The White Supremacist Worldview of Horace Bushnell and the Null Curriculum in Religious Education

Abstract

Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) and his classic book Christian Nurture (1847) contains a white supremacist worldview that is part of the null curriculum of religious education. After exploring the writings of Bushnell, additional articles and resources will be shared that address the topic of racism and will conclude with the importance of movements like Black Lives Matter, and the Poor People’s Campaign, started by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and revived today on the fiftieth anniversary of the Campaign, which identified the three moral evils of poverty, racism, and militarism.
The Prominence of Horace Bushnell in the field of Religious Education

It is a common experience to learn about Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) and his classic book *Christian Nurture* (1847) in many courses that are part of a Religious Education curriculum. Some of these courses include: Foundations of Religious Education, Teaching Methods for Children and Adolescents, Teaching Methods for Adults and others. He is known as one of the Fathers of religious education (Moy 2000), the “father of the Christian education movement,” (Mulder), and, according to Mary Boys, the field of “religious education as a classic expression begins with Bushnell” (Boys 1989, 40). Boardman Kathan considered the book, “one of the most influential books ever published in America” (1981) and Edwards, a biographer of Bushnell, called it “a kernel of an American classic” (Edwards 1992 in Massey 2001, 6). In 1979, a poll among Christian educators called *Christian Nurture* a book indispensable to their field (Hudson 1981, 177 in Massey 2001, 16).

The Discovery of the White Supremacist Worldview of Horace Bushnell

For this author, the glowing reputation of Horace Bushnell suddenly changed when his white supremacist worldview was mentioned by Russell G. Moy in his article “American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education,” (*Religious Education, Vol 95, No. 2, Spring 2000*). Until reading this article, no Professor or book, that mentioned Bushnell, made a connection to this part of Bushnell’s worldview found primarily in chapter VIII of *Christian Nurture* entitled “The Out-Populating Power of the Christian Stock,” which is the final chapter of Part I entitled, The Doctrine.

Moy mentions how Bushnell “was influenced by the prevailing notion of white superiority,” (2000, 127) in chapter VIII, in *Christian Nurture*. A second document from Bushnell, that will be explored in this article, bears a resemblance to the views expressed in *Christian Nurture* in a lecture entitled “A discourse on the slavery question: delivered in the North Church, Hartford, Thursday evening, January 10, 1839.” North Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, was Bushnell’s home church.

This article will begin with providing a context to the worldview of Bushnell that laid the groundwork for his white supremacist worldview and the question of slavery among the churches in his time. A speech by Frederick Douglas, in Belfast, Ireland, will serve as an excellent juxtaposition to the writings of Bushnell on the response of churches, and the Congregational churches to which Bushnell belonged in New England, to the question of slavery. Further background information will explore the history of the First Church of Cambridge between the years 1636-1873 that provides examples of the racist and discriminatory practices of the church and abolitionists during a period which would include the life of Bushnell, who would share similar racist and white supremacist thinking. Early explorers and missionaries looked upon Africa as the Dark Continent, and racial theories of superiority and inferiority would have been further factors influencing the thinking of Bushnell.
After establishing a context, the two main documents of Bushnell will be explored revealing his views of white supremacy that this author finds eerily similar to the writings of Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), and the French novel *The Camp of Saints*, by Jean Raspail (1973) that is described as “A chilling novel of the end of the white world.” It is a book that was said to have influenced Steve Bannon and the Trump Administration.

Following the exploration of the primary documents of Bushnell, the null curriculum as described by Elliot W. Eisner (2002, 97-107) will serve as a transition into a lecture by Fr. Bryan Massingale, Fordham University, and the excellent article by Russell Moy that led this author to the current topic of this article. The absence of Bushnell’s white supremacist worldview in religious education courses associated with *Christian Nurture*, clearly serves as an example of the null curriculum. It is hard to find an introduction to *Christian Nurture*, or a scholarly work on Bushnell that critiques his white supremacist worldview that was a product of his day and continues to be a product of our contemporary society under the current administration of President Donald Trump, especially considering the events that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia. The question that needs to be asked of all Religious Educators who mention Bushnell and *Christian Nurture* is why or why not mention his white supremacist worldview? To do so allows for an opportunity to bring the discussion of race, racism, and white supremacy into the classroom discussion that is needed more than ever today to at least raise awareness about the ongoing problem of racism in our world today.

The death of James H. Cone on April 28, 2018, one of the greatest black theologians of our time, who shed light on the white supremacist worldview of Christianity influences this article and offers resources for addressing this discussion in his books *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1990), *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church: Where have we been and where are we going?* (1987), and *God of the Oppressed* (1975). The article will conclude with the importance of movements like Black Lives Matter, the fatal police shootings of African Americans and people of color, and the Poor People’s Campaign, started by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which identified the three moral evils of poverty/materialism, racism, and militarism just before his assassination April 4, 1968. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Poor People’s Campaign Rev. William Barber is organizing a new campaign that is calling attention to the three evils identified by Dr. King while adding ecological devastation to the triune evils of Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign.

**Methodology**

The article will use a literature-based review and analysis of the writings of Horace Bushnell, and other writers who address issues of race and the null curriculum. It will also provide a historical perspective that includes the world of slavery and white supremacy at the time of Bushnell, through the present day with movements like Black Lives Matter, and the Poor People’s Campaign attempting to address matters of racism and the related evils of poverty and militarism.
Frederick Douglas and the Baptists, Congregationalists, the Free Church and Slavery

In a speech in Belfast, Ireland, 1845, Frederick Douglas (c. 1818-1895) expressed “the corruption and sinful position of the American Churches” regarding slavery. In particular, he speaks about the Baptists, Congregationalists, and the Free Church. Horace Bushnell was a member and minister of the Congregational North Church, in Hartford, Connecticut (Bratti Cheney-Bushnell 1984, 3). Douglas points out the hypocrisy of Christian slave owners with the teachings of Christianity and the preaching of the Gospel by equating the concept of Christian slave-holders with someone who is a sober-drunkard (Douglas 1845).

He points out the ministers who have difficulty getting rid of their slaves because they are afraid of getting rid of their “fat salaries.” He states, “It is curious, that the higher we go in ecclesiastical rank, in the churches, the colder we find the ministers in the cause of freedom.” He specifically addresses the Congregationalists in New England, which would be the location of Horace Bushnell. The leading ministers took the side of slavery and the higher the ecclesiastical office the stronger the defender of the slaveholder. He used the Good Samaritan parable to demonstrate the lowly status of the Samaritan who has compassion on the injured person. He points out the people in Belfast on the side of the slave and the higher, or upper classes in Belfast — the class of “Civis” — that had difficulty speaking up on behalf of the slaves (Ibid.).

Douglas condemns the leading Doctor’s of Divinity in America and the Professors in colleges who were in favor of slavery. He points out a Professor Stewart at Andover Seminary who instructed a large portion of congregational ministers and was himself an advocate for slavery. While Bushnell was not mentioned by Douglas, he would fit the profile as a graduate of Yale Divinity School, and a high-ranking ecclesiastical minister in the North Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut.

The History of the First Church in Cambridge, 1636-1873 and the Racist Inclinations of the Abolitionist Movement

The document, “Owning Our History: First Church and Race 1636-1873” and the website for the First Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, provides additional context to the world of Bushnell. Slavery remained legal in Connecticut and Rhode Island into the 1830’s. The increasing number of freed persons of color led to new legal restrictions, mob actions against communities of color, and the founding of the American Colonization Society to encourage freed black persons to emigrate to Africa. The efforts of Abolitionists supporting the American Colonization Society sought a vision of New England as a society that was free of people of color (Melish 1998 in Kidder 2011, 7). Like today’s immigration policies, laws were passed

1 Like Frederick Douglas, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would also challenge the silent liberal white clergy in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, and also referenced the Good Samaritan parable in one of his speeches.

https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geX-a5PqxaY (YouTube recording Dr. King and Good Samaritan parable.)
targeting people of color as undesirables and taxing their presence. In 1788, a law was passed that all African Americans not citizens of the state would be expelled from the state.

The zeal of abolitionists to abolish slavery did not eliminate their racist views which included: not advocating for black voting rights, or the promotion of social integration of people of color. Wendall Phillips confessed to being uncomfortable sharing a room with a black abolitionist, Abbot Lawrence refused to shake the hand of a black man, and Edmund Quincy was known to tell racist jokes at antislavery meetings (Horton and Horton 1997 in Kidder 2011, 9).

Two speakers express Christian white supremacists’ statements that are like those of Bushnell found in Christian Nurture. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) opposed slavery, but confidently predicted “the dark man, the black man will only be destined for museums like the Dodo.” And Theodore Parker, a prominent Boston minister and abolitionist preached how “the Anglo-Saxon people...as the best specimen of mankind which has ever attained great power in the world ...” (Melish 1998, in Kidder 2011, 9).

The concluding paragraph by David Kidder in “Owning Our History, First Church in Cambridge,” sums up the position of not only First Church and many other Congregational churches, but also those of Horace Bushnell in chapter eight of Christian Nurture. The Congregational churches, and Bushnell, “did little or nothing to stem the rising tide of racism and prejudice towards persons of color that emerged in the north, after northern emancipation. Discernment of the boundaries between “we” of the covenanting community and “they” — increasingly defined in racial terms — became more rather than less restrictive over this period” (Kidder 2011, 13).

Africa as the Dark Continent

One of the terms used by Bushnell in Christian Nurture is “savage race” (Bushnell 1876, 203). It is not completely clear whether he is referring to Native Americans in the United States, or the slaves and all inhabitants of Africa, or both. This section will explore the views towards Africa that were prevalent among missionaries and explorers during the lifetime of Bushnell.

Henry Morton Stanley, was born in Wales in 1841, as John Rowland. He came to the United States as a teen and would fight on both sides of the Civil War, first for the South, and after being captured, for the North. Stanley would become one of many white explorers that would refer to Africa as the “Dark Continent.” Part of this designation was due to the maps that the explorers would make of the lakes and mountains they “discovered”. These maps would help erase the pre-colonial history of Africa. Stanley wrote two articles entitled “Through the Dark Continent,” and “In the Darkest Africa.” He was known for his brutal treatment and punishment of the black porters helping him and the “discovery” of the Scottish missionary and explorer named David Livingston. He died at age of 63, in 1904, from various illnesses he had gotten in Africa (McNamara 2017; Thompson 2018)

The Imperialistic interests in Africa were fueled by three purposes: “the spirit of adventure, the desire to support good work of civilizing the natives, and the hope of stamping out the slave trade” (Thompsell 2018). While slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, it
continued within Africa. Missionaries began traveling to Africa and those who did not find success and few converts gave the reason for it being the “African people's hearts were locked in darkness.” The label of Dark Continent “referred to the savagery Europeans said was endemic to Africa.” A geographer named Lucy Jarosz shared thoughts regarding the negative, savage qualities of Africa and the salvation Christianity would bring as “a primeval, bestial, reptilian or female entity to be tamed, enlightened, guided, opened and pierced by white European males through western science, Christianity, civilization, commerce, and colonialism” (Thompson 2018). These thoughts would be shared by Bushnell and expressed in Christian Nurture.

**Horace Bushnell and the White Supremacist World View of Christian Nurture, Chapter VIII, The out-populating power of the Christian stock**

According to the daughter of Horace Bushnell, it was not a “system of thought” he wanted to leave behind, but “a living, growing, harmonious conception of truth, which should be seed thought to others . . .” (Cheney-Bushnell 1902, 542 in Bratti Cheney-Bushnell 1984, 3). Given charges of heresy and controversy over his writings, Bushnell understood how his writings could be misunderstood, “I know what it is to have the purest motives, most fervent prayers, and most incessant labors misapprehended and misrepresented. I know what the moral whipping post means” (Cheney-Bushnell 1902, 518 in Bratti Cheney-Bushnell 1983, 8). I begin this section on chapter eight of Christian Nurture with an appreciation for the “system of thought” and “seed thought” that this research has provided for my own understanding of Horace Bushnell and his white supremacist beliefs that were a product of his times and ours as well. This research is being offered as a “recontextualization” of Christian Nurture with the hope that it creates further conversation and activism confronting the racism and white supremacist ideology of today within the field and classrooms of Religious Education, and other academic and theological disciplines.

**Christian Nurture** is divided into two parts. Part I is entitled The Doctrine, and Part II, The Mode. Chapter VIII will be the focus of this paper. It begins with a passage from the Prophet Malachi, “And did he not make one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit, And Wherefore one? That he might have a godly seed” (Malachi 2:15). The New American Bible translation is “Did he not make one being, with flesh and spirit; and what does that one require but godly offspring?” Bushnell interprets Malachi’s passage as a “strict observance of marriage” (1876, 195). This passage from Malachi describes the intermarriage that was taking place between the people of Israel and foreigners during and after the exile. It was especially reprehensible when a husband would divorce his Israelite wife, or “the wife of your youth” for a non-Israelite, which constituted a violation of the covenant.

This passage supporting the purity of marriage and the condemnation of intermarriage between Israelites and foreigners supports Bushnell’s vision of the Christian family producing godly seed or godly offspring to over-populate the world. It also implies concepts of racial and religious purity that become the hallmarks of white supremacist ideologies.

Bushnell offers two principle ways the Kingdom of God is to be extended throughout the world. One is the process of conversion, and the other through family propagation and the
reproducing of godly offspring. The conversion of the world by the preaching of the Gospel and piety and the populating of the world with Christians fulfills the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. He provides the reasons for the overpopulating of the world with Christians to spread the Kingdom of god.

First, God frames the order of the church’s economy by creating the family and the organic unity in the family and of the family to help propagate the Christian religion around the world. This is done not by conversion alone but the populating force and presence of the family as “the most majestic and silently creative force in history” (198).

Second, Abraham is given as an example of God’s promise to make him a blessing for humanity through his countless descendants. He will be the father of many nations and all nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. That Jesus came out of these descendants as the Savior of the world further confirms the inclusion of Gentiles as part of the seed of Abraham (199).

Third, the spreading of Christianity and the Kingdom of God will not come about merely by adults’ conversions, but by the populating force of the family, which can only take place “through the gate of a sanctified infancy and childhood” (202).

Fourth, Bushnell makes a comparison of the predisposition of Christian purity in the Christian family, with the predisposition found in domestic animals, based on their function in the world. This function in the world is passed down to the offspring of the animals, making them more trainable. This idea is central to the thought of Bushnell who begins Christian Nurture, Chapter I, entitled “What Christian nurture is” with this passage, “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The more complete text from the New American Bible is “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord” (9, Ephesians 6:4). On the following page Bushnell answers the question What is the true idea of Christian education? He states the familiar passage “That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.” He continues,

“In other words, the aim, effort, and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years. I do not affirm that every child may, in fact and without exception, be so trained that he will certainly grow a Christian” (10).

Unfortunately, as Bushnell develops his thought, it becomes equally apparent that a person can “grow up racist, based on the worldview that surrounds them, and never know themselves as being otherwise.” In this section, Bushnell moves from the example of domestic animals having an innate predisposition for a purpose to using the term “a savage race” that he describes as “a race bred into low living, and a faithless, bloody character” (203). This reference would likely refer to Africans, Native Americans, and in general, people of color, given the context and worldview established in the previous section. Bushnell will later include the Irish
and Muslims into this category, further expanding his views from white supremacy into Islamophobia.

Bushnell moves from a “savage race” to a “race of slaves” who become physiologically servile, which continue as one civilization progresses from one generation to the next. He proposes a civilization that is a result of an inbred civility. He includes the Jewish race and his own anti-Semitic bias, making a distinction between the “old Jewish stock of the Scripture times, who “were not marked by any such miserably sordid, usurious, garbage-vending propensity, as now distinguishes this race”. His reference to the suffering of Jews under Christian ownerships, in other countries, only highlights the negative stereotypes of Jews which justifies the Jewish “character we so commonly speak of with contempt”. Bushnell concludes that if Christians were treated the same way as Jews, over the centuries, they too would “reveal the marks of their wrongs in the same sordid and miserly ways” (203).

Bushnell’s fifth and final point, regarding the spreading of the Kingdom of God by the overpopulating of Christians includes “Mohammedans” or Muslims. He states the well-known fact, with scientific precision suggesting racial theories of his day, that a particular race, or stock of people is increased “according to the degree of personal and religious character to which it has attained.” He adds other criteria to creating a master race that includes: “good principles and habits, intellectual culture, domestic virtue, industry, order, law and faith” (209). The only thing that can save an inferior race is “a ready and pliant assimilation.” For Bushnell, this would imply the superior, white, Christian race. Bushnell’s thoughts on racial superiority, and racial theory would have been influenced by Thomas Jefferson who proposed in Notes on the State of Virginia, (1776), “… “blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”

In this section, Bushnell compares the Christian and Mohammedan races by making the distinction of Christians propagating their message and people by moral and religious influences, “at least in part,” and the Mohammedan race propagating by military force (209). He implies the superior stock of Christianity would “completely expurgate the world of it” (Mohammedanism) and despite the inability of crusade after crusade to defeat the Mohammedans “the majestic populating force of Christian faith and virtue can even push it out of the world, as in the silence of a dew-fall” (210).

Bushnell continues his theory of white supremacy comparing the population forces of the Puritan stock in the United States with “the inferior, superstitious, half Christian stock and nurture of the South American states.” The reason for the white, Christian, supremacy is “having a larger, fuller, more creating force in one,” making it more superior (210).

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2 These ideas would not only influence Bushnell, but scientists who developed their own thoughts on race supporting racial theories of white superiority and black inferiority. The original racial theory of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) did not validate racial superiority or inferiority.

http://www.understandingrace.org/history/history_trans.html
Bushnell adds two additional benefits to the white supremacy of Christianity, better health and wealth. The Christian life contains the virtue of temperance, control of the passions, courage, and the “whole dimension of the soul” kept closer to God’s order. Regarding Christian wealth, that predates the prosperity gospel of today, he speaks of New England and the distribution of wealth that is as evenly distributed as the piety. This Christian wealth accrues “in every direction, power in production, enterprise, education, colonization, influence, and consequent popular increase (211). The church is viewed as God’s university and school of spiritual life, “to energize all capacity, and make her sons a talented and powerful race” (212).

Bushnell continues extolling the virtues of the white, Christian race by comparing the advanced race of the Saxons “with the feeble, wilder races like the Aborigines of our continent; having so much power of every kind that it puts them in shadow, weakens them, brings them down, rolling its over-populating tides across them, and sweeping them away as by a kind of doom” (213). He raises the question and prospect of survival of the “feeble and more abject races” and whether or not they “are going to be regenerated and raised up.” “What if it should be God’s plan to people the world with better and finer material?” In fact the overpopulating power of white, Christianity “will inevitably submerge and bury them forever” if the inferior races do not rise up to a higher capacity. His reference here is the colonization by Christian countries around the world fulfilling the mandate of spreading the Kingdom of God.

Ultimately, for Bushnell, it is up to God as to what races are submerged or lost, but in the meantime, the Christian race is to try to win over and save as many people as possible by conversion, and “hasten the day of promise” (214). The views of Bushnell on slavery, in a second document, will further confirm his white supremacist worldview.

On the Slavery Question, January 10, 1839

The second major document of Horace Bushnell was delivered on January 10, 1839 at his North Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, “On the Slavery Question.” In this lecture Bushnell presents two questions related to the question of the abolition of slavery. The first is whether such abolition is possible, or a duty obligatory on the Southern Legislatures. The second is what is our duty in reference to the subject; what measures, if any, ought we to adopt with a view to hasten the result.

At the beginning of his lecture, Bushnell shows his hand completely that is consistent with the congregationalist thoughts of the day among prominent clergy mentioned by Frederick Douglas in his Belfast speech. He disagrees with Anti-Slavery advocates who hold that a person who holds another in legal bondage is in a state of sin “in all cases, and in every moment of its countenance; — no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the laws of the state” (Bushnell 1839, 5). It is interesting from the start that Bushnell upholds the law that justifies slavery and downplays “the temporary holding of slaves” as a crime, and the euphemism for slavery as “legal bondage.”

He disputes the labels put on slave owners used by Frederick Douglas in his Belfast lecture which calls white slave owners “pirates, man-stealers, and the like,” which “is a mere
indiscriminate raving, entitled to no respect, and having no apology but ignorance.” He refers to those who use these terms, like Frederick Douglas, “petty reformers” who reason with a “small logic” (5). He expresses his sympathy for those who charge slave owners as criminals. “If there was ever a people on earth involved in crime, who yet deserve sympathy and gentleness at the hands of the good, it’s the slave-holding portion of the country” (6).

**The Three Features of Slavery that make it abhorrent**

Bushnell identifies three features in American slavery that should be abhorrent to all and produce feelings of “pity, disgust, and shame” (6). The first is the failure to permit the family state among slaves by the denial of marriage rites among the slaves. This includes the separation of husbands and wives, and stripping their children away from them, which pre-dates the current immigration policies in the United States under our current administration and the policies of ICE. He refers to this feature of slavery as “the cattle-state imported into humanity” (6).

His second feature is the lack of protection and “absence of any real protection to the body of the slave, in respect to limb, life, or chastity.” He continues by giving reasons for slave owners to abuse their slaves due to the slave being prevented from testifying against their master’s, which Bushnell deems is “(necessary, perhaps, as a part of the institution)”, and also the rights of slave owners to take revenge on slaves, who “can do nothing, but bow their body to fury and lust and vent their griefs in tears, which none but God will notice or regard.” He concludes this section with an admission that no law can protect slaves under white, Christian bondage. “I blush also to say, that, in a certain high point of civilized honor and humanity, not even the form of a law exists, to maintain the show of protection” (7).

The third feature of slavery is that, as a legal institution, it does not recognize a slave having a moral or intellectual nature. He is not considered human or a man, but only exists for another as property. “As a creature of conscience, a creature of immortal wants, a creature in God’s image, he has no legal existence” (7). Bushnell concludes this section by saying that doing away with this feature is for him “the abolition of slavery.” Ultimately, Bushnell upholds or defers to the power of the laws of slavery that prevent these features from taking place (8).

While repeating his objections to these three features he says to the South, “this institution is your own, not ours.” It is up to the South to modify slavery as they see fit, but as long as they uphold these three features, they will continue to face condemnation. He makes a distinction between these three objectionable features of slavery with the “institution induced or licensed, under the name of bondage, in the law of Moses” (8).

Bushnell further speaks of the benefits to slave owners even after emancipation. Slave owners will lose nothing by emancipation, because slaves will still exist on their soil, and represent the wealth of the slave owners. The labor-power will remain and the wages to the former slaves will remain at the same rate as when they were slaves. The political payoff from emancipation will result in “ten or twenty representatives in Congress, above their present number” (9).
What is to become of the emancipated slaves?

Bushnell responds to the question of what is to become of the emancipated slaves. His answer reflects his views in *Christian Nature*. “I am obliged to say that I do not anticipate any such bright destiny opening on the African race, in this country, as seems to occupy the vision of our Anti-slavery brethren.” A positive view of emancipated slaves “has too slender a support in the sober facts of history and the laws of population ascertained in political science. There is no example in history, where an uncultivated and barbarous stock has been elevated in the midst of a cultivated and civilized stock; and I have no expectation that there even will be” (12).

He gives the example of Aborigines in North and South America heading towards extinction to justify this theory of racial superiority over the uncivilized, barbarous, people of color. He openly states that the African race in this country will “soon begin to dwindle towards extinction, in the same way, if emancipated” (12).

He compares the law of population to a herd of cattle that dwindles after the herdsman stops taking care of them. The same fate awaits the Africans in the United States along with the vices that taint their blood, and within fifty years will result in a premature extinction (12).

Bushnell offers “facts” to further predict the extinction of people of color in the United States by using the example of the Irish, who were also considered non-white citizens of the United States. He predicts the extinction of the Irish due to early mortality rates and intemperance and poor living sweeping away the young and the old (13). He notes the absence of Irish names from the catalogues of colleges, legislatures, and advertisements of merchants and mechanics, thus proving that they cannot rise to the rank of others in our country. But you will find plenty of Irish names in “the catalogues of alms-houses, and prisons, and potter’s fields, there you will find their names in thick order” (13).³ His words echo the stereotypical tweets and fearmongering comments towards Mexican immigrants, when President Trump spoke of Mexicans as rapists and murderers that are refuted by actual statistics.⁴

Because of the future extinction, slave owners in the south have nothing to fear after emancipation. In fact, Bushnell gives the future extinction of the former slaves as reason to abolish the institution of slavery, while maintaining the institution will lead to the ongoing addition of the number of slaves in the south (13-14).

The second question Bushnell raises in the document is that if the South abolishes slavery, what is the duty of the North, in reference to this subject; what measures, if any ought we to adopt” (15).

³ Moy (2000) points out the social and legal construction of race in the United States. The colonists did not see themselves as white, more as English and free. After 1680, the term white was used given the number of slaves in the country. Excluded from the definition of white were: Jews, the Irish, and southern Europeans (121).

⁴ Michelle Yee Hee Lee wrote an article on President Trump’s false comments connecting Mexican immigrants and crime. *The Washington Post, July 8, 2015*. The Congressional Research Service found the vast majority of unauthorized immigrants do not fit in the category that fits Trump’s description.
Bushnell accuses the anti-slavery movement of committing the first sin of “ill manners.” It is evident that Bushnell fall on the side of a gradual abolition of slavery versus the immediate abolition sought by the abolitionists (17). He makes it clear that the abolition of slavery is too inflammatory a subject to handle given the strong hold it has on one’s passions, for it “to be safely entrusted to associations.” He further states that there is no one individual within the Anti-Slavery Society who can address “the ethical questions involved in the subject” (20). It seems the eloquence of Frederick Douglas on the subject was not acceptable to Bushnell.

Bushnell addresses three classes of people in his audience on the subject of slavery (22). The first group of members is the Anti-Slavery Society. He disagrees with their strategy and calls for them to disband and unite with those who favor a gradual abolition of slavery (23). He openly states his inability or those of others to join with the Anti-Slavery movement.

The second class were those listening to Bushnell who he encourages to take his position, and the third class are those who fully support slavery and have no concern to change it.

While there is no denying the contribution of Horace Bushnell’s Christian Nurture book to the field of Christian and Religious Education, this paper unveils the darker side of Bushnell’s worldview that is not fully addressed in the coverage of Christian Nurture. The influences of theories of racial superiority, white supremacy, and the sin of racism not only impacted the life of Horace Bushnell but continue to influence our current Administration, immigration policies, deportations, the Muslim travel ban, and ongoing international conflicts. Any class that deals with Christian Nurture, or Horace Bushnell has an excellent opportunity to learn about the null curriculum.

The Null Curriculum in Religious Education

Elliot W. Eisner (2002) describes the three curricula that schools teach: the explicit, implicit and null curriculum. The null curriculum is what schools and teachers do not teach. This paper argues that if issues of racism and white supremacy are not discussed when studying Horace Bushnell and Christian Nurture, a major opportunity is lost to deal with a topic that permeates our country and world today. Eisner proposes that “what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach.” He continues:

“I argue this position because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problems. The absence of a set of considerations or perspectives or the inability to use certain processes for appraising a context biases the evidence one is able to take into account. A parochial perspective or simplistic analysis is the inevitable progeny of ignorance” (97).

Ignorance is the result of a null curriculum. “Unawareness” is a term used by Fr. Bryan Massingale, S.T.D., Fordham University’s James and Nancy Buckman Chair in Applied Ethics, who delivered a lecture entitled “They Do Not Know It and Do Not Want to Know it: Racial Ignorance, James Baldwin, and the Authenticity of Christian Ethics” (Verel 2018, 1). Patrick Verel unknowingly references the null curriculum when he begins an article with the crux of
Massingale’s lecture, “If you cannot recognize profound injustice around you, you cannot act upon it.” In keeping with Horace Bushnell’s collusion with white supremacy, Massingale states, “Systemic, collective insensitivity and unawareness is the most theologically involved problem at the core of Christianity’s collusion with white supremacy (Ibid.). He follows this up with the question, “How could so many well-meaning and well-educated people be unaware of the racial terrors that unfolded and still unfold around them?”

Fr. Massingale’s parents had to flee from Belzoni, Mississippi because of the threats of white supremacists who were harassing them “with seeming impunity and even committing murder” (Ibid.). He describes the racism that impacted his family’s migration to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. “My family’s story was a response to a state-sponsored and nationally sanctioned regime of racial terror, a response to a Jim Crow that did not mark the end of slavery but rather marked its evolution” (Ibid.). He addressed the silence of white theologians at the time, and used James Baldwin to further express what is considered the null curriculum. James Baldwin ‘described American society as characterized by “a cultivated lack of knowing that enables the majority to live at peace with the horror that inflicts so many.” Massingale added, “Baldwin describes a society as being defined not only by what they know, but also by what they ignore” (Ibid.). It should be noted that all of the issues mentioned by Bushnell, including slavery and racism were state-sponsored and nationally sanctioned.

Charles H. Mills, author of The Racial Contract (1997) ‘described the desire to ignore the reality of racism as “an ignorance that is not merely a lack of knowledge, but the active presentation of itself as real;” ‘and thus akin to a “consensual hallucination.” “This leads to ethical blind spots, affective callousness, and a refusal to recognize the impact of the past” (Verel 2018). This form of ignorance, expressed by Baldwin and Mills, “is more than simply the absence of knowledge, but is in an “active evasion of knowledge passed off as truth” (Ibid.) In the beginning of Charles Mills book is a black American folk aphorism that sums up the white supremacist worldview expressed by Horace Bushnell and others: “When white people say “justice,” they mean “just us.”

Russell G. Moy’s article “American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education” (2000), is an excellent article that this author would recommend when studying or discussing the null curriculum. In the same way that Horace Bushnell called slavery an “institution,” and “legal bondage,” so has racism itself become institutionalized and ingrained in American history: past, present, and future. Moy states, “People from non-European ancestry were judged inferior and were stereotyped because of their skin color. Racism is in the air we breathe; it infects everyone, even newly arrived immigrants. Thus, a “shadow” follows racial-ethnic minorities because of their skin pigmentation” (2000, 120). Moy critiques the field of religious education as inadequately responding to this dilemma. While race is commonly viewed as biologically fixed, and unchangeable, this fails to appreciate how definitions of race are socially and legally constructed. Racial theorists have shown how categories of race have been “formed, transformed, or destroyed through social, economic, and political forces (Omi and Winant 1986, 61 in Moy 2000, 121). Legal construction of race can have someone born one race
and die another. Children of interracial parents were considered legally black in some states and legally white in others (Moy 2000, 121-122).

For slaves, biblical and theological teaching was intentionally distorted, or ignored regarding freedom, baptism, and the church as the body of Christ that taught a unity and equality among black and white Christians and all people (Moy 2000, 123). The fact that the white supremacist worldview of Horace Bushnell is as present today as it was in his day confirms the inherency of white Christianity and white supremacy. “Brothers and Sisters to Us” (1979) is a Pastoral Letter on racism put out by the United States Catholic Bishops. Part of the null curriculum in Catholicism is the failure to teach and preach this document over the years. A research report in 2004 was published marking the 25th Anniversary of the document. It still was not properly taught thoroughly, or preached from the pulpit, especially in white Catholic churches.

In 2017, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops formed an ad hoc committee on racism and are planning a new document on racism. This author fears the same lack of preaching and teaching about the document will occur, creating another example of the null curriculum.

The Melting Pot Myth

Moy sheds light on the topic of assimilation, which “has historically been the dominant ideology in American society” (Moy 2000, 124). He points out that people of color were outside of the “melting pot” along with Asians and Native Americans. Assimilation came to mean the ‘Americanizing,” of other immigrant groups, the civilizing of “uncivilized” groups like Native Americans, African Americans, the Irish, and other immigrant groups. “As a result, Anglo-Saxon values and cultural norms were institutionalized and, to subsequent generations of European immigrants, became the acceptable standards of behavior” (Ibid.).

While moderate tolerance of European ethnic diversity was found in the United States it was not so for racial diversity. African Americans, Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese have all been victims placed on plantations, reservations, prisons, and concentration camps in the United States (Ibid. 124-125). The 1790 Naturalization Law, passed by the First Continental Congress only accepted free white immigrants as American citizens. The McCurran-Walter Act, passed in 1952 finally allowed non-Europeans to be eligible for naturalized citizenship, having been denied this opportunity prior to 1952. The Labor-movement denied membership to various ethnic groups (Ibid.).

The history of institutionalized racism presented in this paper contradicts and even trumps the American ideals of justice and equality and trumps the same religious values along with love of God and neighbor. “Without understanding the hidden “racial history” of the United States, religious educators can implicitly accept the image of America as a melting pot which excluded racial-ethnic minorities. This can be seen in how Sunday School material has been historically constructed” (Moy 2000, 126). Moy adds one last quote to his section on Horace
Horace Bushnell, Islamophobia and the Null Curriculum

One of the groups mentioned by Horace Bushnell that were targeted with extinction were “Mohammedans,” or Muslims. The inclusion, by Bushnell, of Muslims among people of color, and other groups like Native Americans and the Irish is very important for another discussion of the null curriculum in many fields and disciplines. The very mention of Muslims, by Bushnell, helps give historical background to how far back Islamophobia goes, with Islam paired with violence and the sword. 9/11 forever changed a contemporary understanding of Islam and serves as a perfect date and opportunity to talk about the correct teachings of Islam and promote dialogue and understanding through guest speakers and mutual visits to mosques, churches, synagogues, temples, and other interfaith/interreligious events. The fears of 9/11 have led to the anti-immigration policies of the Trump Administration, the travel ban and promises of building a wall separating Mexico and the United States.

In Khaled A. Beydoun’s book, American Islamophobia: Understanding The Roots and Rise of Fear (2018), he mentions the four words that went through the mind of every Muslim on 9/11 and every terrorist event afterwards, “Please don’t be Muslims” (Beydoun 2018, 6). Beydoun makes an important point of framing Islamophobia by highlighting the relationship between state sanctioned law and individual actors who commit acts of hate against Muslims, immigrants, and other minorities. Muslims fall into the wide net of institutionalized racism, and if one is an African American Muslim, the hateful repercussions can be two-fold (Ibid., 19).

The Writings of James H. Cone

On April 28, 2018, Dr. James H. Cone died leaving behind a legacy of writings on Black Theology that need to be made available to students to appreciate Cone’s indictment of white theology and society. Any other readings from multi-cultural perspectives will challenge the Eurocentric norm that provides the context for a white supremacist worldview.

While James Cone has made his voice heard through his writings and books, Frederick Douglas, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Bryan Massingale, James Baldwin, Charles W. Mills, and Russell Moy have commented on the silence from the white churches, white theologians, and white religious educators. Dr. Kings “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” is a classic document for addressing the null curriculum on racism and the silence of white, liberal, clergy at that time. The rise of white supremacist groups and the Charlottesville, Virginia incident seemed to be motivated by the dread and fear of the “end of white America,” based on studies that project people of color will outnumber whites by 2044, and half the babies being born in the United States are minorities. This led Trump to promote nativism, scapegoating and racism to win his election (Beydoun 2018, 12). As a result other civil rights and activists groups have formed on grassroots levels. Two of these groups are #Black Lives Matter and the Poor People’s Campaign.
#Black Lives Matter and the Poor People’s Campaign

In 2013, three black activists, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi formed a grassroots group in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed Trayvon under the Florida Stand your Ground statute. The project and movement called #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) is a global network of over forty chapters. The attention given to various shootings and deaths of unarmed black men, women, and children has brought examples of institutionalized racism and violence to our attention. A growing list of names continues to be added including Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, Philando Castille, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, and many more (Beydoun 2018, 10).

Guiding Principles of #BLM include: Diversity, Restorative Justice, Globalism, Queer Affirming, Unapologetically Black, Collective Value, Empathy, Loving Engagement, Transgender Affirming, Black Villages, Black Women, Black Families, and Intergenerational. Further details can be gotten from their website. They will not be the last grassroots movement to respond to the institutionalized anti-black racism and state-sanctioned violence in our country and world.5

The Poor People’s Campaign, A National Call for Moral Revival, was formed in the last two years, with grass root groups forming in thirty states. They have a set of demands which include: Declaration of Moral Rights and Poor People’s Moral Agenda: Systemic Racism, with emphasis on voting rights; Poverty and Inequality; Ecological Devastation; War Economy, Militarism; and National Morality. It is a revival of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Poor Peoples Campaign that started just before his assassination. The information in the campaign is not for the faint of heart and calls for advocacy on behalf of the Poor People’s agenda and opportunities for acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. It is led by the Rev. William Barber of North Carolina and Liz Theoharis. The website offers a wealth of information. Some statistics include:

Since 2010, 23 states have passed racist voter suppression laws;
6.1 million people have been disenfranchised due to felony conviction, including 1 in 13 black adults;
In 2017, the 400 wealthiest Americans owned more wealth than the bottom 64% of the entire U.S. population, or 204 million people. Just three individuals possessed a combined wealth of $248.5 billion dollars, an equal amount of wealth as the bottom 50% of the country.

#BlackLivesMatter and the Poor People’s Campaign are just two of many social justice groups seeking to restore right relationships and confront the evils of institutionalized,

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5 In 2015, The Guardian newspaper reported 1,134 black youth killed by police in the U.S. 5 x’s higher than white youth of the same age. 1 in very 65 deaths of black youth is due to police. 1,010 by gunshot, 49 by taser, 41 death in custody, 33 struck by vehicle and I other. [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men)
state-sanctioned racism and white supremacy. It’s important that the worldview of Horace Bushnell found in chapter VIII of Christian Nurture not be the last word.

**Conclusion**

This research paper sought to bring to light the white supremacist worldview of Horace Bushnell for the REA Conference/2018, whose theme is Beyond White Normativity, Creating Brave Spaces. It does not lessen the contribution of Christian Nurture, and the importance of children and youth being important members of the church who should be included as fully as possible through intergenerational worship and learning. It is hard to look back historically at the institutionalized racism and white supremacy of Bushnell’s day and see it as very different from our own time in history that continues to have state-sanctioned, institutionalized racism, white supremacy, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other hate crimes against the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and other minorities. This author hopes new things were learned about Horace Bushnell, the hypocrisy of some Abolitionist who sought to abolish slavery while still being racist, and the need to fill the void of the null curriculum with readings, and activities brought to the attention of the reader. I hope many more ideas of books and authors to read, movies to see, songs to sing, miles to march, protests to attend, will be offered by readers, with a vision for a better future that is found in our present activities and the decisions we make each day. Just remember to breathe.
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Poor People’s Campaign: A Call for Moral Revival. [https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/](https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/).


