

## **“Unspeakable things unspoken”: Researching race and state-sanctioned education inequity**

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This paper takes its title from both a title of a Toni Morrison lecture (1988) and an idea that she develops in her book, *Playing in the dark: Whiteness in the literary imagination* (1993). In both her lecture and her book, Morrison examines the making of Whiteness through the “absent presence” of Blackness in the literary imagination. This “absent presence” has consequences for not only the construction of Whiteness, but also how this construction of Whiteness relies on a construction of invisible, yet visible Blackness that renders Black bodies as useful and disposable commodities. Her arguments have relevance for this particular socio-political moment where despite the mantra of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, we see increasing retrenchment by the State that has essentially rendered Black lives irrelevant. In the field of education, this notion of the irrelevancy of Black lives is most visible in education reform. Using post-Katrina New Orleans as an example, in this paper I will ponder the role of research in illuminating and redressing racialized and gender inequity in education in a context where “speaking the unspeakable” is contentious and wrought with a number of challenges for researchers.