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<http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci7110219>

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<b>Authors</b>	Joseph-Salisbury, R and Connelly, LJ
<b>Type</b>	Article
<b>URL</b>	This version is available at: <a href="http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/48870/">http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/48870/</a>
<b>Published Date</b>	2018

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Article

# 'If Your Hair Is Relaxed, White People Are Relaxed. If Your Hair Is Nappy, They're Not Happy': Black Hair as a Site of 'Post-Racial' Social Control in English Schools

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Received: 4 September 2018; Accepted: 28 October 2018; Published: 1 November 2018

**Abstract:** A growing body of literature examines how social control is embedded within, and enacted through, key social institutions generally, and how it impacts disproportionately upon racially minoritised people specifically. Despite this, little attention has been given to the minutiae of these forms of social control. Centring Black hair as a site of social control, and using a contemporary case study to illustrate, this article argues that it is through such forms of routine discipline that conditions of white supremacy are maintained and perpetuated. Whilst our entry into a 'post-racial' epoch means school policies are generally thought of as race-neutral or 'colorblind', we draw attention to how they (re)produce and normalise surface-level manifestations of anti-Blackness. Situating Black hair as a form of 'racial symbolism' and showing Black hairstyles to be significant to Black youth, we show that the governance of hair is not neutral but instead, acts as a form of social control that valorises whiteness and pathologises Blackness.

**Keywords:** black hair; colour-blind racism; education; 'post-racial'; racial symbolism; social control; white supremacy

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## 1. Introduction

In September 2017, 12-year-old Chikayzea Flanders arrived for his first day at Fulham Boys School in London, England. With the school deeming his dreadlocked hair to be in breach of its uniform policy, he was placed in 'isolation'—a disciplinary measure typically used to place 'disruptive' students in an area away from other students for a limited period of time (Department for Education 2014). Additionally, he was threatened with suspension from the school, unless he cut his dreadlocked hair. The approach adopted by the school was considered by Chikayzea's family and protesting members of the public to be an example of racist school policy: the targeting of racially minoritised students because their physical appearance does not conform to (white) norms and expectations around self-presentation. More than 5000 people signed an online petition in support of Chikayzea and calling for an end to racially, culturally and religiously discriminative school policies. His story also attracted considerable national media coverage. Dissatisfied with the school's handling of her complaint, particularly its failure to understand the religious meanings ascribed to dreadlocked hair by Rastafarians, Chikayzea's mother commenced legal action. Flanders' lawyers, funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, secured a settlement from the school in County Court in September 2018. Chikayzea is not the first Black student to be subjected to school uniform policy that operates to limit the expression of Blackness (Graham 2016; Joseph-Salisbury 2018a), and it seems almost inconceivable that he will be the last. In fact, even as we were preparing

this article, a video circulated on social media ‘of a 6-year-old being turned away’ from a school because of his dreadlocked hair (Selk 2018). From school teachers cutting their students’ hair (Shropshire 2017) to unjust disciplinary procedures, popular discourse is replete with examples of school-level tensions over the hair of Black students (Jackson 2005; Lazar 2018; Pells 2016; Taylor 2011). This is not confined or particular to England, but rather, an iteration of white supremacy that has global manifestations, from the United States (Joseph-Salisbury 2018a; Latimore 2017) to South Africa (France-Pressé 2016), Kenya (Gatwiri 2018), Australia (Testa 2017; Wahlquist 2017), Ghana (Joseph-Salisbury, forthcoming), and no doubt a plethora of other countries across the globe.

Although the cases of Chikayzea Flanders and others reflect deeply-entrenched anxieties about and a need to control Blackness, research on racism in schools suggests that such cases represent only the tip of the iceberg (Alexander et al. 2015). Most examples of racially-discriminative school uniform policies do not generate the level of attention that Chikayzea’s case commanded and instead, the repression of Black hair is normalised within a ‘post-racial’ society that constructs school policy as racially-neutral and/or ‘colour-blind’ (Gillborn 2008; Joseph-Salisbury 2018a). Indeed, notwithstanding the pathological ways in which Rastafari is popularly constructed (King 2002), it is perhaps in no small part the discourse of religious discrimination, along with his mother’s willingness to take on the school, that make Chikayzea’s case such a prominent one.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, we use his case to cast light on how schools in England police Black hair. This, we argue, is part of a broader racist system that places Black bodies under forms of social control in order to maintain white supremacy.

We write this article in a Critical Race Theory (CRT) tradition that strives to reveal how racism operates in both seen and unseen ways (Dixson and Rousseau 2005). CRT emphasises the importance and legitimacy of the experiences of people of colour (Hylton 2012). With this in mind, we hone in on the specific example of a young Black boy, Chikayzea Flanders, in order to recognise the legitimacy of his experience. As we do so, we offer a counter-narrative that we hope is not only instructive in this particular case but also, points towards the ways in which ‘post-racial’ theory can aid understandings of the contemporary social control of racially minoritised people. In this sense, we use Chikayzea’s case as a site upon which to bring into conversation established bodies of literature on social control, Black hair, and ‘post-racial’ theory; literatures that have until now been theorised somewhat independently of one another.

We begin by offering some context about the ways in which Black (student) bodies are policed, before considering the racial symbolism of Black hair, and the way it has operated historically and contemporarily as a site of both Black anti-racist resistance and (racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and aesthetic) self-expression. We then move on to examine the ‘post-racial’ turn, before turning once again to the case of Chikayzea, in order to analyse the ways in which social control is enacted upon Black hair in a ‘post-racial’, ‘colour-blind’ and seemingly race-neutral context.

## 2. Policing Black (Student) Bodies

The tensions we see surrounding the attempts by schools to police the hair of Black students should not be understood in isolation or abstraction, but rather, as an extension of the socio-racial conditions that function to systematically subjugate Black people. In this sense, schooling is but one site of many within a broader apparatus of social control that has historical antecedents in the trans-Atlantic trafficking, enslavement and colonisation of African peoples. In our contemporary epoch, a burgeoning body of literature recognises how the police, as the primary (formal) agent of social control, engage in the disproportionate controlling of Black bodies. Scholars have drawn attention to the enactment of institutional racism through Stop and Search laws (Long and Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Long 2018), through electronic tagging (Cassidy et al. 2005), and through the disproportionately high incarceration rates of Black people (Davis 2013). Attention has also been given to the over-policing of

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<sup>1</sup> In relation to employment discrimination, Anna Birtwistle, a partner in a specialist employment and partnership law firm, suggests that cases are more often brought on the grounds of religion and gender than on the grounds of race (Sini 2016).

predominantly Black areas, the ubiquitous threat of police brutality, and the disproportionate rates of Black deaths in custody (Bowling et al. 2003). It is clear that in their daily practices, British police, like border agencies and other social institutions, re-enact 'relations of white dominance and non-white subordination' (Ansley 1989, p. 1024).

Underpinned by an enduring colonial desire to control 'unruly' Black bodies (Yancy 2017), anti-Black forms of social control transcend formal policing and proliferate across society, particularly in key social institutions like the schooling system. Given that both policing (Long 2016, 2018; Vitale 2017) and schooling (Gillborn 2005) function to perpetuate and maintain white supremacy, it is no surprise that Paul Warmington (Warmington 2014) highlights the two institutions as the key sites of tension for Black communities in Britain. The connections between both institutions are increasingly being documented too. Amongst other examples, this is evident in shifts that have seen the police increasingly take up positions within schools (Lamont et al. 2011) and, whilst the majority of the work on the school-to-prison pipeline has been conducted in the United States, Karen Graham's (Graham 2014, 2015, 2016) work in the UK context has drawn attention to the myriad links between schooling and criminalisation. In particular, school exclusions have been noted to significantly increase the likelihood of a person's involvement in criminal activity, both as a perpetrator and as a victim (Briggs 2010; Graham 2014, 2015, 2016). In essence, what we quickly see is the primary responsibility for formal social control shifting from one institution to another: Black bodies come to be enmeshed in a *web of whiteness*. Given that Black students are far more likely to be excluded from school than their peers, it is no surprise that the school-to-prison pipeline is a threat felt most forcefully by Black students (Graham 2016). That Black students are more likely to be excluded from school should not be necessarily understood a sign of a greater propensity for transgression of school rules. As Graham (2016, p. 133) argues, 'historically and persistently, Black pupils' behaviour in classrooms is more likely to be heavily scrutinised and incur a reprimand compared with the same behaviour by their White peers'. As such, Black exclusion rates are indicative of pervasive ideologies that impose stereotypes of deviance upon Black bodies (Joseph-Salisbury 2016).

Yet the social control of Black students not only manifests in high rates of exclusion, but also through the curriculum, pedagogy, and other school policies which are designed in seemingly neutral ways but underpinned by white supremacy (Gillborn 2006). Indeed, the ethnocentric nature of the curriculum erases and revises the historical and contemporary contributions of Black people, and sanitises and romanticises the histories of Britain generally and white Britons particularly (Alexander and Weekes-Bernard 2017; Tomlinson 1989). In so doing, it functions as a tacit source of control over knowledge that threatens the education and wellbeing of Black students (Doharty 2018), and shapes and reinforces the hegemony of whiteness. Simultaneously, the low expectations of teachers mean that Black students are subject to a range of racialised challenges (Joseph-Salisbury 2016). From educational streaming that places Black students into lower groupings (Coard 1971; Gillborn and Gipps 1996), to disproportionate disciplinary treatment and the burden of self-fulfilling prophecies, the impact is potentially profound.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, David Gillborn's (Gillborn 2006, p. 89) work has shown how education policy has 'failed to address race inequality' and instead, has actually operated to perpetuate it. Remarking upon how changes in assessment coincided with a radical decrease in the attainment of Black students at the beginning of school, he argues that

the changes that have happened are clearly racist in their outcome insofar as black students have been markedly disadvantaged... these changes appear to have resulted from the normal workings of the education system—a system that places race equality at the very margins of debate and takes no action when black students are judged to be failing (Gillborn 2006, p. 334)

Bringing the analytical weight of CRT to bear on the British educational context, Gillborn (2006) shows the normalised, entrenched and mundane ways in which white supremacy is maintained. He

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<sup>2</sup> Recognising this challenge should not lead us to take self-fulfilling prophecies as absolute or inevitable. Joseph-Salisbury (2016) has shown how low expectations can be utilised as a source of motivation for racially minoritised students.

shows how, whether intentional or otherwise, seemingly neutral policies and practices can systematically disadvantage Black students. Yet, whilst recent years have seen growing acknowledgement of the miseducation and undereducation of Black students in schools—a key site in which white supremacy is enacted—scant attention has been paid to how schools police Black students' aesthetic. This is in spite of the Black aesthetic being racially, religiously, ethnically and culturally symbolic.

### 3. Black Hair: Symbolism, Resistance and Control

As Mercer (1987, p. 34) argues, hair is not merely a 'natural aspect of the body'. The socialisation of hair through stylisation makes it a 'medium of significant statements about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or do not'. It has the power to govern how people present and feel about themselves, as well as how they are interpellated (Thompson 2009). Hair stylisation thus is both a practice of self-expression and an embodiment of cultural norms and expectations. It is a signifier (Tate 2009), a 'physical manifestation of our being that becomes loaded with social and cultural meaning' (Banks 2000, p. 26). In a society structured along racial lines, it is therefore no surprise that hair is attributed racial, as well as cultural, social, religious and political meanings (Byrd and Tharps 2014a; Dabiri 2019; Erasmus 1997; Ifekwunigwe 1999). Hair is central to constructions of Black style (Mercer 1994; Tulloch 2004; Tate 2009) and, amongst other things, is perhaps best understood as a form of what Khanna (2011) calls 'racial symbolism'. Hair must therefore be understood in the context of structural and ideological white supremacy; that is, a socio-racial structure that venerates white European beauty and aesthetic standards, whilst denigrating features associated with the Black body, including hair (Collins 2004; Tate 2009). As Mercer (1987, p. 35) puts it, hair operates as the 'most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin'.

White supremacist hegemony is not, however, without contestations, negotiations and resistance. As Shirley Anne Tate (Tate 2009, p. 35) observes, resistance to both European beauty standards and the pathologisation of Black hair have been operationalised through bodily practices (stylisation) since at least the '1800s in the Black Atlantic diaspora'. Dash (2006, pp. 27–28) concurs, noting that 'Black body aesthetics have been central to Diaspora expressivity since the beginning of the slave trade', with enslaved people creating a 'language of style that drew on their African past' (also see White and White 1995). Perhaps the ultimate example of Black resistance through hair came in the utilisation of braids and cornrows as maps of escape routes for enslaved peoples (Byrd and Tharps 2014a; Dabiri 2019). At the quotidian site of hair, we see a microcosmic manifestation of the dialectic of white dominance and non-white resistance that characterises white supremacist conditions.

With ideological manifestations of white supremacy clearly insufficient for its maintenance (at least on their own), Black expression through hair has been subject to white social control through a range of formal and informal mechanisms. Whether it was 'slave masters' shaving enslaved people's hair, jealous white women cutting the hair of Black enslaved women (Sherrow 2006) or even the institution of regulations in law (Cassandre 2014; Mokoena 2018), white social control of Black hair has long since been deemed necessary to the maintenance of a white supremacist social order. In this regard, white supremacy is dependent upon the degradation and subordination of Blackness. Black pride in stylisation, aesthetic and beauty, therefore, runs counter to, and in turn poses a threat to, white supremacist hegemony (Tate 2009).

The significance of hair as a racial symbol has not been underappreciated by schools. Since Black students started entering British schools in significant numbers, hair has been a site of tension and concern. Given that the school functions to maintain and perpetuate white supremacy (Gillborn 2006), this should not come as a surprise. Amidst growing recognition of the racial inequalities in British schools and society more generally, Sally Tomlinson (Tomlinson 2008, p. 58) notes that in the 1970s, schools came to feel 'particularly threatened by assertions of black cultural identity, exemplified by the Rastafari hair and hats'. Tomlinson (2008) locates this stylistic display of Rastafari within global Black struggles, most notably those in the United States and anti-apartheid struggles on the African continent. Alongside a 'Black is Beautiful' movement that sought to push back against

the way a 'white dominated culture had racialized beauty' (Taylor 1999, p. 17) including hair (Byrd and Tharps 2014b), Rastafari came to represent 'a sophisticated expression of the critical consciousness which informs Black struggles' (Gilroy 1982, p. 301). Worried about the potential impact of 'Black Power' on the school and the Black pupils themselves, schools sought to place tighter regulations (social control) upon hairstyles, particularly those of Black students (Tomlinson 1981). This regulation is 'based in assumptions about what embodied discipline looks like' (Graham 2016, p. 132), assumptions that are inextricably tied to deep-seated racialised ideas about beauty and appearance. It is the enduring legacy of these ideas that means Graham (2016, p. 132) is quite right to note that, particularly for Black students,

the practicalities of adhering to the often incredibly specific rules on hairstyle are onerous (and discriminatory) due to the nature of Afro hair. But failures to comply can result in a range of disciplinary measures. It is not uncommon for pupils to be placed in internal exclusion units or sent home for wearing the wrong hairstyle, an exclusion that may last until the hairstyle grows out.

Whilst we would emphasise that the problem is with white supremacy rather than the inherent 'nature of Afro hair', Graham's (Graham 2016) analysis nods to the intense forms of social control that are enacted around Black students' aesthetic. What Graham (2016) reminds us is that cases like Chikayzea's (which we will return to later) are not isolated or unusual (Joseph-Salisbury 2018a).

It is perhaps the school's endemic (yet denied) white supremacist underpinnings, tied up with ideologies that pathologise Black aesthetics, that have made such expressions (that is, symbols of non-assimilatory Blackness) so threatening to the school's social order. As Joseph-Salisbury (2018a, p. 107) puts it, school hair regulations are best thought of as 'part of a broader attempt to discipline and constrain the Black body'. Yet the control of Black hair in today's 'post-racial' epoch—where racism is imagined as a thing of the past (Bell 1993)—takes on a particularly 'subtle' (or at least deniable) form, and hides behind the facade of race-neutral policies. This brings us to consider the 'post-racial' moment and colour-blind racisms.

#### 4. New, 'Post-Racial', and Colour-Blind Racisms

To understand the ways in which debates over school hair policies play out contemporarily, and more particularly how schools largely resist and evade accusations of racism, we need to first understand the racial conditions in which these events occur. According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (Bonilla-Silva 2015), the 1970s marked an epochal shift towards what he terms 'new racism'. This conceptualisation recognises that, while the decline in the explicit prejudicial attitudes of individuals might appear at first to signal the demise of racism(s), this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the structural nature of racism(s). The reality is merely a shift in racisms' modes of articulation (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Goldberg 2015). What we have is a context in which racism and racial inequalities endure in increasingly subtle, covert and subterranean ways (Sue 2010). As Bonilla-Silva (2015, p. 1363) observes, 'racial inequality is still produced in a systematic way ... but the dominant practices that produce it are no longer overt, seem almost invisible, and are seemingly nonracial'. In this sense, racism is normalised: an engrained feature of our social, political and economic structures (Delgado and Stefancic 2013; Rollock and Gillborn 2011).

These racial conditions have been deepened, intensified and solidified by the 'post-racial' turn (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Bonilla-Silva and Ray 2009). Symbolised by the election of Obama to the US presidency (Goldberg 2015), 'post-racial' ideology reasons that society has overcome its (necessarily already sanitised) racist past (Joseph-Salisbury 2018b). The reasoning goes that if a Black man can become president, race must no longer determine life chances (Leonardo 2013). Meghan Markle's marriage into the British royal family has emerged as perhaps the most recent symbol to support 'post-racial' mythology (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2018). As Douglas Murray (Murray 2018) asked in his *Spectator* article following the wedding, 'if this country was what we have been defamed as in recent years, why would Meghan Markle (now the Duchess of Sussex) have been so warmly received into the heart of the British public?' Yet the occupation of positions of power by people of

colour obfuscates the tacit ways in which white supremacy operates to maintain whiteness as the 'ideal' against which all 'Others' are judged (Sue 2006). Whilst examples of the flaws in this logic abound, in relation to the focus of this article, it is evident when we consider the hair policy changes introduced by the US army. In 2014, the United States Army released an updated appearance and grooming policy—AR670-1—that, whilst apparently race-neutral in its language, placed limits or bans on racially symbolic hairstyles like 'cornrows, braids, twists and dreadlocks' (Byrd and Tharps 2014b). Under Obama, a Black president who supposedly embodied the 'post-racial', key US institutions like the army continued to discriminate against African Americans, even those 'willing to die for their country' (Byrd and Tharps 2014b).

Foregrounded within 'post-racial' ideology is the idea that racial progress has been made to such an extent that the state need no longer engage in 'race-based remedies' (Cho 2009, p. 1589). Racial equality legislation is understood to have eradicated the problem of systemic racism and it is argued instead, that race no longer matters (Rhodes 2009). We are assumed to have entered an age of 'colorblindness' (Bonilla-Silva 2018), in which anti-racist policies are viewed by a society that 'does not see colour' as an affront to equal opportunities for all and/or as discriminative of the 'indigenous' population. Racism has also become 'naturalised', in the sense that racial inequalities are understood as being the product of individual choices and a Black culture that promotes traits such as criminality, laziness and racial segregation (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Rhodes 2009). Racism thus becomes minimised (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). It is dismissed as a historical phenomenon, a problem confined to other (less liberal) societies, and/or only acknowledged in its most extreme forms. Given the 'post-racial' and 'colour-blind' conditions that pattern our contemporary epoch, cognisance of the subterranean functioning of racism is an important grounding from which we might now more closely examine the case of Chikayzea.

## 5. Chikayzea Flanders: The Enactment of Social Control through Black Hair

Despite Chikayzea's case attracting significant media attention as well as public protest, the school's response was not to amend its widely criticised uniform policies. Instead, the headteacher, Alun Ebenezer, used the media platform to justify the school's handling of the case. In one statement he argued

We are a strict academic boys' school and have a strict uniform and appearance policy. I would stress that everyone is welcome to the school. We are not a racist school in any way, shape or form. But we have a distinct culture and when boys come to the school we expect them to respect that culture. We are strict and no-nonsense.

Here, Ebenezer first does the rhetorical work of positioning the school as a 'strict academic boys' school'. The choice of words and emphasis is interesting. Indeed, it is unlikely that any school would profess to being anything other than academic, and in a social context that values conservatism and discipline (Bourdieu 1973; Leriche 1991), most construct themselves as strict. Yet given that these comments are made in justification of the school's treatment of Chikayzea, it seems that the words 'strict' and 'academic' are rhetorically offered to stand in contrast to dreadlocked hair. They are used to construct dreadlocked hair as something that is incompatible with the values of the school. Thus, given the ubiquity of dreadlocks as a symbol of Rastafari, these comments act to denigrate and pathologise both the religion and the culture. As we have argued earlier, dreadlocks also operate as a symbol of Blackness both through, but also in excess of, Rastafari. In this sense, it is the Black Rastafarian body—interpellated across the intersectional lines of race, religion, ethnicity, and culture—that is constructed as antithetical to a 'strict' and 'academic' environment. Black hair becomes unquestionably constructed, through a process of naturalisation (Bonilla-Silva 2018), as unruly and messy. Under the white gaze, the Black masculine body is always already unruly, undisciplined and anti-intellectual: the progeny of a backward culture that does not value education. Through this rendering, the Black body is imagined as being in desperate need of white social control (Yancy 2017), not least in order to quell the contaminatory threat unruly Blacks pose to predominantly white schools.

As he continues his defence, Ebenezer goes on to promulgate the 'colour-blind' trope that 'everyone is welcome', despite the very actions of the school proving that Chikayzea is in fact not 'welcome' and neither is his Black body aesthetic. Intentionally or not, what Ebenezer's remarks do is apply sub- or non-personhood to unruly Black subjects; that is to say, Chikayzea, with his dreadlocked hair, is rendered outside of 'everyone'. The academic standards and policies to which the headteacher refers are constructed both as racially-neutral and universal: they are applied indiscriminately to all students. Yet the illusion of neutrality and universality offers an alibi for 'post-racial' racisms. Indeed, as we have argued, hair is racially, culturally and religiously symbolic: it is saturated with socio-cultural meaning. Thus, to ascribe white norms and expectations around hair onto racially minoritised people fails to recognise the socio-structural nature of white supremacy, which itself does not operate in a 'colour-blind' fashion but rather, works to confer privilege on to white people and maintain systems of white dominance and non-white subordination. To be clear, it is white aesthetic norms, obscured by 'colour-blind' policy and 'post-racial' ideology, that justify placing Chikayzea under forms of social control that reinforce the status quo.

Clearly responding to the accusations of racism levelled by Chikayzea's mother and protesting members of the public, the school's headteacher also posits that the institution is 'not a racist school in any way, shape or form'. In order to make this claim, Ebenezer no doubt relies upon popular conceptions that limit racism to 'individual acts of bigotry' (Hodges 2016, p. 1) that are more explicit in their mode of articulation. This framing ignores what Sue (2010) refers to as the 'changing face of racism' and acts to foreclose the possibility of seeing racisms that are subtle, subterranean, and have 'collective and systemic dimensions' (Hodges 2016, p. 1). Ebenezer deploys what Bonilla-Silva (2018) has metaphorically termed the 'hunting for racists' approach to racism. It is through this move that Ebenezer attempts to stave off the hunters. In other words, he engages in discursive work to distance the institution he leads, a self-proclaimed 'non-racist' school, from those deemed 'racist'. In so doing, he sets his school apart from others in a 'careful separation of good and bad, tolerant and intolerant' (Bonilla-Silva 2018, p. 15). Yet the reality is, that racism is not only enacted on an individual level, but is also structural and institutional (Hodges 2016; Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015). It is woven into the fabric and policies of our social institutions, and embedded in the dominant ideology of our times. It is perhaps an unwillingness or inability to see this that prevents Ebenezer from firstly, considering what governs the school's notions of what is (un)acceptable, and secondly, from considering how the school's policies, or sense of 'culture', might act to perpetuate systemic white supremacy. We can be sure that Ebenezer's stance is not confined to the school as a core social institution but is also reflective of an ideological anti-Blackness that transcends far beyond schools to other institutions and structures. As well as the previous example of the US army, there are a plethora of workplace examples that show Black hair is imagined as antithetical to professionalism. In 2016, for example, a Black woman in England was told by her boss to 'wear a weave at work—your afro hair is unprofessional' (Sini 2016). What we see are deep-rooted anti-Black ideologies that endure and manifest in the supposedly 'post-racial' moment. Ebenezer, and Fulham Boys School, are not the source of the problem (accountable though they should be) but are caught up in a white supremacist system that they simultaneously perpetuate.

In his remarks, the headteacher also makes clear that he expects Chikayzea to 'respect' the 'distinct culture' of the school. It is perhaps in this claim that the control functions of the school are most evident. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1973) contends, the conservative ideology that underpins education in the UK promotes a static social order, in which the status quo is maintained. Since that social order is underpinned by white supremacy, it goes to say that the 'distinct culture' of the school to which the headteacher refers may be read as a culture of whiteness. Indeed, the headteacher 'expects' Chikayzea to 'respect' the culture of the school to the detriment of his Black Rastafari culture. He is expected to relinquish his racialised and religious practices to conform to (or assimilate into) norms and expectations mediated by whiteness. Furthermore, by claiming that the institution is 'no-nonsense', the headteacher offers a disparaging take on Black hair, constructing it as antithetical to the discipline and boundaries of the school. As an open letter penned by academics and addressed to the headteacher makes clear, however, it is both problematic and inaccurate to construct the



aesthetics and practices of Rastafari as antithetical to discipline. Rastafari is 'not undisciplined or boundless: indeed, Rastafarian dreadlocks are expressive of a profound personal discipline in the tradition of Talmudic and early Christian asceticism, as well as a commitment to spiritually informed social justice' (Henriques 2017). Thus, to construct Black hair as undisciplined feeds into a broader narrative that constructs Black bodies as potentially lacking discipline in and of themselves (Graham 2016). Given the symbolic nature of Black hair, the implication is that if Black children 'get in trouble' for wearing natural Black hair, it is in fact their Blackness for which they are in trouble: Blackness is troublesome (Joseph-Salisbury 2018a).

In Chikayzea's case, the imposition of white norms and values on the Black body was not only enacted by the institution but also by the parents of other students attending Fulham Boys School. Quoted in a BBC (BBC 2017) news article, one parent defended the school by claiming the following:

Your strict attention to these standards were well publicised to us as prospective parents and I am grateful that they remain consistent as it enables my son to work within these known boundaries—and he is thriving.

The response of this parent offers an example of one of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2018) four frames of colour-blind racism: abstract liberalism. This parent expresses content with the way in which Chikayzea was dealt with because they perceive this to be 'consistent' with a broader pursuit of fairness and equality for all (albeit, one that does not recognise the racist inequalities upon which society is built (Mills 1997)). Through this colour-blind frame, racist opinions can be constructed as moral and common sense: it would be an 'affront' to equality to allow any discretion in the interpretation of the school's rules to account for religious or cultural beliefs and practices. In this way, apparently 'colour-blind' policies can operate to control those who resist the (white) status quo, whilst simultaneously appearing to exist for the promotion of fairness for all. Through invoking a decontextualised and abstracted reading of liberalism, the parent also fails to recognise that the maintenance of the status quo (white supremacy) benefits those racialised as white, whilst subjugating those racialised as 'Other' (McIntosh 2003). Indeed, it is within this environment that their son may be able to 'thrive', whilst Chikayzea has the same opportunity denied. But perhaps this is the very function of schooling. In the parents' remarks, we catch a glimpse of the predicament that 'post-racial' mythology presents to anti-racism (Joseph-Salisbury 2018b): the belief that society is beyond racism forecloses the possibility for reflection on how race might determine which racial and religious symbolisms are deemed acceptable and which are not. Racism continues to shape lives but its existence is now denied and its effects rendered invisible under a cloak of apparent neutrality (Goldberg 2015).

Speaking to the London Evening Standard Newspaper, the headteacher responded to accusations levelled by protesters that the school is racist by highlighting that 13% of the pupils are Black Caribbean, 10% are Black African and 7% are Asian (Davis 2017). Here, he uses the number of students of colour attending the school to distance himself from accusations of racism and in so doing, offers another demonstration of a rather simplistic understanding of racism. That the school allows entry to students of colour (a legal duty, and 'post-racial' obligation) does not offer evidence of racial equality within it. This is a sleight of hand that only becomes possible through a narrow and misguided definition of racism: symbolism is mistaken for (or misrepresented as) structural change, and diversity is mistaken for anti-racism (Ahmed 2007; Michaels 2006).

Following a televised interview with Chikayzea and his mother in which the ITV presenter Eamonn Holmes (apparently sympathetic of the boy's situation) urged the headteacher to resolve things, the headmaster called the show to respond. Once again, emphasising the 'strict uniform policy' of the school, the headteacher argued that the policy clearly states 'no extreme or cult hairstyles including sculpting, shaving, dreadlocks or braiding are allowed.' Of all the statements made by the headmaster, it is this one that perhaps most explicitly shows his disdain towards and ignorance of Rastafari specifically, and Blackness more generally. Indeed, to construct Black hairstyles as 'extreme' or equate the Rastafari religion with a 'cult' not only represents a gross misunderstanding of the social and religious significance of dreadlocked hair for Rastafari but also, operates to construct Black hair as a threat that requires control. Given that in a 'post-racial' society the possibility of racial inequality

and racism is foreclosed, control of the Black body must operate in tacit ways. Indeed, whilst our contemporary epoch renders explicitly racist policies immoral, illegal and/or inconceivable, hair becomes a site in which 'colour-blind' racisms can thrive. Its regulation appears universalistic and therefore unproblematic. Perhaps the apparent neutrality of aesthetic governance is made possible because hair has been detached from the racialised subject: its symbolism is denied and hair becomes de-racialised. Drawing on a variant of a common 'post-racial' motif used to explain away accusations of subtle racism, we can assume that Ebenezer might tell us that this isn't about race, it's just about hair. Whilst school policies based upon skin colour (the primary signifier of race) would jar too sharply with the 'post-racial' hegemony of our times, it seems that, in contrast, hair occupies a particular position that situates it as the perfect vehicle through which 'post-racial' racisms can be enacted. The social control of hair is racially significant but 'post-racially' deniable. What we see then is the 'post-racial' social control of Black bodies.

## 6. Conclusions

An established and growing body of literature examines how social control is disproportionately enacted upon racially minoritised people by key social institutions, including policing and schooling, and how these represent key sites of tension for Black communities. A more recent (but also an established and growing) body of scholarship has shown how, in our contemporary epoch, racisms have taken on increasingly subtle and subterranean forms. This article has drawn these bodies of scholarship together in conversation, in order to highlight some of the more subtle and subterranean ways in which racialised forms of social control operate. In so doing, this article urges scholars not to neglect the minutiae but instead, recognise how the social control of Black bodies operates at the quotidian site of hair. This article thus make theoretical contributions most directly (but not exclusively) to (and across) the sociological and criminological fields of race and ethnicity studies, education studies, and social control studies.

Whilst we have used this article to shine a light on the particular experiences of Chikayzea Flanders, we argue that this case should not be understood in abstraction from the plethora of examples of attempts (globally) to police Black hair (Joseph-Salisbury 2018a; France-Presse 2016; Gatwiri 2018; Testa 2017)—many of which do not come to the attention of the public. Chikayzea's case offers a useful lens through which we might consider how Black hair becomes a key site for the social control of Black bodies in a 'post-racial' white supremacist society. We have shown that white social control of Black hair has deep-roots in enslavement and colonialism, and that notions of Black hair as messy and antithetical to school discipline (and therefore success) are both naturalised and widespread. In this 'post-racial' moment, white social control of Black hair emerges as a deniable and seemingly neutral mode through which racisms may continue. In this epoch, explicitly racially-discriminative school policies would be unconscionable, if not illegal. Yet, new racisms flourish behind the facade of race-neutral policy and practice that is universally applied to all students, and hide the fact that 'a racial order is in place that benefits a racial group' (Bonilla-Silva 2015, p. 1361). This white supremacist racial order holds in place systems which maintain white dominance and Black subordination, systems that are carefully crafted in order to maintain the status quo. In this sense, as we have argued, the disciplining of the Black aesthetic should be seen as part of a broader project to constrain the Black body (Joseph-Salisbury 2018a). Ultimately, the message to Black people remains: 'If your hair is relaxed, white people are relaxed. If your hair is nappy, they're not happy.'

**Author Contributions:** Both authors contributed equally at all stages.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** In this section you can acknowledge any support given which is not covered by the author contribution or funding sections. This may include administrative and technical support, or donations in kind (e.g., materials used for experiments).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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