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Racism, Privilege, and Voice in *All American Boys:*

A Counter-narrative of Resistance and Hope

Increasingly, students and educators are confronting questions and heightened emotions about the persistence of violence, especially police brutality, against Black men and women in the United States. In response, educators are also finding themselves charged with more urgent responsibilities. More than ever, diverse students' perspectives, experiences, and questions need to be welcomed and addressed. To make these conditions possible for students, many educators want to engage in more critical dialogue about racism in society, including how it is instantiated in the daily lives of students and their families. *All American Boys*, a 2015 novel by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, potently addresses these issues. By telling the story of two young men—one Black, one white—caught up in an incident of police brutality, this novel demonstrates how profoundly youth are affected by today's culture of racism and violence. Further, by making these two young men the novel's sole narrators, *All American Boys* doubly affirms how youth's efforts to understand and resist the racist status quo are just as necessary, and just as powerful, as that of adults. In these ways, the novel asks both students and educators to join together in critical conversations about race. More specifically, it asks us to consider what it can look and feel like for people of different backgrounds to live in a racist society, confront privilege, and take a stand for social justice.

The young narrators in *All American Boys* speak to educators as well as to students. They ask us to witness the impact of racist violence on individuals and communities. They ask us to understand how they are struggling to reexamine their racial identities and places in society, including dealing with their vulnerability and pain. They also ask us to join them as they take more public stances against racism. We are interested in how their narratives can open opportunities for teachers and students to start conversations about race together in the classroom. In this article, we first provide an overview of the two frameworks that guide our literary analysis of this novel: a) the concepts of counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and counter-narrative (Glenn, 2012; Hughes-Hassell, 2013), and b) Bishop's (1990) framing of literature as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. We also describe our own positionalities as readers of this text. We then use these frameworks in conversation with critically oriented scholarship on racism, privilege, and antiracist pedagogy to analyze how the two main narrators engage these issues. We conclude by discussing how educators might explore this novel in their own classrooms.

Counter-narratives of Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors

All American Boys challenges young adult literature's deficit representations and exclusions of Black male identities and lived experiences (Bishop, 1990; Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, in order to make the most of the opportunities that

All American Boys provides for talking about race and racism, educators are encouraged to examine dominant social narratives about young men of color, particularly Black men, in school as well as in society (Feagin, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Purpel, 2007; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Tatum, 2003). With this goal in mind, we situate *All American Boys* in conversation with the construct of counter-storytelling, a multicultural framework rooted in Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) critical race research methodology designed to serve as a "'counter' for deficit story-telling" (Abstract) by centering marginalized stories and people who are too often silenced in society. The ways in which multicultural literature can advance counter-narratives have been discussed in teaching contexts by Glenn (2012) and Hughes-Hassell (2013), with attention to how greater diversity of characters and stories can mutually facilitate and challenge young readers'—and teachers'—understandings of racial identity development, systemic racism, and white privilege.

Through Rashad's counter-narratives, the novel offers readers an opportunity to meditate on their own identities and experiences in relation to how racism operates in society, including how violence against Black people has been normalized.

In addition to the framework of counter-narratives, we draw on Bishop's (1990) pivotal discussion of how multicultural literature offers windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors to young readers, via which they can see themselves and their peers more authentically situated in the complex nexus of our racial and cultural worlds. Through these dual frameworks, it is easier to see some of the opportunities that *All American Boys* affords young readers: a) holding up mirrors to see their own racial identities, pain, and agency affirmed; b) opening up windows into how others may be wrestling with their racial identities and privileges (or lack thereof); and c) sliding open doors to real, tough questions about how youth just like them might experience, understand, take action against, and find their power against racism in their day-to-day lives.

As coauthors of this paper, our positionalities as white educators are also reflected in our selection of this novel and our focus on its affordances for dialogue about race and racism among students and educators. We make an additional narrative choice in this article to employ capitalization for the term "Black" and lowercase format for the term "white." Drawing on McIntyre (2008), we affirm their approach as one that seeks to disrupt the perception that white and Black are terms denoting opposite representations, which falsely suggests equitable positioning. With regard to direct quotes from cited literature, we retain the authors' original capitalization conventions concerning these terms.

Rashad's Counter-narrative: Voicing Resistance and Taking Action against Racist Stereotypes, Bias, and Violence

As a counter-narrative, this novel addresses constructions of racism, privilege, and power. Rashad's character illustrates three key types of counter-narrative engagement with these constructs. First, Rashad's narration as a subject of police brutality situates him within a history of Black men being stereotyped and treated as threatening despite clear evidence to the contrary (Davis, 2001; Harris, 1995). Second, the novel's centering of Rashad's experience gives voice to racial microaggressions and biases that are less often heard yet no less painful for Black youth like him to bear (Sue et al., 2007). Third, Rashad's story is invested with power, as he stands up for his survival, healing, and resistance to racial injustice. Through Rashad's counter-narratives, the novel offers readers an opportunity to meditate on their own identities and experiences in relation to how racism operates in society, including how violence against Black people has been normalized.

Black Youth, Racial Stereotypes, and Violent Consequences

There exists historical and contemporary precedent for young Black men's and boys' identities to be ascribed with stereotypes of threat and violence (Davis, 2001; Harris, 1995; Harris & Harper, 2015). As *All American Boys* emphasizes, these stereotypes are used as justification for the mainstream public's fear of young Black men, including inequitable, often violent

treatment by law enforcement. In tackling these issues from the standpoint of a young Black man, this novel serves as a counter-narrative against these stereotypes (Delgado, 1989; Hughes-Hassell, 2013). It also situates readers as "critical witnesses" (Lopez, 2009) to the physical and emotional ramifications of Rashad being perceived as suspicious simply due to the color of his skin.

All American Boys begins by asking readers to "zoom in" on the individual experiences and development of both protagonists against an unflinching backdrop of racist police violence. The events that unfold at the corner store the night Rashad is attacked are deceptively mundane: A white woman in line in front of him trips over his duffel bag while he looks for his phone. Despite his clear innocence, Rashad cannot escape being under suspicion of shoplifting. In fact, as the clerk starts yelling, Rashad's first thought is to defend the woman: "At first, I thought he was yelling at the lady on some you-broke-it-you-bought-it mess, and I was about to tell him to chill out, but then I realized that he was looking at my open duffel and the bag of chips lying in the aisle" (p. 20).

Officer Paul Galluzzo, the cop on duty, initially "perked up" (p. 20) when the clerk shouts at Rashad, but ignores him as he walks over to the woman. Rashad describes how her testimony is shut down: "'Ma'am, are you okay?' the officer asked, concerned. 'Yes, yes, I'm—'And before she could finish her sentence that would've explained that she had tripped and fell over me, the cop cut her off. 'Did he do something to you?' . . . 'No, no, I—' The lady was now standing, clearly perplexed by the question. 'Yeah, he was trying to steal those chips,' the clerk interrupted, shouting over the cop's shoulder" (pp. 20–21). Ultimately, as both the clerk and the cop escalate one another's accusatory indignation, Rashad offers no resistance to his arrest. Even then, he cannot avoid a violent beating. He is construed as a Black threat, even in his own community, as the clerk's immediate assumption of guilt demonstrates (Noguera, 2008). The narrative of young Black men being falsely accused, assaulted, and even killed by law enforcement is so widely known to Rashad that he only has a single, desperate thought as he is handcuffed and beaten:

> "please
> don't
> kill me" (p. 23).

After his beating, he understands that he has become part of the statistics about Black men accused and assaulted by police officers, yet he is still dazed by disbelief: "I mean, I hadn't done anything. Nothing at all. So why was I hooked up to all these machines, lying in this uncomfortable bed? Why was I arrested? Why was my mother waiting there for me to wake up, dried tears crusted on her face, prayer on her breath?" (p. 45). *All American Boys* places us in these moments alongside Rashad, asking us as readers to bear witness and linger in the hospital with him as he processes and heals (Lopez, 2009).

And for those of us who are white, it holds up a mirror to how we are privileged with the kind of safety and social "benefit of the doubt" that young men like Rashad do not have, no matter how far we tell ourselves America has come.

As Paul's unwarranted attack on Rashad demonstrates, stereotypes about young Black men construct them as "others," often misrepresenting statistics and images in ways that pathologize young Black men's behavior and contribute to deficit ideologies (Harper, 2012). This cultivates fear toward young men like Rashad; although he defies these labels, he cannot avoid them or their lived consequences (Apel, 2004; Baker, 1998; Noguera, 2008). For example, when Paul taunts Rashad as a "thug" who disrespects authority (p. 27), he reinforces the racist intent behind his beating. A later example from the novel illustrates how much Rashad is wounded, inside and out, by Paul's attack: "Nobody wanted to hear the truth, even though everybody already knew what it was. I felt . . . violated. That's the only way I can put it. Straight-up violated" (p. 89).

Throughout the novel, Rashad's characterization—full of detail about how carefully he is being raised and making choices as a young Black man in America—is contrasted with American society's underlying racist assumptions of Blackness-as-indictment. Consequently, *All American Boys*'s nuanced characterization of Rashad also stands as one of the novel's important counter-narrative contributions to young adult literature, as well as one of its most important invitations to young students of color (Bishop,

1990; Hughes-Hassell, 2013). And for those of us who are white, it holds up a mirror to how we are privileged with the kind of safety and social "benefit of the doubt" that young men like Rashad do not have, no matter how far we tell ourselves America has come.

Racial Bias, Microaggressions, and the Lived Experience of Racism

Talking about contemporary racism in school requires more than examining overt acts of racist violence, such as Paul's attack on Rashad. It also requires examination of the effects of racial microaggressions on people of color (Sue et al., 2007). For example, as a prelude to the beating of Rashad by police at the corner store near school, Rashad recalls his exchange with the clerk: "'Wassup man,' I said. He nodded suspiciously. Like he always did" (p. 17). This time, however, the clerk's suspicion results in near-fatal consequences for Rashad.

It is important to note that the novel also addresses how schools are not free from racial microaggressions, biases, and injustices enacted against Black male students. Quinn, Rashad's white classmate and the novel's peer narrator, is depicted as having racist conversations in school without even realizing it. For example, Rashad's friend English calls out Quinn's assumption that Rashad was at fault, including how he invokes a stereotype about Black men, crime, and drug use when, in fact, Quinn is the one who is known to use: "He stood and pointed at me. 'Why does it automatically gotta be Rashad's fault? Why do people think he was on drugs? That dude doesn't do drugs. He's ROTC, man. His dad would kick his ass. You do drugs, asshole'" (p. 175). These examples highlight the relevance of engaging with *All American Boys* to address how Black men are positioned in schools, especially in relation to peers' and educators' unwillingness or inability to recognize racial biases—even among those who consider themselves antiracist (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Fenning & Rose, 2007). For example, when Quinn apologizes to English for making assumptions about Rashad, English's response instructively points out that biases can be both pervasive and unconscious: "Man, you have no idea how many times you've sounded like a dick. You think it was just today?" (p. 177).

The novel is also direct about how friends, family members, and school members can be the source of racial microaggressions and bias. For example, Quinn's and English's basketball coach dances euphemistically around the topic of race by encoding it as team unity: "Media shit's gonna hound us every day. You let me handle that. You just ignore that shit. There's all kinds of pressure going on out there, at school, in your lives back home . . . . In this gym we're only Falcons, you hear me?" (p. 138). Despite his desire to go along with his coach, Quinn raises questions about this disingenuous call for unity. Is it possible to have "one goal for one team, none of us thinking about race or racism, all of us color-blind and committed like evangelicals to the word team" (p. 140)? How can it be, when Quinn had just "walked on the court and seen the team like this: seven black guys, five white guys, two Latino guys, and one Vietnamese guy" (p. 139)? What is being asked of each of those students? What are they being asked not to bring, and not to be, on the court? What are the stakes of the coach's request for English, for example, in contrast with the stakes for Quinn?

In a striking classroom-based example, the novel also shows how euphemism and silence about race affects teachers as well as students. When Ms. Webber facilitates a quiet study session in Rashad's absence, "anybody could tell she was nervous and just wanted a silent and nonteaching day of class" (p. 133). When she incorrectly calls out a student for talking, she is taken aback by her own discomfort: "'Every time, EJ,' she said abruptly, so loud that she seemed to surprise even herself" (p. 133). EJ responds, "Guilty until proven innocent, huh? . . . Just like Rashad" (p. 134). Quinn, who is present, notes that this was especially "awkward" because EJ was black, "just like Rashad," and Ms. Webber was white, "just like Paul—like me and Molly, too" (p. 134). The novel demonstrates how Ms. Webber's request to stay quiet in class fails to accomplish the task of eliminating Rashad from everyone's thoughts, especially when that silence only makes the racial tensions more explicit.

Ms. Webber warns EJ that he can't "go conflating things like that" (p. 134). However, she pauses before acknowledging, "I'm sorry. I know there's a student from our school who is in the hospital today, but we don't have the full story" (p. 134). Yet despite the seemingly conciliatory intent of her acknowledgement, the whole exchange illustrates Ms. Webber moving from silence about the topic of Rashad to avoiding,

even erasing, Rashad's name. It demonstrates that she chooses the safety of silence over empathy for her student. This example also shows how she ignores an opening to engage with her other students in class during this painful time. When Molly and EJ say Rashad's name in class, and get thrown out for it, they signal to Ms. Webber that her silence tells more of a story than she thinks. However, Quinn tells us that he and his classmates are also uncomfortable. While Molly and EJ speak up, "the rest of us sat there in shock" (p. 135). Note, too, that even as Quinn is beginning to feel "freaked out" (p. 117) by Officer Galluzzo's denial of any wrongdoing and expectation of loyalty, he also chooses the safety of silence in class. Molly and EJ choose to speak up for Rashad and for their own pain, even if it means taking the risk of standing alone (Leonardo & Porter, 2010).

In these ways, the novel does an important job of addressing the staggeringly heavy day-to-day burdens of Black youth, in conversation with implicit and explicit forms of racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). In particular, the novel shows how Rashad and other Black characters cannot escape the daily stresses of micro- and macroaggressions that engender what Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) call "racial battle fatigue." For example, Rashad and his family are shocked to find themselves talking about Rashad's appearance in the wake of his attack, despite collectively knowing that it is his Blackness, not sagging pants, that cause Officer Galluzzo to beat him (p. 49). Racial microaggressions, biases, and stresses do not take place in a vacuum, nor can they be disaggregated from the cumulative lived experiences of racism (Sue et al., 2007). These examples also make painfully clear that current sociocultural institutions and conditions will not protect Black men—no matter how well they conform to stereotypes and expectations and no matter how high they clear mainstream bars for performance and responsibility. Only changing our racist systems and cultures will protect young Black men like Rashad.

He Deserves a Face: The Power of Rashad's Counter-narrative

All American Boys emphasizes how Rashad's path from maintaining his silence to taking back his voice is a complex negotiation of personal risk and social benefit. He realizes that he isn't—and can't be—invisible as a young Black man caught up in police brutality no matter how hard he tries (Noguera, 2008). As he decides to join in the novel's concluding protest march, bandage-free, Rashad demonstrates the high stakes of advocating for racial justice: "I wanted people to know that no matter the outcome, no matter if this day ended up as just another protest and Officer Galluzzo got off scot-free, that I would never be the same person. I looked different and would be different, forever" (p. 305).

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Metaphorically, this evolving stance toward visibility and action is strikingly revealed in Rashad's artwork. He feels compelled to draw in the hospital and asks his mom to bring his sketch pad and pencils. In asking for his drawing materials, he begins to claim his right to his own narrative, using his own tools. He tells us, "I wasn't sure what I was drawing. That's not true. I knew *exactly* what I was drawing. The only thing I could. I was going to re-create the scene, what had happened to me, what was playing constantly on the news" (p. 144). He struggles over his drawing, persisting despite the physical and emotional pain it causes: "[W]hen your hand starts aching in the middle of such a personal piece, there's no telling what you might think about" (p. 148). Yet he lets himself feel that ache. Stylistically, he is known for drawing intriguing, faceless figures. However, when drawing about his trauma, he ultimately decides to draw in a face: "The dude with his heart torn out. It's impossible to ignore him. He has a face. He deserves a face" (p. 273). In drawing himself into his own narrative frame, Rashad gives himself permission to be seen. Up to this point, the novel emphasizes how Rashad has tried to avoid seeing images of his face that were publicized in the news after his attack. He also struggles with seeing his brutalized face in the mirror. Yet as he finally comes to claim the "torn out" heart (p. 273) as his own, he also claims the face he sees reflected at him (Bishop, 1990).

This example represents an extraordinary, self-affirming counter-narrative moment in the novel—one that many young readers will be able to experience, especially those who may be suffering broken hearts and bodies like Rashad, yet have not been able to see their pain reflected in books (Bishop, 1990, 2011; Delgado, 1989; Hughes-Hassell, 2013). Rashad comes to recognize, with increasing gravity, that even his devastating personal encounter with police violence is indicative of factors bigger than himself. He comes to believe that he deserves the affirmation of making his pain public—that others need to see him, in all his bruises and strength, as he has come to see himself. He is bearing critical witness to himself, for himself, and for others like him (Lopez, 2009).

As he marches, we are all asked to bear witness to how his body, life, and soul change as the result of unjust police violence. Rashad's evolution toward a self-affirming, publicly antiracist stance represents an indelible lesson for educators and readers. Rather than being forced by outside pressures into a tokenizing role that can be co-opted by those in power, his characterization and trajectory demonstrate powerful ways in which marginalized individuals can find their own power and exercise their own voices as agents against unjust acts, expectations, and systems (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In the book's final chapter, which is just two pages long and written as a poem that alternates stanzas between each narrator (pp. 309–310), Rashad affirms his place at the march and in the world:

> For all the people who came before
> us, fighting the fight, I was here,
> screaming at the top of my lungs.
> Rashad Butler.
> Present.

Reading Rashad: Opportunities for Talking about Racial Identity, Inequities, and Resistance in the Classroom

Rashad's evolution toward visibility and affirmation offers three central opportunities for educators to use this novel in the classroom to think and talk about race. First, it complicates what the experience might be for a student to occupy a minority position within a classroom setting. This is especially important for educators who represent different cultural, racial, and socioeconomic identities from their students. Too often, students from marginalized groups are tokenized in classrooms and asked to speak as representatives of their group. Yet, they are still often misperceived as "other," even if they do not represent or identify with the labels assumed by peers or teachers from dominant groups (Delpit, 2006; Tatum, 2003). In acknowledgement of these dynamics, Rashad's character is constructed in ways that highlight how students from nondominant cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds challenge these deficit assumptions, holding up a much needed mirror to their experiences (Bishop, 1990). It also shows how such students, even when explicitly subverting expectations, are still pressured to uphold tokenizing roles. By including examples of sometimes tense dialogue among Rashad, his parents, and his brother, the novel also provides a glimpse into how these pressures permeate not only schools, but communities and families, too (Hill, 2003).

Second, the novel offers multiple counter-narrative moments through which students' multiple identities and perspectives are engaged (Delgado, 1989; Hughes-Hassell, 2013). Rashad's understanding of his identities as a young Black man in and out of school, his perceptions of other races and cultures, and his desire to move past these events without being tokenized as another Black victim all suggest rich opportunities to create interpretive classroom communities that reflect greater racial and cultural exchange, learning, and empathy (Fish, 1980; Glenn, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Third, the story offers readers multiple views of what it can look like to take a stance against racial injustices. It also acknowledges ways in which that work can be unsafe. This is an important conversation to bring to the classroom, especially with regard to Leonardo and Porter's (2010) assertion that people of color do not inhabit safe spaces in race talk. These scholars also emphasize the importance of confronting fears about taking up dialogue about race and social justice toward constructing individual and collaborative goals of advancing understanding rather than comfort. For Rashad and other students in the novel, the work of standing up to racial injustice can indeed be fear provoking and costly. These costs range from infuriating their teachers and losing opportunities for scholarships to alienating friends and family and being viewed in ways that diminish their personal identities. However, these students do still stand up; Rashad chooses to be visible. *All American Boys* makes it pos-

sible for young readers like Rashad and Quinn to see and think through their own fears, relationships, and choices in and out of school (Bishop, 1990).

Quinn's Counter-narrative and the Representation of White Privilege: Discomfort, Accountability, and Social Action

As cross-disciplinary scholarship has established, engagement with white privilege in America must take up the entwined historical and cultural memory of its deep roots—including the ways in which it has been systematically erased from our present-day discourses, policies, and curricula (Harper, 2012; Warnke, 2015). This is a weighty but necessary task. Warnke (2015) reminds us of the need to confront our historical distortions and consequences by taking up a "politics of memory." Even more explicitly, Margolin (2015) contends that an individualistic paradigm has inadvertently reified white dominance in educational policy, culture, and practice, despite pedagogical practices that have developed around white educators acknowledging our privilege.

Quinn's trajectory in *All American Boys* suggests important attention to the domains of the historical and social. The novel not only depicts Quinn's recognition of his white privilege in the wake of Paul's attack on Rashad, but it also emphasizes how he comes to emotionally and intellectually wrestle with how that privilege simultaneously protects and implicates him in relation to that act of police brutality. It thus both sheds light on and challenges some ways in which white privilege and racial inequity have become embedded in American society. Through Quinn's character, *All American Boys* does a critical job of delving into white racial/ethnic identity development and emphasizing the catalyzing, sometimes painful role that confronting white privilege plays in Quinn's development, as it can with other young white men like him (Tatum, 1997). In these ways, it also holds up an important mirror in which white students can see their own doubts, resistance, and questioning reflected, especially in terms of navigating what it can mean to benefit from white privilege, intentionally or not (Bishop, 1990; Margolin, 2015).

Before he becomes a witness to Rashad's attack, Quinn's journey in the novel is seemingly predetermined. However, it also subtly challenges stereotypes. He is a charming white basketball star whose smile and reputation as the son of a fallen soldier gloss over an adolescence as a latchkey kid responsible for taking care of his brother. However, his version of recreation also includes stealing flasks of bourbon from his overworked, widowed mother and drinking with friends. That in itself is a privilege not afforded Rashad, who consciously pursues an "all American" path of academic and ROTC responsibility that doesn't protect him from suspicion and police violence. In contrast, Quinn's characterization exemplifies the novel's subversion of stereotypes commonly associated with Black youth, as well as a broader counter-story about how social norms and opportunities are differently accessed and experienced by white youth like Quinn and Black youth like Rashad (Glenn, 2012; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Noguera, 2008). The novel also uses this counter-narrative platform to generate questions about how Quinn is afforded social approval due to his father's military service and his whiteness, both of which afford relative invisibility for his illegal behaviors, like underage drinking and theft. In contrast, Rashad cannot escape hypervisibility within inconsequential settings, like standing in line at a corner store (Noguera, 2008).

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Recognizing and Grappling with White Privilege

Throughout the beginning of the novel, Quinn recognizes the advantages that being seen as an "all American boy" affords him. For instance, he acknowledges how his reputation works as he persuades an adult to purchase alcohol for him. He also reflects on how he consciously takes advantage of his community's approval, even when it comes to little things like re-

ceiving free beverages at the local pizza parlor: "I was the kind of guy who just kept taking those free Cokes, no questions asked, like I actually deserved them or something" (p. 78). Part of the privilege afforded by whiteness is the perception that witnessing injustices, and one's complicity in them, can be ignored—and by extension, their harm minimized (Tochluk, 2007).

While learning about the fraught history and legacy of racism in American society is a deep and difficult undertaking, it also affords us distance from the immediacy of how white individuals, families, and peers live with—and avoid—racism every day.

After witnessing the assault on Rashad, Quinn hopes that he and his friends can "all just pretend like we weren't here. Like it didn't happen" (p. 39).

The novel demonstrates, however, that despite Quinn's attempts to ignore Paul's attack on Rashad, he cannot ignore the sick feeling welling up inside him about the injustice it represents. It becomes painfully clear to Quinn that his way of living and being in the world before Rashad's attack no longer exists for him, no matter how much self-protection or what relationships he can preserve by ignoring it. At one point, he thinks, "I didn't want my life to change from the way it was before I'd seen that. . . . The problem was my life didn't have to change. If I wanted to, I could keep my head down" (pp. 178–179). He can only keep up the guise of accepting the academic, athletic, and social favor conferred upon him if he denies who and what he saw. It would also require him to deny how he is changing in his understanding of his own race and privilege.

Quinn ultimately decides to tell the police department what he witnessed. Before he can make that decision, however, we see him coming to an unexpected realization about the title he shares with the novel: "'Regular.' 'All American.' White. Fuck" (p. 180). It is important to note that the novel spends time unraveling the impact that this new understanding has on him. Seeking out conversation with the only member of his social circle who expresses the same discomfort with Paul's actions, Paul's cousin Jill, Quinn articulates feelings of disgust, guilt, and helplessness when he confides, "I feel so gross . . . . I keep telling myself it isn't my problem. But it is. It is my problem. I just don't know what to do" (p. 182). Jill's observation that the problem of racism is everyone's opens Quinn up to another level of talk that he was previously unaware he was avoiding. He asks, "Why is it taking me five minutes to say the word racism?" (p. 181).

Through this dialogue and Jill's rejoinder that "Maybe you're racist?" (p. 181), *All American Boys* resists an easy conversation about coming to terms with racism on social and individual levels. Instead, it asks us to keep looking into the mirror it holds up to the often defensive, always vulnerable work of confronting our white racial subjectivity (Bishop, 1990; Blakeney, 2005; Tatum, 1997). It affirms that one of the reasons talking about racism is hard for white readers like Quinn is because it requires talking about personal complicity as a white person. It also reveals that being able to talk about racism is not the same as excavating our own racism. Moreover, it challenges two pervasive ideas: that white racial identity development is a linear or simple process once we have the language for it, and that awareness alone absolves us from actively fighting racism (Margolin, 2015; Patton & Bondi, 2015; Tatum, 1997).

Through Quinn, the novel reveals that it can actually be easier to affirm racism as a social problem than to confront what it means on an individual level. Once we as white readers accept our acculturation into a racist society, there is no way to escape racism or its complicities. While learning about the fraught history and legacy of racism in American society is a deep and difficult undertaking, it also affords us distance from the immediacy of how white individuals, families, and peers live with—and avoid—racism every day. In these ways, Quinn's struggle reflects the difficulties of private learning and public talking about race (Levine-Rasky, 2000). His deepening conversations with Jill also affirm that asking questions and sharing vulnerably are important parts of the process of confronting our white privilege and moving toward forming a positive antiracist white identity (Levine-Rasky, 2000; Tatum, 1997).

Quinn's experience also may be considered a generative counter-narrative against more simplistic or uninterrupted white male character development in

young adult literature (Harris, 1990). The novel shows Quinn's pain, confusion, vulnerability, and importantly, his wish to go back to a safer, more comfortable period in which he never witnessed Paul unjustly attack Rashad. That alternate history would leave his beliefs about himself, his social circle, and his choices unchallenged. Part of Quinn's counter-narrative is necessarily illustrated by the contrast between his control over his future as a star basketball player (and safety therein) and the lack of Rashad's safety within his own life. For Quinn, relinquishing this control is one of the most painful parts of this process. When he finally confirms to himself and to Jill that he is going to report Paul, it is not yet a cathartic assertion, even by Quinn's own admission. Instead, the novel makes the point that he "finally mustered" the words, as he adds, "[I]f I don't do something . . . if I just stay silent, it's just like saying that's not my problem" (p. 184). By distinguishing Quinn's statement about taking action—however quiet, difficult, and even inarticulate it is—from the complicity of his prior silence, *All American Boys* asserts a counter-narrative about the mutual difficulty and necessity of white people's antiracist action. It also demonstrates how antiracist stances are formulated over time, often through seemingly small steps that signify hard personal work and learning.

Moving from Awareness of Privilege to Taking Antiracist Action

As the novel progresses, it shows how Quinn deepens his commitment to taking Rashad's side. One striking example is his decision to write "I'm Marching/Are You?" on a shirt he wears to school (p. 252). In an echo of how Rashad draws himself into his picture in order to claim his own representation, pain, and path to healing, Quinn writes himself into an embodied public declaration of his solidarity with Rashad and his place in the community protest that concludes the novel. While Quinn is afforded more control over his public narrative than Rashad, there is still a crucial counter-narrative element to his writing on his shirt, specifically his decision to direct his protest participation outward toward his primarily white social circle. This move affirms the responsibility of white antiracist work in white spaces at the same time that it critiques the dominant tendency for white allies to defer the labor and discomforts of fighting racism toward people of color (Levine-Rasky, 2000; Tatum, 1997).

Additionally, by joining his voice with that of the community organizers of the protest, which includes Rashad's brother Spoony, Quinn also makes a conscious decision to disconnect himself from his prior silent complicity with Paul's controlling defensive narrative. In representing Quinn's struggle to negotiate what it means to take social action against racism, the novel raises pointed questions for readers, such as whether Quinn's personal decision to take action would have the same impact on him and his community if he didn't make his stance public. What impact can a single action, like marching in a protest, have against racism? What can we learn from Quinn's evolving antiracist identity as we see him reach out to Jill and make public his decision to march in the protest?

The scholarship around white privilege and becoming a white ally engages with questions like these. However, it often problematically situates itself in relation to individual awareness rather than confronting the tensions between espousing and enacting antiracism. Margolin (2015) suggests that white individuals can actually become more complacent by focusing on affirming their individual experiences rather than challenging them in a more systemic context. As a result, they may become more at home in a persistently unjust world or remain comfortable benefiting from white privilege. Moreover, this standpoint can contribute to the construction of a "white privilege pedagogy," which focuses more on white personal identity than institutional structures: it affirms white personal experience in ways that can minimize the individual and institutional experiences of Black people; it falsely claims that the confession of white privilege leads to social action and equity on behalf of Black people; and it both validates and expands white people's sense of moral rightness (Margolin, 2015). The construction of being a white ally has also been critiqued, with both antiracist scholars and activists calling for a more nuanced, action-focused construction of social justice alliance and white solidarity (Kohn, 2015; Patton & Bondi, 2015).

In contrast, *All American Boys* engages important questions about how to move beyond recognizing white privilege to actually employing one's individual white privilege to work against systemic forms of oppression (Feagin, 2006; Margolin, 2015). It also keeps

a sustained focus on Quinn's awareness that he can no longer ignore the injustices witnessed. In a significant moment of self-critique, he decides to finally watch the video of Rashad's attack that was broadcast on the news, telling himself, "I already *had* walked away. . . . [N]ot watching the damn video was walking away too, and I needed to watch it" (p. 180).

Changing his stance from denial to racial solidarity does have costs for Quinn. The novel emphasizes how knowing the consequences of alienating Paul and his family makes Quinn's wrestling with his growing racial identity awareness even harder. In doing so, it illustrates how both Quinn and Rashad take on fear and risks in doing the work of challenging racism in their lives (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). In Quinn's case, he risks his position on the basketball team and an athletic scholarship by defying the coach's orders. More painfully, in speaking out against Paul's police brutality, he severs his long relationship with Paul's family, including Paul's brother Guzzo, who has been his classmate and constant friend over the years. He reconciles himself to the knowledge that neither his conscience nor his relationships can bear the weight of his complicity in racist violence. In these ways, *All American Boys* positions Quinn as a mirror in which white readers can find affirmation, guidance, and potent challenges to their negotiations of white privilege (Bishop, 1990). It also offers teachers some frank opportunities for engaging classroom conversations about race and privilege.

Reading Quinn: Opportunities for Talking about White Privilege, Racial Solidarity, and Social Action in the Classroom

As white educators, we share in the cultural weight of white privilege that Quinn's character represents. This means we have to interrogate our own privileges and complicities as a starting point in our practice rather than treating our awareness as a fixed anchor from which we work. We have the opportunity to consciously choose more diverse, antiracist teaching materials like *All American Boys* through which our students can see themselves and their questions. This novel offers us a special opportunity to examine how our current biases and positionalities affect how we choose and how we engage with texts like this. It also opens up the opportunity to work through how we formulate positive, antiracist white identities and position ourselves as both teachers and learners in conversation with our students (Utt & Tochluk, 2016). Further, it demonstrates how important it is to reflexively situate our teaching and reading practices in conversation with other critical information for understanding and talking about race in the classroom (Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Margolin, 2015; Tatum, 1997). Our society's ongoing epidemic of police brutality against Black people lends even greater urgency.

Quinn's trajectory toward an awareness of white privilege as a concept, along with his deepening engagement with the realities of his own white privilege and the action it requires, offer three key opportunities for educators to talk about race and privilege in the classroom. First, it powerfully represents the twinned intellectual and emotional labor involved in coming to terms with one's own white racial identity and privilege (Tatum, 1997). In doing so, it exemplifies a generative approach to race talk as described by Blommaert (2013), specifically with regard to taking account of Quinn's cognitive dissonance, discomfort, and fear as he struggles with what it means to distance himself from white friends who have enacted or silenced racist violence. Second, it offers educators the opportunity to take on classroom conversations about race even further and problematize what it means—and if it's possible—to fully "give up" white privilege (Margolin, 2015).

Third, Quinn's experience demonstrates how the path toward white solidarity is forged not only through personal development but also a sustained commitment to social action. Through Quinn, *All American Boys* advances a persuasive counter-narrative challenge to the passivity of claiming to be a white ally without action or empathy (Glenn, 2012; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Margolin, 2015). He asks us as much as himself about how the hearts of those who witness racist events in our nation have "become so numb that we needed dead bodies in order to feel the beat of compassion in our chests" (p. 296). Ultimately, however, the novel's narrative is as hopeful as it is challenging. Through Quinn, the novel holds up a mirror in which white teachers and students can see ourselves reflected and find guidance in his complicated, imperfect, lifelong road toward a socially active stance of racial solidarity (Bishop, 1990; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Patton & Bondi, 2015).

Implications for Teaching: Pedagogy and Counter-narratives

Using a counter-narrative text such as *All American Boys* to examine modern injustices of race and racism in our current era of documented police brutality represents both an opportunity and a great challenge for our classrooms. Hoffman (1996) calls for a discourse that reflects multicultural awareness in both research and practice, and counter-narrative literature like *All American Boys* can help us approach this work. However, implementing pedagogical practices and specific teaching strategies is difficult. Pedagogy that takes an antiracist stance to create communities for critical discourse and self-reflection requires a fluidity of instructional methods and responsiveness to the individuals within the classroom community. As Gillborn (2000) suggests, "There is not a blueprint for successful anti-racism, no one 'correct' way. What succeeds at one time, or in one context, may not be appropriate at a later date or in another context" (p. 486). The following section outlines work that educators can do in preparation for teaching this text, including specific teaching strategies that might be useful in providing students a space to use the experiences of these characters to examine injustice and racism in the world.

Like many other pedagogical practices, enacting antiracist pedagogy begins with preparation and self-reflection. Educators must consider their own identity and history in relation to the text and their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Leonardo, 2004). An educator's point of view stems from his/her own experience; in teaching counter-narratives, that self-history needs to be examined (Willis & Harris, 2003). From what standpoints does an educator witness and understand the fictional lives of Rashad and Quinn?

Teachers need to grapple with the concepts of whiteness, racism, and power as a starting point, and the concept of whiteness needs to be addressed across multiple frames.

Scholars have expanded on what it means to confront white privilege (Blakeney, 2005; Levine-Rasky, 2000) and how to examine racial differences (Willis & Harris, 2003). Blakeney (2005) suggests that antiracist professional development can help educators confront constructs like "white is right, white ignorance, white privilege, and how they interact to perpetuate a white dominant culture that in turn perpetuates aversive racism manifested as institutional racism" (p.129). Leonardo (2004) recommends examining racism and privilege through the lens of how people of color may be denied the resources of their communities and compensation for their labor. Before sharing this powerful counter-narrative novel with students, teachers should examine their own constructions of race, privilege, and power. This reflective act must include questioning white privilege beyond superficial awareness of whiteness on an individual level. It requires sustained engagement with deeper concepts that have historically been left unaddressed, such as how individuals maintain positions of voice and power, enact racial microaggressions, and fundamentally ignore culpability within systems of injustice.

Pedagogy that takes an antiracist stance to create communities for critical discourse and self-reflection requires a fluidity of instructional methods and responsiveness to the individuals within the classroom community.

In addition to considering the context of the classroom itself, as well as adopting a stance of reflection and learning toward examining systemic issues of racism and privilege, there are some pedagogical teaching strategies that may enrich students' experiences with counter-narrative texts like *All American Boys*. One preliminary strategy is pairing the novel with supplementary texts and images that connect students' examination of its themes to real-world examples. Based on research within teacher education, Coleman-King and Groenke (2015) suggest that examining issues of inequality can be enhanced by combining fictional texts such as *All American Boys* with historical nonfiction to understand the ways in which certain cultural groups have been positioned and discriminated against. Similarly, Harris (1993) suggests that a relevant nonfiction source to pair with multicultural fiction can be found in age-group-specific pop cultural texts, such as magazines, which can be beneficial for questioning differences and similarities from different cultural standpoints.

Pairing *All American Boys* with nonfiction texts

represents a rich opportunity to examine issues of racial injustice, both historically and contemporarily. Educators may find it especially valuable to pair the novel with theoretical pieces about racism in the United States, historical perspectives on racism, research and examples regarding media contributions to stereotypes of specific cultural groups, and/or personal accounts of cross-cultural lived experiences and perspectives. Books such as *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* (Moore, 2010) and *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015) would enhance students' engagement with personal narrative perspectives on race and racism. Hill's (2016) *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* and Lowery's (2016) *"They Can't Kill Us All": Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America's Racial Justice Movement* lend themselves to examining current acts of grave injustice in the US. Markus and Moya's (2010) *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century* has specific chapters on racism in the media, real estate practices, and law enforcement. Each of these titles, whether read individually or as part of a selected assortment, can deepen students' understanding of racial realities, both past and present, and enrich their reading of *All American Boys*. (See "Select Nonfiction Texts to Pair with *All American Boys*" in the references.)

In addition to pairing the novel with nonfiction texts, educators can think about the ways in which they frame discussion of the novel itself. Students could begin their examination of its themes through strategies such as Beers and Probst's (2017) framework of "in the book, in your head, in your heart" that open up ways to access difficult topics. Discussion could be centered on conceptual frameworks that lend themselves to examining cultural difference and injustice, such as examining the literacy aesthetic of a work about a specific cultural group (Glenn, 2014). Classrooms could also explore the coming of age aspect of the novel within the specific cultural spaces that the characters occupy (Harris, 1993). Another possibility is examining the way knowledge is positioned in the novel and which types of knowledge—cultural, mainstream, school, and transformative—are valued. Finally, the concept of moving from analysis to action (Glenn, Ginsburg, Gaffy, Lund, & Meagher, 2012) could also be integrated into classroom discussions and activities. A list of potential discussion questions based on these approaches is included in Appendix A.

To accompany these strategies, there are also opportunities for students to pair their reading of *All American Boys* with writing activities that contribute to their critical analysis of the text and foster analytical connections to the world around them. For example, students can write about this novel from an insider/outsider stance that explores what it's like to identify with certain forms of cultural knowledge while lacking others (Soter, 1999). Romano's (1995, 2000) notion of multigenre writing lends itself well to using different forms to explore voice. Students could also design youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects that address issues of inequality (Glenn et al., 2012). YPAR is grounded in the combined efforts of multiple stakeholders, community members, and outsiders to question injustice within communities, research those injustices, organize for change, and create products to educate others about these injustices (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). In tandem with reading *All American Boys*, students could research racial injustices within their own communities by looking at systemic practices within their school, or elsewhere, in which people are treated differently based on their race, culture, gender, class, or other identity markers. Educators and students alike could draw on resources like the Public Science Project (http://publicscienceproject.org) to examine other youth participatory action research projects and how they have worked to create change.

It is essential to reiterate that this novel can act as social commentary and that it allows readers to explore the concept of self and others, which is crucial if young adult literature is to be used as a way to question social realities and ultimately enact actions that lead to change. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that culturally relevant teaching is about "questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequalities, the racism, and the injustices that exist in society" (p.18). Counter-narratives help students examine, understand, and critique "real-world wrongs borne witness through fiction" (Glenn, 2006, p. 91). Texts like *All American Boys* thus create space for critical witnessing, in which the ramification of reading injustices within the world of a text can lead to action for change within the reader's own world (Lopez, 2009).

Conclusion

During the novel's final chapters, the marchers who protest police brutality have a die-in. Rashad, a survivor, drops to the ground with his fellow protesters amidst a litany of fallen Black men's and women's names. Name after name fills the air. Of profound note: the ten names listed in the text are real people who, innocent and unarmed, lost their lives to police brutality. This novel embeds these people as an enduring counter-story, in which their lives and names will not fade from our public discourse or historical memory (Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Warnke, 2015).

All American Boys invites us to challenge the privilege of dominant racial groups, examine the positionalities of diverse racial and cultural groups, and offer students an abundance of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to see and discuss their own varied identities and experiences. It is also a profound work of insight and empathy that can be brought into the classroom as an act of healing, representation, and empowerment, especially at a time when students are increasingly faced with the daily realities and threats of systemic racial inequity. Reynolds and Kiely (2015) enjoin us in this counter-narrative, asking us to help keep their characters' names in our own memories, to lift up the stories of those, like Rashad, who survive, and to work toward change. Finally, the novel offers a counter-narrative that tells youth we see you, and we know that change is needed.

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Select Nonfiction Texts to Pair with *All American Boys*

Coates, T. N. (2015). *Between the world and me.* New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.
Hill, M. L. (2016). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
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Appendix A: Representative Discussion Questions for Classroom Use

1. Rashad is both surprised by the accusation made by the officer and aware that he must quickly remove himself from this situation when he is accused of shoplifting at the corner store. What constructs do you think the authors allude to in both the accusation itself and Rashad's instinct to remove himself as quickly as possible?
2. At the end of chapter one, why does Rashad fear for his life? If you think across identity and race constructions, what different thoughts might individuals from other cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, and sexually-oriented groups think? What would you think if you were in this moment being unfairly accused of shoplifting at your local corner store?
3. On page 49, Rashad's father suggests that Rashad may be at fault for his hospitalization as a result of the way he dresses or his actions. Describe your reaction to his father's words.
4. Why do you think Spoony sends in Rashad's picture in his uniform and tries to be in control of the media narrative?
5. In describing his experience at the pizza shop, Quinn describes himself as "the kind of guy who just kept taking those free Cokes, no questions asked, like I actually deserved them or something" (p. 78). What do you suppose Quinn means by emphasizing this statement?
6. Desmond Tutu's quote, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor," is in direct contrast with the actions of some of the adults at Rashad's and Quinn's school. Two examples include Coach Carney's desire to have the students "leave all this stuff at the door" (p. 158) and Ms. Webber's omission of Rashad's name in class. In your eyes, how do schools and other institutions maintain systemic issues of injustice? What would you say to Coach Carney, Ms. Webber, and other teachers, like Quinn's English teacher Mrs. Tracey?
7. What do you think English means when he tells Quinn, "You have no idea how many times you've sounded like a dick. You think it was just today" (p. 177)?
8. During the early chapters of the novel, Quinn wants to ignore the assault on Rashad. Why? What does it mean for him to be a witness to this violence?
9. The concept of being "color-blind" comes up throughout the book. What is meant by this term? Why do some want to believe that we live in a color-blind society? What is problematic about the concept of being "color-blind" in our society?
10. What does Quinn mean by stating "[M]y shield was that I was white" (p. 180)?
11. Quinn believes that to work against injustice, he must engage in dialogue about race and his own privilege. How can we work against injustice in our own communities?
12. As you look at Rashad's artwork, what stands out about the passages that refer to the way in which he depicts people, including the Family Circus images, his faceless figures, and his final culminating drawing in the hospital?
13. Why do you think Rashad attends the protest without his bandages on?
14. Why do you think the authors made the choice to list the names of real individuals who lost their lives as a result of police brutality? What are the implications of this decision for you as a reader?