

The Dangers of Whitewashing Black History

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb04xj7LS34&t=10s> (June 3, 2018 [18 mins])

David Ikard, Professor of African American and Diaspora Studies at Vanderbilt University, speaks of how the white establishment educational system “whitewashes” Black history in order to create a story that does not challenge whites socially or emotionally. He uses an example from his young son’s retelling of Rosa Parks as a tired, old woman with sore feet who did not want to move on the bus, versus Parks as the long time, quiet, educated activist who found her moment. In the former, the whitewashing of African American history becomes a perpetuation of white supremacy.

In this Lunch and Learn, we have an opportunity to think about the Black History stories we have been told, and how and where we need to challenge the narratives in order to bring about more informed/ accurate history storytelling. We can also think about how to “unlearn” false narratives, and relearn using original/ varied sources. We will discuss the harmful effects of being a Black child who is searching for powerful Black stories and instead is fed formulaic “whitewashed” stories of Black heroes’ accomplishments described as happenstance.

Additional Resources:

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/the-many-lives-of-pauli-murray

Murray, born 1910, was a Black gay, non-binary poet, Co-Founder of NOW, Episcopalian minister, and lawyer whose writings strongly influenced the Supreme Court arguments led by Thurgood Marshall, RBG, and the Marriage Equality lawyers...and yet very few of us have ever heard of Murray. (A documentary, by the team that produced “RBG” was released in January 2021 and is currently available on Prime: “My Name is Pauli Murray.”)