

**The In or The Out: Who Has the Answers**

Paul Douglas II

Department of Social Justice Education, The University of Toronto

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Dr. rosalind hampton

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Most often it is assumed that blackness is best understood by those inside of academia and that their knowledge is superior to people's knowledge outside of the academy. This may be due to acquiring knowledge seen as more beneficial due to the name of the institution or the location in which said license or certification is earned. This is especially concerning as it pertains to the “black intellectual” and institutions of higher learning.

According to hampton (2023), the myth of meritocracy posits that academic success is only based on arduous work and assumes the definition of success for all is shared, ignoring systemic inequality. The fact of the matter is that many complex systemic laws, policies, rules, and regulations contribute to the accessibility of academia, positioning the black community further into an inferior state from the perspective of many intellectuals. This is more than just educationally; it is socially, psychologically, physiologically, spiritually, and beyond. For too long, non-blacks have been able to legitimize black culture, use of language, and the arts, which is an obvious responsibility of the people who black is imposed on (William-White, 2011). When, where, and how to address the issues are a constant endeavor. Throughout this essay, I examine and compare terms associated with black identities as defined by those inside and outside of the academy, to offer a fuller analysis of blackness and anti-blackness.

The academy is defined as a society or institution of distinguished scholars, artists, or scientists that aims to promote and maintain standards in its respective field (“Oxford Press,” 2023). This suggests anyone outside the academy is lessor of an author, scientist, or artist. I have asked five individuals from within the academy and five who have never attended University the same five questions to compare the answers of each, as well as define the terms. The sample group are both male and female between the age of 15 and 55 all living within Ontario, Canada.

This essay draws on these informal conversations to respond to these questions in relation to so-called “black people” in Canada: What is black? What is racism? What is white supremacy? What is the most successful black movement? What is the solution?

### **What is Black?**

Blackness is shrouded with tones of slaveness, a black death; persons deserving of nothingness which is defined as afro-pessimism, signaling the individuality of the struggle of being deemed black (McCormick, 2021). According to Smith (2017), the English are credited as ascribing the definition of black to Africans as a sub form of race, deviating from ethnic heritage, and attributing a color to a people to distribute wealth to themselves and place restrictions on Africans. Lipsitz (2017) posits that blackness is not a unified homogenous community, and has diverse needs, interests, and desires. How one is labeled as black or not is extremely inconsistent therefore should be defined in its use as often as possible to prevent confusion especially in scientific studies (Cenat, 2022).

For participants inside of the academy, black is most often defined as a social construct or label imposed on a group of people of African descent regardless of current geographical location, skin tone, or language spoken. Outside of the academy, black is defined as anything that is not Caucasian, European, or White. Inside and outside of the academy the understanding

is that black is a social construct including and excluding groups at the discretion of the power structure. Black was created as justification for practicing racism manifested many times in the form of anti-black racism.

### **What is Racism?**

According to Unzueta & Lowery (2008), racism is defined as individual discrimination caused by negative attitudes or beliefs about members of a discriminated against group. Racism is shown through scaffolding power and influence away from blackness and towards whiteness, thus generally, leaving those considered blackest at the bottom of the social construct. From within the academy racism is most often defined as a system of oppression used by dominant groups against members of a racial construct deemed inferior.

Participants outside of the academy define racism as the unfair treatment of blacks by whites, excluding other groups that practice anti-black racism. In conversation, it was assumed inside and outside of the academy that the question was about what racism is and how it affects black people specifically. Unfair treatment of blacks by whites is an example of racism in action, which supports the definition. However, understanding that there are more groups outside of whiteness that practice antiblack racism (ABR) was excluded by those outside of the academy.

According to Vargas & Jung (2021), racism is an aspect of sociality whereas ABR is an

ontological condition of modern world social possibilities. Additionally, the term anti-black racism was not mentioned explicitly by any of the participants although they all described how blackness is devalued and minimized by groups of people.

### **What is White Supremacy?**

According to Bell et al. (2021), white supremacy is defined as a systemic institution of normalizing power and privileges, maintaining whiteness and its advantages in every aspect of life. hampton (2020) defines whiteness as a social construct that idolizes “white” people and is primarily about exerting power over non-whites regardless of the socioeconomic or political status of its ingroup members.

Inside of the academy white supremacy is defined as a system, tool, or manifestation of racism where people group themselves together under the social construct of white to place

themselves above those considered black or other than white. Outside of the academy white supremacy is defined as a system that places white people above blacks and others based on the color of their skin. This concept is understood extremely well inside as well as outside of the academy. The ten participants described seeing manifestations of white supremacy in hiring practices, scholarships, medical attention, and other factors caused individuals to investigate attaining the language to describe their life experiences.

### **What is Success?**

Weathertone & Schussler (2021) state that success is subjective and can be determined by the individual or group attempting to achieve a particular goal. According to Santoro (2015), black communities are the only authoritative voice to define the most successful black movements. This means that stories of the successes and failures of the civil rights movement, #BlackLivesMatter, and other Black Power movements will be told by black authors, researchers, historians, and others living during and after those times. According to research by Nardini & Rank-Christman (2021), the formula for successful social movements is a three-step process. Bystanders must become upstanders, grassroots groups must unite, and coordinated groups of allies must act on their shared purpose. This translates to the most successful black movement having no correct answer, so the answer changes based on who you ask and when.

From within the academy, it was agreed upon by the 5 participants that the most successful black movement is the Civil Rights Movement and #BlackLivesMatter due to the

success of legislation and inspiration for the advancement of people of African descent. Outside of the academy the 5 participants considered the most successful black movement to be the Black Panther Party. I believe that the participants from outside of the academy valued a more radical aspect of perceived success, versus those from within the academy who gave a more perceived acceptable answer of what success looks like for black movements.

### **What is the Solution?**

Inside of the academy the solution to combating antiblackness in North America is overall education. Understanding that black people are not the problem, unlearning false narratives, internalized racism, practicing group economics, and equity in every aspect of life. Outside of the academy the solution is also primarily considered education. I would have liked to see both groups focus on the type of education that would provide the best solutions. We know that there are examples of history being intentionally left out or not allowed to be taught in schools, for example Kaerwer & Pritchett (2023) have shown that bills in Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Oklahoma have undermined many years of culturally relevant research, preventing proper education especially for black people. Specifying the type of education needed for black success as Afrocentric and Afro- led culturally sensitive pedagogy.

Throughout this analysis an underlying tone of afro-pessimism is pervasive. No participant explicitly used the terminology however, the understanding from inside and out of the academy is that so called black people have a unique place in society that is incomparable to other struggles that groups have experienced. This imposition of removing ethnic heritage and relegating an ancient people to slaveness and nothingness is undebatable (McCormick, 2021).

The insiders and outsiders agree that blackness is a social construct, and racism affects blacks the most due to the system of white supremacy. Both groups also agree that education is the best hope for solving the problems of black people. Where the groups differ is primarily on the groups of blacks that have garnered that most success due blacks not being a homogenous group but imposed as so, as well as the subjectivity of success.

As a person of African descent, one has the responsibility of resisting colonialism and anti-blackness in its many forms. Educating themselves and others of the true history to attain knowledge of self and remove the veil of ignorance to become as Brown & Lipford- Sanders (1995) defined in their article as *Kujichagulia* meaning self-determined in Swahili. Black people must define what it means to be black, then and only then can one bask in their blackness as they see fit.



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