to Fraser, are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 67). In this context, counterdiscourses are simply discourses that offer "oppositional interpretations of marginal identity, interests, and needs." Seeing as turn-of-the-century African American periodicals offered alternative portrayals of blackness that countered the often-derogatory stereotypes found within mainstream media in this period, I argue that these periodicals are counterdiscursive.X

[3] Without veering too far from my central argument, we can see the stakes inherent in Giroux's ideas in our current socio-political climate. That is to say, concerns over immigration and what constitutes American assimilation reveals the ways in which popular media (from all ends of the political spectrum) have a direct hand in shaping the types of identities that are visible or are not visible within a social sphere by teaching a media-consuming public normalized identity formations. For example, viewing an immigrant as either a foreign other to be feared, maligned, and banned from American participatory democracy or a "raw material" to be shaped and molded into a model for American exceptionalism or progressivism are archetypes that derive consistent media currency in our contemporary moment.

[4] In this article, I am suggesting that subject formation is tied to one's capacity to become visible within a public sphere of representation. Here, I am gesturing toward the work of Jeffery Nealon and Susan Giroux. In *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*, Nealon and Giroux define subjectivity as a collection of discursive and physical actions that allow for individualized identities to develop and become culturally visible. Subjectivity happens at the intersection of individual agency and larger cultural values. The larger cultural values that help dictate and discern racial subjectivities, for instance, are explicitly tied to political forces. Therefore, political agency is the medium through which new racial subjects can emerge, develop, and become visible within mainstream culture and within wider public spheres of influence and representation.

how the asymmetrical deployment of political, cultural, and social power shapes the pedagogical encounter. Revealing this asymmetry and chronicling how activist campaigns offer alternative forums for enunciating identity formation and political agency is thus fundamental to countering dominant systems of power.

Turn-of-the-Century African American periodicals are especially useful sites for exposing asymmetrical deployments of cultural and political power, as such periodicals interrogated the deep racial divides buttressing public and social norms. A landscape in which news, advertisements, opinion pieces, political commentary, personal letters, and literary critique sat alongside and in conversation with one another, African American print media offers a particularly unique staging ground for historicizing and contextualizing the multi-voiced and inter/intratextual nature of modern mass media. As Anne Ardis posits in “Making Middle-Brow Culture,” turn-of-the-century African American magazines like W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Crisis* highlight “the complex relationships between printed artifacts, the dazzlingly, distractingly visual cultures of modernity, and the world of things for purchase commercially in a modern consumer culture...” (21). Similarly, Anne Carroll’s “Protest and Affirmation: Composite Texts in *Crisis*” suggests that *Crisis*’s “large cultural presence in the early twentieth century was due, in part, to its multimedia format and layout, which has drawn scant scholarly attention” (89). This “multimedia format,” characterized by the intermingling of news, photographs, advertisements, and critical and opinion commentary (and which is akin to contemporary media layouts both online and in print), provided a forum for readers to experience and engage with different genres of writing. For example, the Table of Contents for the December, 1912, issue of *Crisis Magazine* lists the following four titles under its “Articles” section: “Emmy” (a short story by Jessie Redmon Fauset), “Sackcloth and Ashes” (an editorial detailing the trauma of lynching and mob violence), “The Club Movement in California” (featuring biographical sketches of members of the National Association of Colored Women’s California chapters), and “The Christmas Sermon” (a poem by Robert J. Laurence), in addition to its featured departments, including “Along the Color Line,” “Men of the Month,” “Opinion,” “Editorial,” and “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.” Such offerings represent a range of critical, literary, and journalistic prose, from poetry and short stories to investigative journalism and political commentary.

Readers of magazines like *Crisis* were therefore presented with various textual genres and images that required a multimodal literacy, one that took into consideration how the structural and design features of these periodicals coalesced to make meaning. Even print advertisements, which were reflective of a growing consumer culture, cultivated a style of reading and interpretation that compelled audiences to deduce meaning from an economy of words and images. This multimodal reading experience was shaped by the various linkages and relationships one might find between different media paraphernalia, as such relationships could be found between images and copy, or copy and advertisements, or advertisements and opinion commentary. Editors also took advantage of multimedia formatting by positing arguments based on the internal staging of different, sometimes competing, media paraphernalia.⁵ In short, African American newspapers and magazines advanced a multimedia format that privileged inter- and intra-textual dialogue, exposing the internal juxtapositions informing how we making meaning from a range of cultural and media artifacts. Additionally, African American newspapers and magazines offered an approach to literacy where readers were able to participate in, contribute to, and enact new outlets for democratic engagement.

Passing, A Pedagogy: Artificial versus Embodied Passing

One of the more insightful observations made about the media flurry surrounding Rachel Dolezal’s

[5] In “Beauty Along the Color Line: Lynching, Aesthetics and the ‘Crisis,’” Russ Castronovo argues that *Crisis*’s multimedia format was used deliberately by editors to build connections between politics and aesthetics. Castronovo’s work focuses specifically on how the internal staging of lynching photographs alongside of literary articles worked to renegotiate both the standards on which art was evaluated and the conditions on which bodies came into and out of view (and the extent to which these bodies were considered beautiful).

public outing was by a columnist for *The Guardian*. In an article entitled “Rachel Dolezal Exposes our Delusional Constructions and Perceptions of Race,” Steven W. Thrasher suggests that Dolezal’s failed passing reveals the artificiality of binary constructions of whiteness and blackness. Thrasher notes that what makes Dolezal’s case so “fascinating” is its exposure of the “disquieting way that our race is performance — that, despite the stark differences in how our races are perceived and privileged (or not) by others, they are all predicated on a myth that the differences are intrinsic and intrinsically perceptible” (Thrasher). Thrasher’s article presents two premises. Thrasher suggests that the ostensible intuitiveness with which we perceive racial characterization is learned. Thrasher additionally notes that we can learn to see and *unsee* these visual markers given our cultural and social training. In other words, although our racial constructs are arbitrary (as Thrasher points out), the features and categories that we associate with such constructs are learned and serve an ideological purpose, as such constructs are policed through legal legacy (*Plessy v. Ferguson*), social doctrine (de facto segregation), and institutional forums.

Historically, *Crisis Magazine* has played a role in narrating the linkages between artificial and embodied passing, enabling early twentieth-century readers to recognize the hidden pedagogies within dominant cultural paraphernalia. The editors of *Crisis* made revealing these “hidden pedagogies” a fundamental project of the magazine—a project that is productively illustrated in Jessie Redmon Fauset’s “Emmy.”

Arranged around two instances of passing—(1) Emmy, the protagonist, becoming “passable” as a black body within the protopublic sphere of the classroom; and (2) Archie, Emmy’s love interest, passing as someone of “Spanish decent” in order to excel in the field of engineering—Fauset’s story is largely a mediation on the role of public institutional settings in defining and standardizing blackness.⁶ Making visible the discriminatory and derogatory lens through which black identity was visualized in turn-of-the-century American culture, “Emmy” endeavors to “mend” these dominant and problematic ways of discerning black identity by calling attention to the arbitrary nature of such identity markers, foregrounding the role of pedagogy in inculcating these dominant modes of evaluation and interpretation. Passing is treated as a pedagogical practice, one that requires African American subjects to perform arbitrary racial markers for the purposes of attaining legibility within our public forums. Yet passing is cast from two differing vantage points, artificial and embodied passing. A comparative example between artificial and embodied passing, as each are noticed through Fauset’s Emmy and Archie, clarifies how Fauset, and in a larger sense the editors of *Crisis Magazine* as a whole, undertake the work of redefining passing as not simply a process of misrepresenting one’s race identity. Rather, passing in this context is defined as a cultural procedure in which black Americans acquire legibility within a larger public sphere of representation by performing “acceptable” racial characteristics (as defined and delimited by dominant visual and discursive systems).

Consumed with the stakes and consequences associated with disguising his racial identity, Archie’s narrative follows many of the tropes and themes associated with a traditional passing story, referred to in this analysis as “artificial passing.” Posing as white man in order to ascend the ranks in the field of engineering, Archie is plagued with interior deliberations about whether or not he wants to marry Emmy and “out” himself as an African American, thereby limiting his chances of professional fulfillment and wealth. It is not until Archie is met with the prospect of professional advancement at the expense of his romance with Emmy that he realizes success cannot be achieved without self-acceptance and race pride. Archie accomplishes these forms of acceptance when he exposes his “true” identity and *comes out* to his superiors, risking his career as

[6] I borrow this term from Rosa E. Eberly. Eberly refers to school spaces as protopublic spheres where students can practice participatory democracy within a low-stakes learning environment. Eberly notes that these “protopublic spaces...[allow] students to form and enter literary public spheres and choose whether to join wider public spheres” (162). For a more detailed account of the relationship between classroom spaces and public spaces, see Christian Weisser’s *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*.

an engineer for the interior reward of self-actualization.

Although Archie's narrative aligns with standard passing stories, Emmy's storyline extends the notion of passing to account for the process in which racialized bodies are taught and expected to disguise specific identity markers in order to *pass through* public space, even if they do not intend to pass as white. Thus, Emmy's narrative explores passing-as-learned-identity as opposed to passing-as-deception. In drawing Emmy's narrative, Fauset is perhaps more concerned with and critical of the white gazing subjects that delimit and authorize how racialized bodies can be seen or come into view within public spaces. Emmy's story therefore serves to illuminate "embodied passing," which is the primary focus of this article insofar as it underscores the material and cultural forces influencing subject formation.

For the purposes of this discussion, "embodied passing" denotes the physical experience of passing into and out of different public arenas as a racialized body, a term employed to underline the extent to which mainstream culture places specific conditions on how blackness can be seen and received within public spheres of representation. Black bodily presence is therefore mediated through certain assumptions about blackness; these assumptions dictate and discern how blackness can be performed in public space. Although embodied passing does not necessitate disguising one's racial identity for the purposes of seeking professional or social advancement (artificial passing), it does suggest that in order to "pass" through different public venues *unscathed* (that is, without the chronic fear of bodily harm and harassment), racialized bodies must contend with and acquiesce to dominant visual systems for seeing and evaluating blackness. Such dominant and problematic systems of representation are made explicit in the story's initial scenes, which are staged within the schoolhouse and revolve around the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student. In an assignment for class, Emmy is asked to name the world's "five races" (Fauset 79). After naming the "white or Caucasian, the yellow or Mongolian, the red or Indian, the brown or Malay, and the black or Negro," Emmy's instructor, Mrs. Wenzel, demands that Emmy identify the race to which she belongs (79). This question, however, is harder for Emmy to navigate, "not because hers was the only dark face in the crowded schoolroom, but because she was visualizing the pictures with which the geography had illustrated its information" (79). Emmy deliberates that "she was not white, she knew that—nor had she almond eyes like the Chinese, nor the feathers which the Indian wore in his hair and which of course, were to Emmy a racial characteristic" (79). Finally, Emmy concludes that she "belongs to the black or Negro race," much to her teachers "relief" (79). Emmy too is relieved, as "the Hottentot, chosen with careful nicety to represent the entire Negro race, had," as Emmy notes, "on the whole a better appearance"(79).⁷

Visualizing iconic representations of racialized bodies, Emmy undertakes a process of logical deduction, reading her race identity in relation to these other representative identities. Although none of these iconic race representations adequately articulate her experience as a racialized body, Emmy chooses the least problematic minority appearance as her own. Emmy's participation and legibility within the public institutional sphere of the classroom is predicated on these representative icons (for example, the Venus Hottentot). Thus, Emmy becomes intelligible and "passable" only when she complies with these racial representations. Moreover, passing within this context holds a double significance, since Emmy is both receiving a passing grade for Mrs.

[7] The Hottentot Venus was the stage name assigned to Saartjie Baartmann (also referred to as Sara Baartman), a South African slave who was sold to a Scottish doctor named Alexander Dunlop. Dunlop compelled Baartman to perform in carnival slideshows throughout Europe. Considered a major "attraction" in Britain and France between 1810 and 1815, Baartman would draw large crowds interested in her "exotic" anatomy. Baartman was also used as an object of scientific examination both during her life and after her death by Georges Cuvier, a professor of anatomy at the *Museum of Natural History* in Paris. After Baartman's death in 1815, Cuvier dissected her body and displayed her remains, including her brain, skeleton, and genitalia in Paris's *Museum of Man*. Fauset uses the legacy of Baartman in order to highlight the extent to which blackness was treated as an object of public scrutiny and scientific examination, and to further elucidate the degree to which black public presence was marked by an erasure of subjective identity.

Wenzel's assignment, as well as *passable* as a black body within a public institutional sphere. By introducing her story with a schoolhouse "lesson," Fauset underlines the extent to which dominant visual systems are learned and artificial. Pedagogy therefore acts a medium through which dominant visual systems are articulated and enacted, as educators are the primary interlocutors for policing racial categories.

Throughout "Emmy," Fauset is concerned with how racially marked bodies come to know, see, and value themselves within and in relation to dominant visual systems, as the story reaches its climax when Emmy and Archie learn to reject the racial hierarchies and stereotypes that define blackness in order to realize and fully recuperate their love for one another. Each character undergoes a process of becoming intelligible both within and against these dominant characterizations of blackness. One reviewer, Claire Oberon Garcia, describes the story as "permeated by problematic tropes of recognition in the verbal and visual arts" (Garcia 101). This chronic and consistent squaring of embodied identity with dominant standards for seeing blackness is further explicated in the illustration of a young African American woman gazing at her reflection in a vanity mirror, which momentarily interrupts Fauset's text and works to create a collage effect in the layout of the page. This juxtaposition of image and text underlines the visual qualities implicit within the process of imagining identity: identity, through this discursive and visual vantage point, is contingent upon and pivots from the image. In other words, the visual field through which bodies become viewable works to determine one's access to and acceptance within public culture. As a consequence, racial icons such as the Venus Hottentot—a public identity singularly circumscribed by the visual field—set certain and specific limitations on how blackness could be seen, received, and responded to within mainstream culture and its publics. In Fauset's fictional account of passing, the image works to police, circumscribe, and substantiate racial identity. Race is treated as an aestheticized object of public consumption, interpretation, and analysis, and racial articulation is mediated by public figures, specifically educators. Furthermore, racial iconicization in "Emmy" works to reify binary constructions of race, asserting categorical clarity through the visual field, through artificial enactments and visual presentations of race.

The primacy of the image in discerning racial identity finds further elucidation in an editorial preceding Fauset's "Emmy," entitled "The Black Mother" (TBM). Reporting on legislation to erect a mammy monument in the National Mall, "TBM" complicates the legacy of the mammy figure, which at the turn of the century derived particular cultural currency as a happy and benign relic of the "Old South."⁸ Noting that such iconography "existed under a false social system that deprived [real black mothers] of husband and child," "TBM" suggests that such caricatures dehumanize and negate the subjective experience of Black mothers—as the mammy figure signifies a moment in African American history when Black women were deprived of interiority and barred from cultivating a private life outside of white supremacist systems of servitude and surveillance ("TBM" 78).

"TBM" also points to the degree to which our public memorials are spaces of learning, as public memorials both instruct citizens what our nation's values are and which citizens (and civic actions) are valuable. Erecting a mammy statue in the National Mall would therefore teach African American women that their value as citizens stems from their capacity to identify with and live into these demeaning tropes of representation. In both "Emmy" and "TBM," dominant pedagogies (such as those that happen in the

[8] This notion of the "Old South" is firmly connected to Lost Cause Mythology, a nostalgic misreading of plantation life prior to the Civil War. In the half century after the Civil War, Lost Cause sentiment grew in popularity. Rooted in plantation literature (including *The Leopard's Spots* in 1902, *The Clansman* in 1905, and *The Traitor* in 1907), Lost Cause mythology romanticized Southern paternalism, uplifting the plantation as a utopian space in which racial binaries were fixed and natural. The mammy figure played a central role in clarifying such binaries.

schoolhouse and those that are derived through public memorialization) are associated with submission. That is, Emmy must submit to her teacher's reading of race in order to pass through and become legible within the classroom space. Likewise, public memorialization of mammy works to instruct white and black citizen subjects how to read and evaluate African American identity through the lens of submission, as the legacy of the mammy is one of servitude and submission. However, the editors of *Crisis* challenge these dominant pedagogical practices by teaching readers how to recognize and depart from these systems of seeing and evaluating blackness.

Critiquing the extent to which black bodies were encouraged, expected, and to some degree even required to identify with and through these iconic and hypervisible racial caricatures, the editorial describes the mammy figure as a "perversion of motherhood" and compels "present-day mammies [to] suckle their own children...walk in the sunshine with their own toddling boys and girls and put their own sleepy little brothers and sisters to bed" ("TBM" 78). Compelling African American women to contest the cultural legacy of these hyperbolic and problematic tropes of representation, "TBM" asserts that the mammy caricature (probably one of the more iconic and visually pointed images of black iconography) works to abstract and erase the embodied and felt experiences of black women.

Particularly noteworthy is the article's positioning. Directly preceding Fauset's story about passing, "TBM" contextualizes the drama of "Emmy" with real-world prefatory material, drawing connections between passing and racial caricatures. By juxtaposing Fauset's fictive story of passing (which emphasizes the primacy of the image in objectifying and aestheticizing racial identity) with a critique of the hypervisible legacy of the mammy figure, the December, 1912, layout of *Crisis* links the phenomenon of passing to an oversimplification and caricaturization of racial subjectivity. Passing is therefore associated not with the breakdown of racial categories but with the solidification of racial boundary lines—lines that, regardless of the racial identity performing the passing, associate racial identification with phenotypic categorization.

Scholar Baz Dreisinger, who has written prolifically on the phenomenon of passing, suggests that passing privileges and reiterates the presence of the white gazing subject. In an interview for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Dreisinger suggests that the phenomenon of passing underlines the white gazing subject's "long legacy of fetishizing blackness" (Dreisinger). Such fetishistic imagery is "based upon caricatures, and not characters...on idealized or cartoonish notions of what blackness is" (Dreisinger). These cartoonish portrayals of blackness work to obfuscate the interiority of racialized subjects. Although traditional stories of passing tend to emphasize the psychological consequences of performing whiteness (notably the pain associated with breaking familial ties for the purposes of social or professional advancement), both "Emmy" and "TBM" highlight the extent to which *passing as black* within a white public sphere of representation is equally risky. In other words, passing takes on a dual context: passing is treated as both a phenomenon in which individuals transition from one race identity to another and a process through which African Americans learn how to see, identify, and contend with dominant visual systems. Consequently, the editors at *Crisis* sought to re-define passing as a social and psychological process of erasing embodied experience and aestheticizing racial identity. The metaphoric erasure of subjectivity that becomes visible through the fetishizing imagery of the mammy figure is made literal and explicit in the article directly succeeding "Emmy," which chronicles the lynching of Zackaria Walker.

Walker's identity, as well as his purported crime, is not specified in the report. Instead, the article, entitled "Sackcloth and Ashes," vaguely notes: "On August 18, 1911, a black man was burned to death by a mob in Coatesville, Pa" ("Sackcloth" 87). From here, the editorial details a speech by John Jay Chapman to a prayer gathering in Coatesville. In his speech, Chapman interprets a newspaper account of Walker's death:

...I read in the newspapers of August 14...about the burning alive of a human being—
and of how a few desperate fiend-minded men had been permitted to torture a man

chained to an iron bedstead, burning alive, thrust back by pitchforks when he struggled out of it, which around about stood hundreds of well-dressed American citizens, both from the vicinity and from afar, coming on foot and in wagons, assembling on telephone calls...hundreds of persons watching this awful sight and making no attempt to stay the wickedness. ("Sackcloth" 87)

Making many references to sight and seeing, Chapman describes his personal reaction to the violent scene reported in the paper: "I seemed to get a *glimpse* into the unconscious soul of this country. I *saw* a seldom-revealed *picture* of the American heart and of the American nature. I seemed to be *looking* into the heart of the criminal [...] What I have *seen* is not an *illusion*. It is the truth" ("Sackcloth" 87). The "truth" that Chapman gleans from this tableau is the commonness of racial violence in American public culture. For Chapman, the black body comes into view publicly through the frame of the lynching spectacle. Signifying the erasure of black bodily presence, the lynching spectacle (circulated through lynching photographs and media depictions) works to further abstract black subjective experience. Like "Emmy" and "TBM," "Sackcloth and Ashes" examines the role of dominant visual systems in narrating and filling in black identity. "Sackcloth and Ashes" does not describe the lynching spectacle firsthand; rather, the lynching spectacle comes into view through media narration and visual language.

By appropriating how lynching was narrated and depicted in popular media, the editors of *Crisis* perhaps hoped to disrupt popular depictions of lynching as either a "just" response to black criminality or a benign enactment of popular sovereignty. Furthermore, lynching reporting and imagery within mainstream presses was implicitly pedagogical; that is, such coverage acted as a grotesque and deeply problematic mode of teaching white and black readerships the risks associated with black public visibility. The circulation of lynching imagery in Southern States made explicit the consequences of questioning or challenging segregationist policies. However, in *Crisis*, the circulation of lynching stories (and photographs) inverted this pedagogical initiative.

Drawing connections between artificial representations of racial performance (vis-a-vis passing and racial iconography) and the erasure of black subjectivity, *Crisis Magazine* (as observed through its intratextual linkages) brings to light the extent to which our modes of seeing, understanding, and evaluating blackness is learned. Furthermore, the aestheticization of racial identity (as is noticed in passing narratives, as well as in racial caricatures) directly informs—and is in dialogue with—the most extreme examples of black erasure. That is, the erasure of black subjective identity exemplified in the popularity of iconic caricatures such as the Venus Hottentot ("Emmy") and mammy ("TBM") finds its most disgusting manifestation in the wholesale erasure of black subjectivity in the lynching spectacle. Thus, the lynching spectacle, as Chapman notes, offers a harrowing insight into the political and social pulse of the country.

This analysis has touched on the relationship between passing and pedagogy by discussing the central role popular media plays in the construction of public identities. Considering how binary constructions of race rely on and privilege phenotypic identification, this article historicized the ways in which the phenomenon of passing is interpreted and re-defined by activist media. By highlighting intratextual linkages, W.E.B. Du Bois's *Crisis Magazine* takes up the pedagogical incentive to teach readers our own cultural biases and assumptions regarding racial identity, underscoring the extent to which such biases and assumptions are learned and *can be re-learned* for the purposes of pursuing a more progressive agenda towards race, racial performance, and racial legislation. What "Emmy," "The Black Mother," and "Sackcloth and Ashes" clarify is the primacy of the image in envisioning and legislating identity. Of course, this brief analysis of Fauset's story and the two editorials bordering her work cannot fully articulate the extent to which questions of citizenship are built into this collective imagining of how to see and receive blackness within public institutional spaces. However,

this analysis begins to identify the ways in which black citizenship comes into view both within and against these dominant visual systems. These dominant visual systems are taught and learned through popular media in stories of passing, which expose the artificial boundaries defining and circumscribing who and how we see. Each of the articles chronicles the contours of these systems of seeing black identity while at the same time aiming to respond back to the white gazing subject through whom these depictions are authored and authorized.

What turn-of-the-century activist periodicals can teach—or at least model—for us today is the pedagogical nature of these media representations. Periodicals such as *Crisis* call attention to the pedagogical imperative to write and legislate identity. Mainstream pedagogies of representation *can* work to foreclose the potential for new citizen subjects and subjectivities to emerge. Yet, the texts referenced in this article offer an historical framework for understanding how media invention and intervention by marginal and minority communities works to re-shape the borders and boundary lines characterizing dominant discursive and visual fields of representation.

Although this article focused on historical accounts of periodical activism, such work opens up new avenues for discussing media literacy, defined here as identifying, critiquing, and even modifying the pedagogical dimensions underpinning popular culture. By considering what media landscapes make visible (or not visible) in terms of racial subjectivity, gender expression, and citizenship, such work uses a discourse of pedagogy as a lens for understanding the various popular forums where teaching happens. Making racial passing stories a focal point, this article suggests that such narratives expose the many ways in which different forms of social representation are learned through public culture and public media and the extent to which media landscapes “teach” us normalized identity categories. Such categories have the potential to influence not only how we visualize blackness, but the ways in which blackness is legislated in public spaces, as stories of passing tend to derive specific cultural currency in moments of social and cultural upheaval (moments in which the policing of racial identities in public space is particularly incisive).

While it is important to be sensitive to the cultural particularities and nuances surrounding the policing of black bodies today, the antecedents of such skepticism towards “foreignness” and “otherness” within public forums can be traced to segregationist legislation and deeply-rooted anxieties about modernity at the century’s turn. Furthermore, these anxieties can be connected to current fears surrounding globalization and immigration, which have manifested in the rise of nativist populist rhetoric. Thus, it is no surprise that questions of “categorical clarity” with respect to racial identity were re-introduced alongside of nativist concerns about “shoring up our borders” and surveilling foreign others. Conversations about the pedagogy and politics of racial passing are therefore not divorced from more modern concerns regarding how popular media narrates difference and which counternarratives derive media currency.

This article proposes the following three questions for further research seeking to use a discourse of pedagogy for the purposes of better understanding the critical and cultural relevance of examining popular media and media activism: How can a discourse of pedagogy that does not singularly privilege traditional classroom settings and practices further highlight the political dimensions associated with reading and interpreting media texts, texts that explicitly and implicitly teach us the degrees of visibility available to marginal and minority communities in the face of dominant or hegemonic structures? How might this expanded view of pedagogy allow us to balance political concerns with an aesthetic and literary experience of Otherness and passing? How might we use different forms of media expression as a means for intervening in this process of visibility—or changing and counternarrating dominant media tropes?

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