

American Education Mythologies

American Education Mythologies:

*A Remythification of the Public
Language of U.S. Schools*

By

Steve Daniel Przymus

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To the most vulnerable youth in U.S. schools, who often are the targets
of and most directly impacted by unquestioned American education
mythologies.

May this book provide new ways of talking, thinking, and acting that lead
to a new consciousness, nuevas oportunidades, y una vida mejor.

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Steve Daniel Przymus
Texas Christian University
November, 2023

INTRODUCTION

“And the men who hold high places
must be the ones who start
to mold a new reality
closer to the heart.”

—Rush: Lee et al. (1977)

There are very few things that people will claim to know about, more than education. Almost everyone in the United States experiences some form of schooling and thus forms opinions of what schools are, falls victim to folk theory about curriculum, and lives their lives by the myths about American education. Truth and reality have become debatable concepts in public language, shared across diverse social media platforms, signs in the linguistic landscape, in music lyrics, radio talk shows, television, streaming, and movie dialogue, and other pop-culture outlets. Myth plays an influential role in these debates.

Innumerable myths contribute to and make up the public language on education in the United States. In this small book, I focus on 10 of these (and mention a few more, embedded in certain chapters) that have proven to be persistent throughout the history of U.S. education and are influential today, found in ideologies, practice, and policy of U.S. schools. I have also chosen these myths because they fall at the intersection of my professional preparation and personal lived experiences as a human. I am a white, of European (Polish, German, Irish) decent, married, cisgender, heterosexual male, who is raising cisgender and non-binary children, am a product of a poor, working-class background, but am solidly middle class today. I am currently a “spiritual” individual who practices meditation, mindfulness, and tries to spread peace and kindness, but comes from a Methodist-Catholic-Christian upbringing, and I am educated to the point of having attained the highest degree possible in academics. I am a Spanish-English bilingual (with some working knowledge of Somali and Turkish) but have always enjoyed the benefits of being a first language (L1) English-speaker in the United States (and around the world, for that matter), who also originates from the part of the United States most often associated with standard English (the English of newscasters, spokespeople, and the “educated”), and I am socially identified as “able-bodied.” It is important

that I begin this book positioning myself with these identities because they solidly make me part of the modern-day bourgeoisie, the influential so-called middle class, in the social order that dominates and controls thought, action, ideologies, policies, practices, etc. in a capitalist society-the very group whose language I will problematize throughout this book and who produce the most American education mythologies.

It is said that when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. This book is a collection of diverse, school-based recipes for lemonade. You see, language can be and is indeed used every day for deficit-based, harmful, and racist agendas and it can be discouraging to witness the effect of this use. However, when language is used in this way, it does give direct insight to the diverse thought and ideologies of those pushing those agendas and this, in turn, gives those opposing those agendas the best hope for reorienting negative ideologies to positive ones. Language may on the surface appear to be a mechanism for communication, but really the first and foremost function of language is thought.

Another common phrase that comes to mind is “be careful for what you *wish* for.” When radical-conservative, white supremacist factions of the Republican party *wish* to demonize, criminalize, and abolish, for political gain, the teaching of critical race theory in schools, it is anti-productive to push back and claim that CRT is not actually taught in schools. Rather, it is more productive and powerful to listen to what these forces *wish* for, pay attention to the lazy and senseless language of the myth, accept the myth, give it power, and use that power against itself in the process of remythification or the mythifying of the original myth (that CRT is taught in schools). In turn, this produces a new myth (that indeed, race theory has always been taught in the 200-year history of schooling in the United States, but from a white-Christian-centered perspective and it just has not been critical or questioned until of late), redefining CRT as Comfortable Race Theory (CRT) or Caucasian Race Treatise (CRT). By creating a new myth, one that builds off of the original myth, the original myth remains and continues to give power to the new one, until the point when the creators of the original myth are forced to retract their original claims, because it now no longer works in their favor and they realize that they have become unwilling co-producers of the new, more positive myth (which is actual a return to the truth). You can’t have it both ways, or can you? Producers of deficit-based myths have had it both ways for a long time. The truth exists and it is distorted through folk theory to meet the needs of a certain population of people. It’s time for the truth to have it both ways.

Of course, this isn’t easy. “Effective reframing is the changing of millions of brains to be prepared to recognize a reality” (Lakoff, 2014, p.

33). Lakoff recognizes that people are incapable of seeing things in another way if they have not been prepared to even conceptualize another reality. How, then, might the work of that preparation begin? By presenting facts? What are facts? What is truth? Lakoff (2014) continues by stating that a mistake that many people make is “believing that, if only we could present the facts about a certain reality in some effective way, then people would ‘wake up’ to that reality, change their personal opinion, and start acting politically to change society” (p. 33). But people do not just wake up. According to Lakoff, new ways of thinking need to be “ingrained in us—developed over time and precisely enough to create an accurate frame for our understanding” (p. 33).

How this book works

In this book I ask, what if, instead of offering our facts, our truths to rebut already ingrained framing, we started with the well-ingrained, what we might consider the inaccurate frame, and use it as the base for a new understanding, a new framing, and a new myth? What makes myths so powerful is that they are experienced as nothing more than innocent speech. As is, they are “a system of communication, that is a message” (Barthes, 1972, p. 217). Examples of this unquestioned, taken-for-granted language about education include conspiracy theories about critical race theory (CRT) in schools, banned books, and justifying the continued use of Native American mascots, in majority non-Native schools. Because this book is an ideological critique and remythification of the *public* language on education, evidence for the critiqued myths come from social and public platforms. Throughout the book I reference blogs, online news articles, tweets from X (formally Twitter), public signs found in the linguistic landscape, building materials, murals in public spaces, Facebook and Instagram posts, emails, song lyrics, movie and tv show references, and other public, social, pop-culture sources. Because I am an academic and believe in science, I balance out the above non-academic sources with data from peer-reviewed, academic journals and books. I believe this mixture of data sources is a nice Texas Two-Step that sets up what the public language is, regarding American education, what research says, and how we can use both to mold a new reality; one that is closer to the truth and closer to the heart. This is a daunting, but worthwhile task, and just like with myth, history has given us the language for starting this work.

Roland Barthes (1972) claimed that attempts to push back against myths with truth and data only strengthens the myth and the only way to vanquish a myth is to mythify it. This book continues the work of Barthes

(1972) and situates it within current U.S. school-based mythologies, or American education mythologies (see Chapter 1 for the myth of the adjective American). This book is needed for unearthing what mythologies are in public and social language and for providing a semiological approach to vanquishing these mythologies. In Chapter 1, I begin with a lesson on how mythologies work and an overview of the first order semiological chain (the most literal understanding), the second chain (the original myth), and a new third semiological chain, whereas the first and second still exist, but the last, most recent ideological association of material form and mental concept/thought becomes the new myth. Each chapter provides examples of this process by taking up different American education mythologies, offering “an ideological critique of the language of so-called mass culture,” a subsequent “semiological dismantling of that language” (Barthes, 1972, p. ix), and a remythification of each mythology. Using the above example of CRT, Figure I.1 shows each level of semiological chains and meaning. This manner of visually presenting myth is taken directly from how Barthes (1972, p. 224) metaphorically represented the spatialization of the semiotic pattern of different levels of language. Barthes states that

It can be seen that in myth there are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the language object, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which I shall call the metalanguage, because it is a second language, in which one speaks about the first.

Every chapter and for every myth, I present a figure that contains these two semiological systems (language + myth) and another figure that adds a third semiological system or staggered chain of signifier, signified, and sign, that builds off of both the first and second order of representation in order to create a new myth, a new language (see Figure I.1). Barthes (1972) suggests this kind of practice but does not go as far as to visually present it. Thus, what I put forward in this book is what I would imagine Roland Barthes and I would agree on, if I could go back in time some 40 years and have coffee with him.

Figure I.1
The remythification of “Woke” ideology and Critical Race Theory in schools

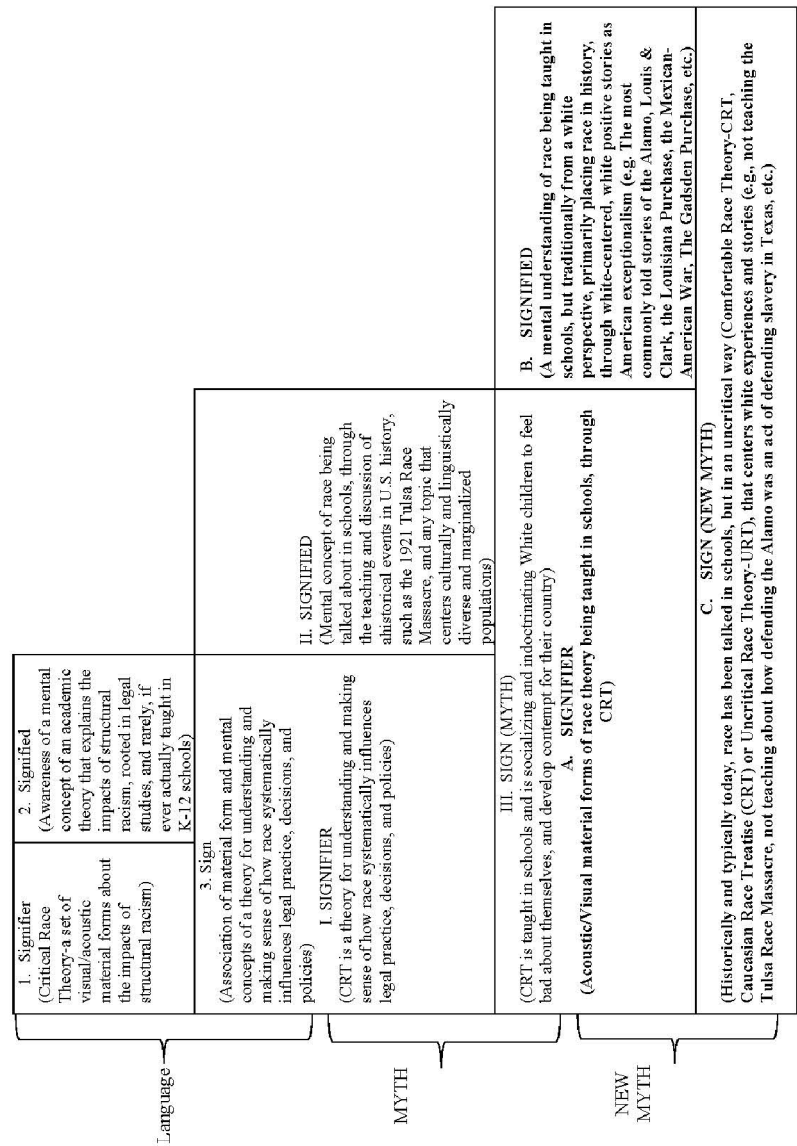


Figure I.1 starts with the first relationship of an idea, in form. The signifier, “Critical Race Theory,” is just that, a material object that is yet to be noticed and signified, thus is empty. Once someone (or thing) becomes aware of its existence, it becomes signified and is given meaning as a sign. I would argue that even though this first semiological chain is the most basic, innocent, relationship of idea-in-form, it has already taken on an ideology, when made into a sign. The second semiological chain begins with this first sign “CRT is a theory for understanding and making sense of how race systematically influences legal practice, decisions, and policies,” and due to a certain life-framing, socialization, and ideology, this sign becomes an alluring opportunity for being signified in a way that serves this ideology, “Race is talked about in schools, through the teaching and discussion of undertaught events in U.S. history” (and to some ideologies, this is a very bad thing). Finally, due to this new signification, a new sign (or myth) is created “CRT is taught in schools and is socializing and indoctrinating white children to feel bad about themselves,” which becomes the mythology of the damning nature of Critical Race Theory in American schools.

A major thesis of this book is that most people who disagree with this myth will unsuccessfully spend their days trying to convince others that this simply is just not the case—that CRT is a specific academic theory that began in the legal field (Bell, 1995), and that in no way is it being taught in schools, let alone to young children in elementary schools. I posit that the only way to make this point, in a meaningful way, is to agree with those who think that CRT is present in schools. This is the third semiological chain, the new myth, that starts with the original myth, “Race theory is taught in schools,” as the signifier of the 3rd chain. A new myth, however, will require a new signified, a mental conceptual relationship to the signifier, that historically race has indeed been taught in schools, but mostly from a white-Christian-centered perspective, that erases critical themes of colonialism, racism, discrimination, etc., goes unnoticed, is innocent speech or set of facts, and has become naturalized and unquestioned. This new mental awareness, however, allows for questions, such as “In what ways is race talked about in schools? (The most commonly told stories of white, American exceptionalism and strength, such as the Alamo, Louis and Clark, the Louisiana Purchase, the Mexican-American War, The Gadsden Purchase, etc.). This new signified starts from the original myth that race is indeed taught in schools but uncovers how it has historically been made up of white-centered stories and thus CRT would better be defined as Caucasian Race Treatise or Comfortable Race Theory. This signified both agrees with the original myth, by showing how race has traditionally/historically been

taught in schools, and also gives evidence to how this has been uncritical and skewed toward the white experience. This creates a new sign, “Historically and typically today, race it is talked about in an uncritical way (URT) in schools (not teaching the Tulsa Race Massacre, not talking about how defending the Alamo was an act of defending slavery in Texas, etc.), and thus what really is happening in schools is Caucasian Race Treatise (CRT) or Comfortable Race Theory (CRT). This new sign/myth uses the original myth to expose its hypocrisy.

Another example of turning lemons into educational lemonade, is the persistent and often unproductive effort to rename the mascots of non-Native schools that embrace a Native American identity. Insert many examples here (professional sports teams come to mind), but within, I lead the reader through the exercise of stopping to push against these schools and their supporters with logical, research-based, and impassionate arguments, and rather accepting and giving power to the myth to mythify it with a new, more positive myth, that I’m sure in time will drive supporters of the original myth absolutely crazy and in dire need to change the mascots of their beloved schools. To describe the three semiological chains in a different way, one might think of them as

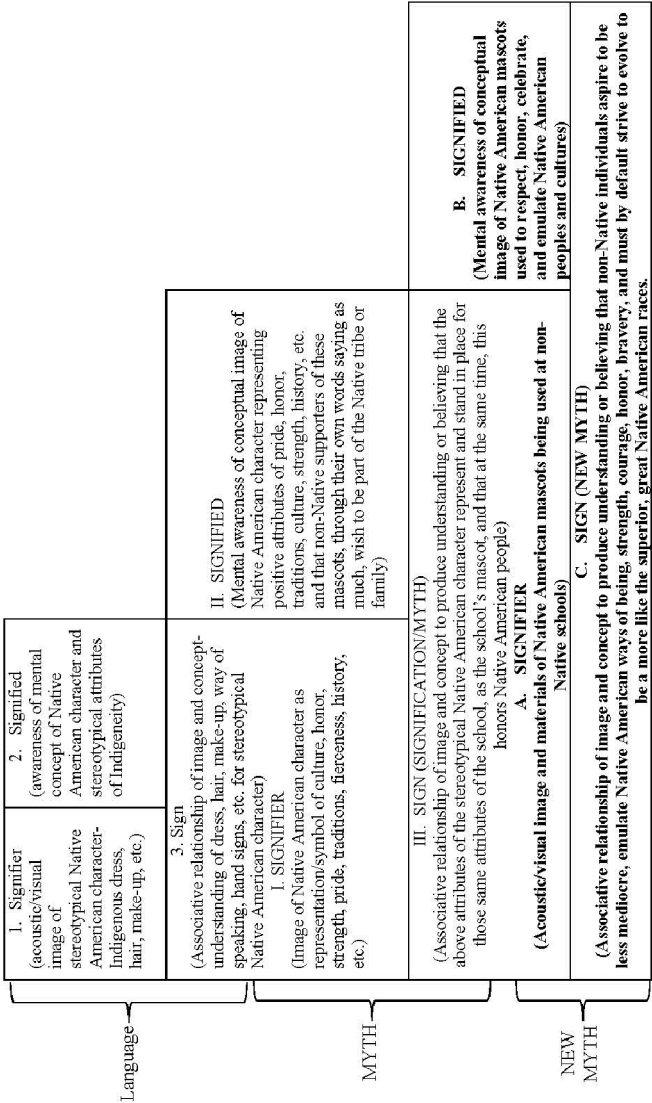
1st Chain: **Fact**-Many schools with Native American mascot names, are attended by mostly non-native students.

2nd Chain: **Myth**-These schools have had these mascot names for many years and it is a matter of tradition and not one of disrespect to keep the mascot name.

3rd Chain: **New myth**-The majority non-Native families and students that attend these schools reap the benefit of being associated with, celebrating, and by emulating the superior characteristics of Native people, and therefore, must by default wish to be more like Native people, as an evolutionary process of becoming a more superior and heightened people.

Figure I.2 provides another example of the staggered levels of representation or three semiological chains, that are built upon each other and reify each other, all the while adding new meaning (signification) with each added system. I again refer to the first system as “Language” or “fact,” the second system as “Myth,” and the third system as “New Myth.” The example below, which is fully taken-up in Chapter 2, remythifies the myth that the continued use of stereotypical Native American mascots (e.g., Indians, Chiefs, Warriors, Comanches, etc.) is indeed done out of tradition

Figure I.2
The remythification of Native American mascots honor, respect, and celebrate Native American cultures to non-Native people aspire to be more Native-like



and respect (as the purveyors of this myth will say) and that ultimately it is done because the majority non-Native (mostly white) families that attend these schools aspire to be more genetically and evolutionarily superior, like the Native peoples that they emulate.

The above two examples are tutorials, of sorts, for the recipes that await in the rest of this book. Beyond taking up the myth of woke ideology and critical race theory in schools (Chapter 8) and Native American mascots at primarily non-Native schools (Chapter 2), there are recipes for remythifying the myth of banned books (Chapter 5), the myth associated with the intersection of disability and bilingualism in schools (Chapter 4), the myth around how immigrant students are talked about and conflated with dangerous water (Chapter 3), the myth of educational freedom and the rise of vouchers and educational savings accounts for private schools (Chapter 6), the myths about guns in schools and arming teachers for school safety (Chapter 9), the myth of LGBTQIA students' chosen names and preferred pronouns (Chapter 7), the myth of standard English and standard linguistic behavior at school (Chapter 10) and the myth of teachers as those "who can't" (Chapter 11). Before getting into these 10 American education myths, however, in Chapter One I critique two additional myths in order to provide concrete examples of how myths are social, public language. First, and quite locally to my own context, I expose the brick used on my university's buildings for the myth of oneness, belonging, and acceptance for some students, but not for all. Then for an entirely broader context, I critique and remythify the myth of "American" used metonymically for just the United States, setting up the rest of the book's discussion on "American" education mythologies.

It's likely that by now, you have come to the conclusion that I believe there is a truth, and that it reflects my own way of thinking about American education policies and ideologies. You would be right. You would also be right to conclude that people who wanted to remythify my new, remythified myths, could do so to change or return the framing to something more analogous to their own, original myths. This is theoretically possible of course, but unlikely. First, I believe that white, English, heteronormative, Christian-conservative, nationalist, supremacist myths have existed this long, with this much power, because people are inherently lazy and it takes both work to remythify myths, and also, as Lakoff (2014) accurately points out, one needs to know how to do it. And finally, if your retort is that they only need to read this book to learn how to do it, I've already succeeded in my efforts. However, it's also unlikely that anyone adhering to those discriminatory and racist beliefs and myths will pick up this book, let alone

read it, as it will probably be banned in places where people do not want their ideas to be challenged and their myths to be exposed.

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CHAPTER ONE

HOW MYTHOLOGIES WORK: “GOD BLESS AMERICA”

I saw the sign
and it opened up my eyes, I saw the sign.
Life is demanding without understanding.
I saw the sign
and it opened up my eyes, I saw the sign.
No one's gonna drag you up to get into the light where you belong.
But where do you belong?
—“The Sign”
(Berggren & Ekberg, Acc of Base, 1993)

How do mythologies work? Myth is a language. Mythologies convey and ultimately construct new, desired (and often unquestioned) realities. One example of how mythologies work, comes from my immediate surroundings, as we are always saturated by myths and only need to be awoken to their meaning imposed upon us. As I write this chapter and look out my office window or take a break to walk across the Texas Christian University (TCU) campus, I cannot help but be impressed by and impressed upon by the beauty of the systematicity of purposeful architecture. When a 1910 fire caused the TCU campus to move from Waco, Texas to Fort Worth, Texas, a less flammable concrete and “buff” brick was selected for campus building construction. It is theorized that these materials were readily found in the North Texas region and were likely affordable. All but few buildings on the TCU campus today have the same combination/pattern of creams, tans, and beiges as the result of a purposeful adjustment during the kiln process to match the original design. This has created a stunning effect of symmetry that no doubt is influential in consistently landing the TCU campus on top 15 lists of most beautiful U.S. college campuses.

I take the time to tell this story because I believe it provides a good, concrete (and brick) example of how mythologies work. Myth is a language, a type of speech, and therefore can be arbitrary. Anything can be a myth (even a brick), as long as it has meaning and “is conveyed by a discourse”

(Barthes, 1972, p. 217). But where does this meaning come from? Essentially myth attaches itself to a sign. As I describe in the introduction chapter of this book, a sign is the association of a visual or acoustic material/form (signifier) and a mental concept (signified) of that acoustic/visual material. Signs, from written text, spoken or signed words, art, clothing, wine, professional wrestling, architecture, space, etc. have been studied by many people, since Saussure postulated the science of *semiology* (the study of signs, the science of forms) over a century ago. A basic treatment of semiology would include the equivalent relationship and the correlation which unites three terms: the signifier, the signified, and finally, the sign, “which is the associative total of the first two terms” (Barthes, 1972, p. 221). I quote Roland Barthes here and will throughout this book, because Barthes understood the mythologies in social language, the represented and created realities of the bourgeois (the social middle class), and the influence their material, capitalistic interests had on social ideologies, thought, and practice (action). Barthes semiologically uncovered the mythologies of such things like music halls, plastic, Martians, wine, professional wrestling, and toys (to name a few), just as I take up bricks and murals in this chapter, as an example of how mythologies work, and the mythologies found in the social language of education in U.S. schools, throughout the rest of this book. In *Mythologies*, first published in 1957 and translated into English in 1972, Barthes writes that

The development of publicity, of a national press, of radio, of illustrated news, not to speak of the survival of a myriad rites of communication which rule social appearances, makes the development of a semiological science more urgent than ever. In a single day, how many really nonsignifying fields do we cross? Very few, sometimes none.

Just as it is true that I cannot escape the influence of the TCU brick, all around me presently, neither can I escape the signifying fields that make up the world that surrounds me, in all other contexts. Barthes mentions the development of media, but the linguistic landscape, alone, not to mention space, clothing, classroom organization, smells, weather, light, darkness, etc. are all meaning-making signs. However, what I describe as signs, here, are meaningful, but are not yet recognized myths. Let me explain. Let’s talk bricks. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the first-order semiological system for bricks would start with the acoustic/visual image (which is material) of a brick. This is called the *signifier* and as is, is empty of meaning. A mental concept or *signified* is produced when one becomes aware of the *signifier* and the relationship formed between the image (*signifier*) and concept (*signified*) is the *sign*, which is full in meaning. One could say, although it

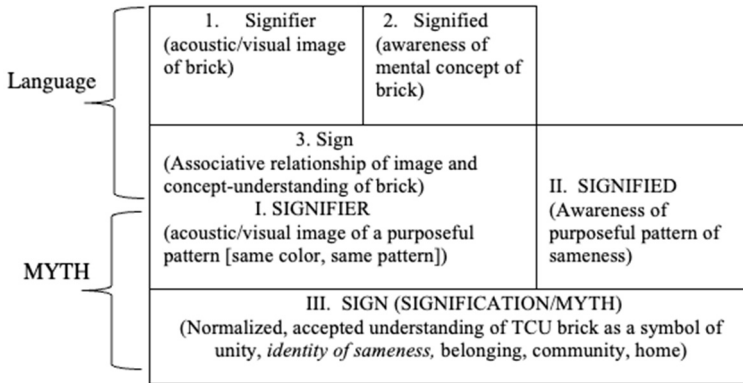
would be hard to prove this completely, that this first tridimensional pattern of signifier, signified, and sign (association of form + concept = sign) is the most literal, pure meaning. Simply put, I become aware of the image of patterned bricks all over in my surroundings, I relate this image to my already formed concept of bricks, and I give it the meaning (*sign*) of pragmatic, perhaps inflammable building materials, and perhaps I also notice or categorize these bricks as somehow pretty, forming distinguishing patterns on the TCU campus buildings.

Enter myth. As seen in Figure 1.1, myth never exists on its own, rather it attaches itself to an already existing, already established semiological chain (signifier + signified = sign), that already contains meaning, history, and is ripe with motivation that can nourish and sustain the myth. Myth becomes a second-order semiological system. What is the sign (associative total of concept and image) from the first chain (bricks-a practical building material), becomes a new signifier in the second, starting a new (2nd) tridimensional, semiological chain. Here, Barthes (1972) asks us to remember that all that will be part of the mythical speech (bricks, colors, patterns, buildings, architecture, etc.), however unique and different they may individually be,

are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Myth sees in them only the same raw material; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language...myth wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain.

Now myth has something concrete, upon which to attach and build. Adding a new signifier to this existing structure is meaningful in that the original, perhaps most literal understanding of the bricks, remains, but now a new sign can be created; a sign of double complexity, which is a myth. It is evident that the intentional pattern of bricks, effort in the kiln process to match the original design, and expected consistency across all buildings are here in order to signify something else to me. All of this imposes on me that this campus has a warm, residential feel, is an inviting environment, and in the words of Todd Waldvogel, TCU Associate Vice Chancellor for facilities and campus planning, “The brick and color express a ‘sense of place’ at TCU” (Martino, “The Story Behind an Iconic Brick Color,” TCU Magazine, 2020). For universities, like TCU, this creates a brand. Since 2013, the colors included in the TCU brick have become the “executive” and “natural” secondary color palettes, allowing them to be embedded in TCU publications, promotional materials, and any other official products with the university’s name (Martino, 2020). It is all about identity.

Figure 1.1
The myth of TCU brick



This coexistence of semiological systems produces an innocent speech, transforming history into nature; an unquestioned reality-TCU is a welcoming place, of oneness, of acceptance, because we are all the same, part of the TCU family.

Even that history is doubly or multiply complex, however. We can tell the story of the fire, the move to a new campus location, the available materials, and understand the first order meaning of the brick, but whether naively or not, I am aware of what the brick signifies to me. It signifies a history of sameness. A history of belonging for some and an unacceptance for others. TCU, a predominantly white institution (PWI), has just recently begun to face its racist and discriminatory history. Race and Reconciliation efforts are in full force these days, but there exists a palpable tension between these efforts and the beautiful, purposeful aesthetics that reminds us of an unaccepting, uninviting history. Even the bricks, themselves, tell this story. When the rose-colored bricked Robert Carr Chapel was built in 1953, “There were actually protests because it was the wrong color brick” (Martino, 2020). In a real way, the TCU brick is a daily reminder for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) students, as a metonym semiotically standing in place for what color is accepted, invited, and welcomed on campus. A myth or innocent speech of “we are all the same,” may seem inclusive, but can act to erase our differences, dismiss what makes each student unique, and minimize identity markers linked to power and efforts to be seen.

Surely people will exclaim, but aren’t they just bricks? And behind this shroud of truth, the myth is protected, remains, and gains power. This is not

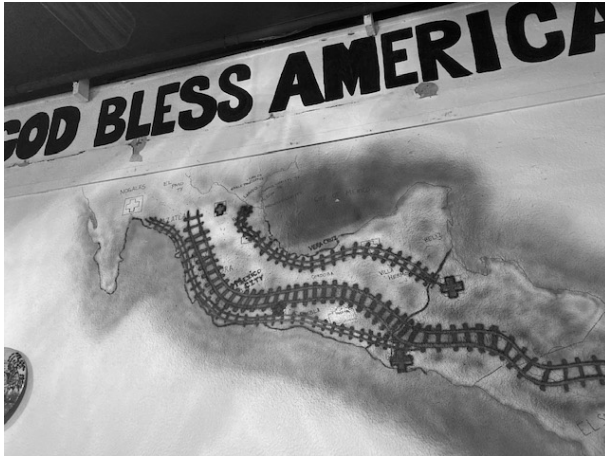
a new myth. It is the “melting pot” myth of the United States. It is a myth that acts to feed the status quo and keep white power structures intact. It is the myth of being American, a myth that I take up below, as a second exemplar of how mythologies work. As long as we have a daily reminder in our surroundings that we are all one, then aren’t we? This is the power of mythologies.

Just as the repeated narrative of sameness, oneness, unity, and belonging imposed upon us by the brick, mythologies are a set of socially constructed *facts*, that through time and socialization are taken as given, unquestioned, normalized knowledge. History gives us all the fodder needed for myth production. Take for example the first word in the title of this book – American. Although many readers will know that American is an adjective that should be used for people, places, and things all across North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean, many more will not even question why I purposefully selected this modifier for a book about educational mythologies, only in the United States of America. As a metonym for the 50 states of the United States of America, American has become a myth: an unquestioned set of facts, a speech, and a way of thinking. In fact, to avoid falling into this trope of conceptual language (and thus thinking), the proposal for this book was titled “U.S. School-Based Mythologies.” Then it dawned on me that there would be no better way to begin a book about mythologies, then to name it with a ubiquitous myth and begin the process of semiologically naming/describing myths and remythifying them.

On a recent visit to San Antonio, Texas, I stopped by a coffee house (Chicos Coffee Shack) to grab an *americano* on my way to the local university for a conference talk. I took a photo (Image 1.1, below) of a wall that had the words “God Bless America” above a mural of parts of Central America (starting with the tip of Nicaragua and up to the Southern parts of North America, ending with the region of the U.S. that used to belong to Mexico (Southern California, Southern Arizona, Southern New Mexico, and much of Texas).

Image 1.1

Mural on coffee house wall in San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A.



Whether noticed or not by the coffee house owners and left intentionally or unintentionally, while studying the mural, I became aware of the signifier of a piece of plaster missing, between the words God Bless America (under the 'l' in Bless) and the mural. Without the hue of missing paint, the exposed plaster revealed a brown color in the shape of a fist. Quickly the signifier (visual of missing plaster), signified (mental concept of this form, as conditions I've seen before in buildings of this age), and sign (associative relationship of concept and form) of understanding and giving meaning as an aging wall in need of repair, turned into a myth. Myths latch on to existing signs, on to existing accepted history and knowledge, and on to existing innocent speech, becoming part of that innocent speech. In the case of the aging wall, my mind used the original sign as a new signifier to start a new semiological chain (as seen below in Figure 1.2). This signifier (acoustic/visual image of missing plaster as appearing to be a Brown fist), was signified with my awareness of this visual relationship, connecting to my mental concept of Brown fists of resistance and revolution, producing a new sign and a myth: This mural is an image of Brown American Pride, strength, resistance, and the reappropriation of all that comes with the adjective American.

Figure 1.2, differs from 1.1 in that it has a third semiological chain, a second myth, of which I will discuss below and will become the major thesis of this book. Figure 1.2 adopts a three-fold, triadic structure, first proposed by Barthes (1972), and demonstrates three semiological systems or chains of meaning. Barthes proposed that the first semiological chain represents the purest meaning, mostly void of historical ideologies, and acts to present what I will call the “facts” about the diverse American education topics that I take up in each chapter of this book. The first semiological chain (complete relationship of acoustic/visual image [signifier], mental awareness of acoustic/visual image [signified], and form or associative relationship of image and mental concept [sign]) presents just that, the fact that a set of symbols, when presented together are recognized as words and given socially constructed meaning, are understood as an adjective “American” for a certain geographical location in the world. Enter hegemony and historically produced, normalized meaning for the second semiological system and the chain that produces the first, and ubiquitously used myth that “American” is a metonym for just the 50 United States of America (U.S.A.). Myth does not and cannot exist in isolation, but rather latches on to an already established and understood sign. In this case, the myth of American being the descriptor for the U.S.A., uses the Sign of American as an adjective for much of the Western hemisphere. In doing so it can start a new (2nd) semiological chain with a new Signifier. All this Signifier needs is repetitive and historical acoustic and written use of American to represent the U.S.A. Once established, this Signifier becomes Signified as a mental concept of American as an adjective for the 50 U.S. states and becomes established into existence as a new Sign (myth). Few will have need or even motivation to call this myth out for what it is, as it always will have the protection of being part of the first (most pure representation or facts) semiological system. It cannot be denied that the U.S. is part of the geographical location of America...it also cannot be denied that it is not the only country in the American region. As long as the U.S. continues to use American as its most prominent self-descriptor, the myth will remain.

Figure 1.2
The remythification of American

Language	1. Signifier (Acoustic/visual image of the word American)	2. Signified (Awareness of mental concept of American)	
	3. Sign (Associative relationship of image and concept- understanding of American as an adjective for nouns associated with much of the Western hemisphere) I. SIGNIFIER (Existence or mere ability to exist as acoustic/visual form of American used to only describe nouns associated with the 50 United States of North America)	II. SIGNIFIED (Awareness of existence and mental concept of American as an adjective for the 50 U.S. states of North America)	
MYTH	III. SIGN (SIGNIFICATION/MYTH) (Associative relationship of form/image and mental meaningful understanding (sign) and normalized myth of American as only a U.S. adjective; and as such, a source of U.S. pride) A. SIGNIFIER (Acoustic/visual image of attaching American and American pride to Mexico and Central American geography (and South America, although not seen in the image, is metonymically assumed), coupled with acoustic/visual image of Brown fist.		
NEW MYTH	C. SIGN (NEW MYTH) (Associative relationship of form/image and mental conceptual awareness, producing meaningful understanding (sign) and new normalized myth of "American as a source of Brown pride for Mexico and Central America") ¹		
	B. SIGNIFIED (Mental concept of becoming aware of this new acoustic/visual form, attaching it to already existing mental concepts of American pride and Brown resistance movements)		

It may seem rather futile to attempt to meaningfully address and make any kind of change to the myth that American is a sole denomination for the 50 United States of America and indeed attempts to dismiss this by presenting facts of other countries that should also be considered American, will likely result in Americans exerting American bravado and only becoming stauncher in their beliefs. As I mention in the introduction, the only way to vanquish a myth is to mythify it. This process of mythifying a myth or “remythification,” must utilize the language of the existing myth. Just as the first myth latches on to the sign of the first semiological chain and hides behind it, the new myth must do the same with the original myth. Keep your friends close but keep myths you want to remythify closer. In the third semiological chain of Figure 1.2, we see a new, bolded **SIGNIFIER**, that just as in the 2nd semiological chain, uses the preceding SIGN to create a new system or chain of meaning. Murals, such as the one in Image 1.1, introduce new acoustic/visual images into the world that seem familiar, because they are. This mural of Central America is entitled “God Bless America,” the essential language that the first myth is built on. This time, however, this language, so desperately needed for the first myth is associated or **SIGNIFIED** with an image that includes countries, outside of the 50 U.S. states and an unintentional, but meaningful all the same, Brown fist of resistance. This allows for the strength of the original myth to be appropriated and associated into a new **SIGN** (and a new myth) that the words America and American are signs and sources of pride for México, Central America, and metonymically for all countries not seen, but conceptually understood to be part of this mural.

The exercise and discipline of remythifying the myths of public language of education; practicing, perfecting, at times failing, but continuing the work, is the practice of this book. In every myth, lies the opportunity to build on that myth, to remythify it, and produce a different ideology. I began this chapter on how mythologies work by talking about bricks, an essential material in forming, shaping, constructing, and building structures. To conclude this chapter, I circle back to the concept of building and make a connection to education, the focus of this book. The German word *bildung* means “education” and “forming” of individuals. In literary criticism, *bildungsroman* is a genre of writing that emphasizes character change, throughout life, placing focus on psychological and moral growth. This book is about change, about ideological growth, both psychological and moral, through building/forming new educational mythologies. It is about making myth explicit and using it to build new myths, in hopes to construct new educational thinking, new educational understandings, leading to new educational opportunities and futures. Gloria Anzaldúa, a

great American philosopher and poet, who wrote about the borderlands of the United States and México, gave us imagery of this new space. "And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture" (Anzaldúa, 1999, 44). The chapters that follow are American Education stories and tell about unquestioned myths, starting with the public language (the mythologies of the bourgeois) on education and each ending with how they might be remythified, with a different voice and narrative. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa's seminal work, she describes how the act of writing stories has energy and power. "I write the myths in me," she says, and "the myths I want to become." (1999, p. 93). Ultimately, this change in mythologies, rhetoric, change in thoughts, and in action, begins with changing our own way of talking/thinking. As Anzaludúa (1999) writes, "I change myself, I change the world" (p. 92). This small book takes on this massive goal of changing the world of American Education and public language around schooling in the United States.

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