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Active Solidarity: Centering the Demands and Vision of the Black Lives Matter Movement in Teacher Education

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Abstract

In the era of Black Lives Matter (#BLM), urban teacher education does not exist in isolation. The White supremacist, neoliberal context that impacts all aspects of Black lives also serves to support antiblackness within the structures of teacher education. In this article, the authors, who are grounded in a race radical analytical and political framework, share a vision of what it means to be an urban teacher who actively understands and teaches in solidarity with #BLM. The authors unpack their theoretical framework and the vision of #BLM while examining the state of teacher education in this era of neoliberal multiculturalism. The authors contemplate what a race radical, #BLM-aligned, approach to urban teacher education might look like. The article concludes by addressing ways that teacher educators must be in active solidarity with the #BLM movement to better prepare teachers who understand that the lives of their students matter within and outside of their classrooms.

Keywords

Black lives matter, race, identity, activism, social, teacher education, urban education

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Introduction

In the three years since its inception, sparking protests after George Zimmerman was found not guilty in Trayvon Martin's death, Black Lives Matter (#BLM) has expanded from a "moment to a movement" (BLM, 2016). What started as a hashtag pronouncing the importance of Black life connected to historical and contemporary police brutality, #BLM has now

broaden[ed] the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. (BLM, 2016)

BLM is a slogan, a hashtag, a principle, and a chapter-based national organization with identifiable leaders called the Black Lives Matter Network. The term is often used interchangeably with another group called the Movement for Black Lives; however, they are not the same. The Movement for Black Lives is a coalition of over 50 organizations, of which the Black Lives Matter Network is one member. More often than not, however, BLM is used as an umbrella term with which many concerned with justice for Black people globally identify, regardless of any formal connection to the specific organization or coalition. As scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor explains, ". . . there is a BLM 'mood' that exists and it expresses itself in the demonstrations against police brutality or murder where the main slogan is 'Black Lives Matter.'" Taylor acknowledges that many people use the term without being aware of the official organizations or leaders, but rather "are connecting with a broader consciousness that is determined to fight" (Denvir, 2016). In the remainder of this article, while we do cite the leaders of the Black Lives Matter Network, as well as the education platform of the Movement for Black Lives, our use of #BLM as a hashtag reflects the "mood" or broader movement Taylor references.

In pushing society and the state to account for the perpetual war on Black life, #BLM is a rallying cry for Black liberation and thus global, human liberation. "Black liberation," Taylor (2016) comments, "implies a world where Black people can live in peace, without the constant threat of the social, economic, and political woes of a society that places almost no value on the vast majority of Black lives" (Chapter 7, para. 7). More, Taylor reminds us that "the aspiration for Black liberation cannot be separated from what happens in the United States as a whole. Black life cannot be transformed while the rest of the country burns" (Chapter 7, para. 6). In other words, the struggle for Black liberation as seen through #BLM is bound up with the project of collective liberation and social transformation, and requires all of us to actively

work toward solidarity. By presenting both a set of demands and a vision of Black liberation, #BLM is a rallying cry for the radical imagining of a different vision of society and the creation of paths to get us all there.

We within the field of education, and teacher education specifically, must heed this call to action. Given the challenges of institutional racism and economic inequality, upon which this country was founded, that continue to mutate, we argue that teacher education currently operates from an “All Lives Matter” framework. This is to say, even with the progressive trajectory that teacher education has traveled, from being ethnocentric, to additive of multiculturalism, to “social justice” oriented, teacher education still works institutionally in ways that answer to and uphold White supremacy and racial capitalism. To actually center the demands and vision of #BLM in the urban schools and communities we purport to serve, we within teacher education need to understand and transform ourselves through the vision. The Black Lives Matter Network came together with over 50 other organizations to create the Movement for Black Lives Platform, which developed a number of policy demands, including ones centered on education (The Movement for Black Lives, 2016b). In this article, we make sense of the education demand focused on community control and explore its implications for four key functions of teacher education. As such, we seek to unpack the responsibilities for those of us in teacher education to support the actualization of this demand and the transformative vision it is leading us toward.

As non-Black coauthors (one Latinx-Asian and one White, respectively), we are concerned about how to position our voices while concurrently centering the demands of an explicitly Black movement. To help us come to terms with our own positionality, we look to the founders of the Black Lives Matter Network. We share their concerns that when non-Black people “adapt” #BLM, they often end up erasing the work and presence of Black people in the movement, particularly the queer Black women who founded it. In our discussions about what it would mean to center #BLM in teacher education, we worry about our role in perpetuating this erasure and question the appropriateness of inserting ourselves into this conversation. However, we take heart and instruction from the network founders who provide these directives:

Through this work, we remain persistent in urging non-Black, anti-racist communities to organize themselves and their people in the fight for Black lives and liberation. The turbulent road to civil rights has long been paved with the support and resistance of allies and their significance in this struggle cannot be overstated. (BLM, as quoted in kovar, 2016)

As such, this article is an attempt for the two of us as teacher educators, situated within institutions of higher education, to take seriously the call to “not

just stand in solidarity with [#BLM], but to investigate the ways in which anti-Black racism is perpetuated in [our] own communities” (BLM, 2016) and across educational spaces.

A Race Radical Framework

Wrestling with the ongoing attack on Black life, we think it is critical that teacher educators, and the aspiring educators we work with, teach in active solidarity with the demands and vision of #BLM. To engage in this recentering of our field, we must understand how teacher education is implicated in the structural and cultural formation of societal conditions in general, and the constitution and perceptions of Black life in particular. In this section, we map our race radical theoretical framework and use it to understand the racial and political economic conditions that have fueled the #BLM movement. We apply our framework to understanding antiblackness, the trappings of neoliberal multiculturalism, and the necessity of active solidarity. We argue that #BLM is a current response to antiblackness within this era of racial capitalism that brings to light the limits of liberal antiracism. As an alternative, this race radical approach seeks to engage in a politics of materialist antiracist solidarity that centers Black life and Black liberation.

Defining Race Radicalism

For us, race radicalism is a form of politics and analysis. Rooted in Cedric Robinson’s (1983) mapping of the Black Radical Tradition, Melamed (2011) describes race radicalism as “struggle and politics that reckon with the differential and racialized violences that inevitably follow from the insufficiency and nongeneralizability of human value under U.S.-led transnational capitalism and neoliberal globalization” (p. 47). Our framework “works in both” (*trabajar en ambxs*) a cultural politics of race and an analysis of neoliberalism (Dumas, 2011; Mayorga, forthcoming). Neoliberalism, as a strain of capitalism, is a political economic system undergirded by a cultural logic that proposes that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Materially, neoliberalism is visible in all aspects of education, such as economic disinvestment in schools, the taking control of school governance and finance away from local people, and the punitive use of standardized testing as an accountability tool, among other things. Neoliberalism is also cultural in the emphasis it places on individual performance and school choice over civic and collective social practices. With this

working definition of neoliberalism, we have asked on different occasions what race has to do with neoliberalism and education.

Over the last 500 years, Western capitalism has been wedded to an intensely racialized social order that contributes to defining society. Robinson (1983) describes this evolving system as racial capitalism. Phelps (2014) reminds us that the United States is in fact in the midst of its third great system of racial capitalism, moving from “chattel slavery and formal Jim Crow” to the current system, “which operates so subtly that it gives only the barest appearance of being a system—maintain[ing] diversity as an ideal even as it continues to produce injustice in the aggregate” (para. 9). Racial capitalism is not static, but rather an adaptive system where changes in racial and economic conditions, cultural discourses, and policy and politics are geared toward expanding profit accumulation by the few, and applying racialized forms of containment, dispossession, and dehumanization of the many. Melamed (2011) describes our current era as one dominated by neoliberal multiculturalism, where individual sovereignty is tied to the machinations of capital, and the logic of the market is understood as being far more effective than the state in managing human life. It is within this cultural and material context that #BLM has emerged. The question then becomes, what does #BLM teach us about this current, elusive, system of racial capitalism, and how it can be combatted?

Anti-Black Violence in Education

#BLM originated as a response to the physical harm of police brutality and incarceration, but it has made evident that anti-Black violence is a multidimensional set of discourses and practices that permeate all sectors of the society that produce Black suffering, including education. Historically, the demand for educational opportunity has been a central aspect of Black struggles for liberation, including calls for Black literacy, desegregation, Black studies in the curriculum, and community control of schools. At every turn, Black struggles have been figuratively and literally beaten down by anti-Black violence.

In education, anti-Black violence takes on corporeal, economic, and psychological forms, and occurs in both slow and fast ways. By fast violence, we are referring to actions that are felt and seen with immediacy. A Black high schooler dragged from a classroom by an officer (Jarvie, 2015) and the handcuffing of a kindergartener can be read as fast forms of violence where Black people are physically and psychologically harmed, and socially dislocated. These moments are often swift acts of theatrical, political spectacle (Smith & Miller-Kahn, 2004) to the broader society.

Less visible are the slow violences that occur within education that fuel Black suffering. Punitive discipline policies that are purported to keep students safe but in fact disproportionately suspend Black students (Smith & Harper, 2015), low expectations of Black students (Irvine, 1991), and sustained cycles of disinvestment in the social, academic, and material resources students need (Aggarwal, Mayorga, & Nevel, 2012) are just some examples of slow violence in schools. These everyday processes eat away at the health, well-being, and sense of belonging for students. Over time, these processes have been normalized and unquestioned, and thus make Black bodies “structurally and perpetually subject to premature death and ongoing captivity” (Wun, 2016, p. 178).

Anti-Black violence takes on many forms, and #BLM has forced us to also see that systemic violence is undergirded by a culture of antiblackness that is sewn into the DNA of the society. Taylor (2016) comments,

This crisis goes beyond high incarceration rates; indeed, the perpetuation of deeply ingrained stereotypes of African Americans as particularly dangerous, impervious to pain and suffering, careless and carefree, and exempt from empathy, solidarity, or basic humanity is what allows the police to kill Black people with no threat of punishment. (Introduction, Section 1, para. 5)

Taylor’s comments suggest society permits and legitimizes racial state violence wrought on Black people because blackness and Black people are always situated in opposition to social constructions and definitions of what it is to be human. Antiblackness is “a cultural disregard for and disgust with blackness” (Dumas, 2016, p. 11), where to be constructed as a Black person is to be “seen as a problem” to White people, White supremacy, and capitalism. The varied forms of fast and slow physical, social, and economic violence that we have discussed must be understood as always already infused with an utter disregard for Black people. Teacher education must come to grips with the fact that we are fundamentally entangled in these oppressive conditions.

The Trappings of Official Liberal Antiracisms

Anti-Black violence is varied and context-specific, but an anti-Black strategy that is of particular relevance to #BLM and teacher education are “official liberal antiracisms.” Within a race radical framework, “official liberal antiracisms” can be understood as the set of discourses and actions that overtook, though did not supplant, overt White supremacy as the state’s primary racial frame for shaping governance and the larger social order in the years following World War II (WWII). Melamed (2011) describes three dominant forms

of official liberal antiracisms since WWII: racial liberalism (1940s-1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s-1990s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s). Each form of official liberal antiracism provides a means for the state to portray race as a contradiction to progress rather than identifying it as a major force in structuring social conditions. In this article, we focus on neoliberal multiculturalism as a defining characteristic of education policy and practice.

Neoliberal multiculturalism ties together calls for civil rights and inclusivity, personal responsibility, and race-evasive discourses that ignore racial difference and histories of racial oppression. Mainstream rhetoric around the purpose of public schooling, for example, often invokes civil rights language to purport that it is a system designed for equality for all people, at the same time that it excludes race as a “legitimate political grievance” (Davis, 2007). For example, in *How to fix our schools: A manifesto*, an op-ed written by Joel Klein, Michelle Rhee and other education leaders (2010) who ushered in the neoliberal reformation of large U.S. urban school system, they state:

the single most important factor determining whether students succeed in school is not the color of their skin or their ZIP code or even their parents’ income – it is the quality of their teacher.

Let’s stop ignoring basic economic principles of supply and demand and focus on how we can establish a performance-driven culture in every American school – a culture that rewards excellence, elevates the status of teachers and is positioned to help as many students as possible beat the odds (Klein et al., 2010)

In the first statement Klein et al. (2010) hinge their argument on the trope that “demography is not destiny,” bracketing the racially oppressive social conditions that fueled collective Black people’s demand for educational equality over the last sixty years, and pinning reform on improving teacher quality. Interestingly in the second statement Klein et al, center economic principles and individual performance as means to helping students “beat the odds” that were produced by the oppressive social conditions that they had bracketed earlier. Such rhetoric around public school reform strategies such as charter schools, mayoral control, and school closings, represents a power erasure (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) that allows current school reforms to appear as equity measures while, in reality, such reforms have dire consequences for communities of Color, particularly for Black students.

#BLM’s focus on antiblackness also shows how neoliberal multiculturalism frames Black suffering as a product of individual cultural failings and pathologies, whose rescue requires the expertise of business-minded decision

makers. Over the last 25 years, “culture of poverty” discourses and anti-Black constructions of Black people that were first articulated during the 1960s through the Moynihan Report (Greenbaum, 2015) were revived. This neoliberal multicultural frame confers “privilege or stigma according to conformity with limited repertoires of antiracist value, which themselves have normalized and stabilized contemporary political and economic arrangements” (Melamed, 2011, p. 13). This framing has been evident in multiple social sectors, such as welfare reform debates, where Black and Latinx women living on public assistance were depicted as “Welfare Queens” to suggest they were taking advantage of the government (Davis, 2007). This set of discourses helped advance welfare reform that focused on individual merit where people were disciplined to “play by the rules” (Davis, 2007).

A particularly salient example of this is school governance reorganizations, like mayoral takeovers of school districts, that increasingly dismantle any structures or notions of local, community-led, schools. Almost 30 years ago, then Chicago mayor, Richard M. Daley, “felt that community control of schools in the form of budget appropriation and principal hiring was yielding too much control to ‘inept’ community members” (Stovall, 2015, p. 49). This kind of coded racist language that does not explicitly reference race (Davis, 2007) frames primarily poor communities and communities of Color as being culturally and politically deficient, and thus incapable of self-governance. As such, the only rational approach to improving schools, according to policymakers, is to turn power to supposed experts who can make the “tough decisions” (Stovall, 2015). These government reorganizations open the door for neoliberal reform strategies like punitive testing systems and school closures, and contribute to the ongoing disempowerment and socioeconomic destabilization of communities. Ultimately, neoliberal multiculturalism becomes a trap that is increasingly difficult to challenge as the language of antiracism is co-opted and used to keep Blackness at the bottom. In contrast, to take a position that affirms racial difference and is as “unapologetically Black” as #BLM, takes a position outside of the state’s official liberal antiracist stance, and is thus framed as deviant.

Active Solidarities, so We All Get Free

Equally important to mapping the entanglements of racism, capitalism, anti-blackness, and neoliberal multiculturalism is race radicalism’s focus on engaging in a “materialist antiracist thinking, struggle and politics” (Melamed, 2011, p. 47) that leads toward collective liberation. We argue that this kind of politics is in alignment with the #BLM vision. #BLM’s end goal is fueling and achieving Black liberation as a means to global liberation. By marching in the

streets, interrupting presidential candidate speeches, creating art, and facilitating study groups, #BLM has engaged in a range of efforts to “validate Black Life” and support Black people to “get free” (BLM, 2016). This convergence of strategies is a powerful example of materialist antiracist politics that centers an understanding of the origins and nature of Black oppression and demands the development of a strategy for moving Black people into a liberated future (Taylor, 2016). As both mode of analysis and political work, our race radical framework centers Black and collective liberation, using #BLM as a guide. Race radicalism is continually, and reflexively, bent toward the constitution of the “good” society grounded in social justice and democratic practice, and as such, it places practitioners under an obligation of moving from analysis to practical action for change. Crucial to engaging in materialist antiracist ways is the notion of active solidarity. In the closing paragraphs of the *Herstory* of the Black Lives Matter Network’s webpage, the organization’s leaders state,

And, perhaps more importantly, when Black people cry out in defense of our lives, which are uniquely, systematically, and savagely targeted by the state, we are asking you, our family, to stand with us in affirming Black lives. Not just all lives. Black lives. Please do not change the conversation by talking about how your life matters, too. It does, but we need less watered down unity and more active solidarities with us, Black people, unwaveringly, in defense of our humanity. Our collective futures depend on it. (BLM, 2016, Section 3, para. 2)

In these statements, the network leaders make clear the difference between unity and solidarity. Unity is a homogenizing force where the presumption is that individuals or groups come together under a shared vision and set of values on the world. Discourses and practices that call for unity, such as including more racially and culturally diverse group of students at a college, become instances where there are demographic changes, but no critique of the foundational thoughts about the purposes and missions of the college that are situated in a culture of whiteness. As a construct, unity thus produces a flattening effect in a complicated world, which reproduces intersecting modes of oppression.

Conversely, active and race radical solidarity is a practice of holding up a recognition of how people’s liberation is bound up in one another’s, while the conditions, needs, and notions of liberation remain distinct. Solidarity is an active practice of recognizing and working through difference to achieve liberation for ourselves and for others. Because we live in a time that is at once anti-Black and neoliberal multiculturalist, the notion of working through difference is a dangerous but important strategy of resistance in society and teacher education. We now turn to thinking about what a race radical approach might look like in teacher education.

Teacher Education in a Time of Neoliberal Multiculturalism and #BLM

Given our race radical framework that pays attention to neoliberal multiculturalism and anti-Black violence, we turn to the questions: In what ways is teacher education implicated in the maintenance of White supremacy and what would teacher education look like if it were to be actively in solidarity with #BLM? In theorizing how teacher education can achieve this solidarity, we turn to the education platform put forth by the Movement for Black Lives. Titled, *A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice* (Community Control: The Movement for Black Lives, 2016a), the education platform includes an analysis of problems and specific policy demands at the federal, state, and local levels. While much of this framework addresses broader contextual and governance issues, such as privatization and community control of education, as teacher educators, we aim to heed the call of the Black Lives Matter Network's founders to investigate anti-Black racism in our own community. Therefore, the remainder of this article examines how teacher education currently supports anti-Black violence and four ways we can be in active solidarity with the vision of BLM. While not exhaustive, these include (a) protecting public education, (b) gatekeeping who becomes teachers, (c) preparing educators to teach aligned with #BLM, and (d) supporting and defending in-service teachers committed to #BLM.

Active Solidarity 1: Defending Public Education

While the presumption is that teacher education's primary concern is training teachers for the classroom, our race radical approach frames teacher education as situated within the cultural political economic conditions that shape society. While the education platform of the Movement for Black Lives does not specifically address teacher education, it takes a strong stance against current trends in school reform such as privatization and demands a move to community control of schools (Community Control: The Movement for Black Lives, 2016a). The platform lambasts school reformers, "bankrolled by billionaire philanthropists . . . and aided by the Departments of Education at the federal, state, and local level" for treating Black children and families as "test-subjects" and "impos[ing] their experimental, market-based approach to school reform," which ultimately serves to "undermine Black democracy and self-determination, destroy organized labor, and decolor the education curriculum . . ." They denounce standardized testing and out-of-school suspensions and call for a moratorium on Teach For America, state and mayoral takeovers, charter schools, and school closings (The Movement for Black Lives, 2016b).

For teacher education to work in active solidarity with the platform demands, it is necessary that we struggle against the reforms that work to maintain and reproduce racial and economic inequality. We must actively address institutional racism along every step of the teacher preparation pipeline, from recruitment, admissions, coursework, placements, and professional development, and how they aim to reproduce or resist anti-Black violence in theory and practice. Rather than hiding away in institutions of higher education concerning ourselves only with teacher education reforms, we must also recognize we have several other responsibilities to be in active solidarity with #BLM. Teacher education must have a voice in combatting state- and federal-level teacher education policy to move toward the kind of liberatory context that we have articulated. We must also see our work connected to the broader attack on K-12 education and join social movements aimed at broader issues of racial, economic, and educational justice.

One such example of active solidarity is a scathing open letter written by Leslie Fenwick, Dean of Howard University's School of Education, in which she called out school reform as a front for urban land development. Fenwick claimed,

The lie is that schemes like Teach For America, charter schools backed by venture capitalists, education management organizations (EMOs), and Broad Foundation-prepared superintendents address black parents' concerns about the quality of public schools for their children. These schemes are not designed to cure what ails under-performing schools. They are designed to shift tax dollars away from schools serving black and poor students; displace authentic black educational leadership; and erode national commitment to the ideal of public education. (Strauss, 2013a)

In language similar to the Movement for Black Lives education platform, this example of active solidarity from the teacher education community looks beyond the daily aspects of teacher preparation by using a race radical approach to examine the political economic context of urban reform. By paying attention to racial capitalism, teacher education is in a position to defend public education while explicitly addressing inequality and antiblackness.

Active Solidarity 2: Gatekeeping Who Becomes Teachers

While teacher education must address the broader contextual issues such as those outlined above, our daily responsibility involves preparing teachers for the profession. As such, we are able to be in active solidarity with #BLM by serving as gatekeepers of who is provided the tremendous right and responsibility to teach America's children. Therefore, it is

critical to look at who pre- and in-service teachers are and what that means for their ability to teach in solidarity with #BLM. The teaching force of the United States is over 80% White (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013) and almost half of U.S. schools do not have a single teacher of Color on staff. Thus, many students will graduate from high school having been taught only by White adults (Irvine, 2003), even though students of Color now outnumber their White teacher counterparts (Green, 2015). This is unlikely to shift dramatically, as it was shown that of ACT-tested graduates in 2014 who said they planned on pursuing an education major, 72% were White (ACT, 2016) and they are being prepared by a teacher education profession that is 88% White (Ladson-Billings, 2001). This demographic imperative (Banks, 1996; Cochran-Smith, 2004) has motivated many teacher educators to look deeply at whiteness and its relationship to teaching (Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016; Marx, 2004; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 1992). Countless studies highlight the problematic ways in which White teachers resist and reproduce patterns of racist ideology and calls into question their ability to teach from the perspective demanded by #BLM.

Some teacher educators attempt to disrupt the deficit and racist ideology that many White, although not exclusively, preservice teachers hold through their coursework. Concurrently to teaching content and methods, some programs attempt to equip teachers with racial, cultural, and structural analyses of schooling (Sleeter, 2013). There is a growing body of scholarship that argues for a focus on racial justice within teacher education (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2008; Gorski, Zenkov, Osei-Kofi, & Sapp, 2012; Kumashiro, 2015) concentrated on two main topics: (a) preparing teachers to understand the role of race and racism in the experiences of students and communities and (b) unpacking teacher racial identities as it connects to classroom pedagogy (Picower & Kohli, 2017).

In theorizing a race radical approach that moves away from tinkering with teacher education programs to make incremental chips at preservice teachers' hegemonic understandings of race (Picower, 2009), and bestowing employment opportunities upon teachers who hold deficit and racist ideologies, which ultimately contributes to the production of schools as sites of "black suffering" (Dumas, 2014), we argue that teacher education that works in active solidarity with #BLM must stop admitting such educators into the pipeline of teaching. Teacher education that centers #BLM must actively recruit and admit critical preservice teachers of Color, along with critical White teachers, who are ready to enter schools prepared to recognize, to name, and to address issues of racial injustice (Kohli, 2013; Sleeter, 2001) and antiblackness specifically.

Active Solidarity 3: Preparing Educators to Teach in Alignment With #BLM

Because teacher education is charged with the task of helping position teacher candidates to successfully transition into the profession, we have the opportunity to help them develop the pedagogical skills and the critical consciousness that is the basis for active solidarity with the #BLM movement. The BLM website calls for the following: “We demand a public education system that teaches the rich history of Black people and celebrates the contributions we have made to this country and the world” (BLM, 2016). As previously stated, many within the current teaching force, and among the preservice teachers who are preparing to join them, are not in a position to meet this demand because they view Black people through a deficit lens of racism and stereotypes. Until our public school system is one that is revolutionized into a space of Black liberation, until the adults that teach children are critically conscious and possess a political understanding of anti-Black oppression, until teachers reflect student and community demographics, the singular act of including Black people into the curriculum cannot meet the broader vision of #BLM. Despite the myriad of studies demonstrating the problematic issues that White preservice teachers bring with them regarding race (Jupp et al., 2016), teacher education graduates such educators expecting them to teach from culturally relevant and multicultural perspectives.

These efforts are equivalent to slapping a coat of paint on a rotten foundation. Until teacher education is ready to dig deeper to address core issues of identity, White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), and antiblackness, attempts at curriculum reforms cannot transform our educational system. As it stands now, this coat of paint and the resulting curriculum ends up being superficial at best (i.e., George Washington Carver discovered peanuts! Martin Luther King was a great man!) and outrageously racist at worst. Take, for example, a 2016 eighth-grade mathematics test given at Burns Middle School in Mobile, Alabama. Questions on the test included “Tyrone knocked up 4 girls in the gang. There are 20 girls in his gang. What is the exact percentage of the girls Tyrone knocked up?” Another question informed students that “Dwayne pimps 3 hos” and “asked students to figure out how many tricks each of the hookers must turn in a day to support Dwayne’s crack habit” (Bult, 2016). When filtered through the lens of race radicalism, a contributions approach to Black history without systemic change cannot provide a route to liberation. While this was the act of one racist educator, the problem is a systemic one, as widely used textbooks actively remove historical racism from the curriculum: A McGraw Hill textbook referred to enslaved Africans as “migrant workers” (Brown, 2015), and Texas-approved textbooks removed Jim Crow,

the KKK, and the role of slavery in the civil war from its pages (Schaub, 2015).

In contrast, to be in active solidarity with the broader project of #BLM, teacher education needs to focus, as said earlier, with recruiting critically conscious teachers, and preparing them to become teacher activists. Such educators actively teach from a race conscious perspective in terms of curriculum, while working outside of the classroom to address broader inequities maintained by racial capitalism. They recognize that they cannot remain solely in their classroom, but must also join movements such as #BLM to reconcile their vision for justice with the realities of injustice around them (Picower, 2012). Teacher activists understand that “radical reconstructions of society” (King as cited in Taylor, 2016) are required, and that education is simply a vehicle toward this end. For teacher education to truly work in active solidarity with #BLM vision, they must become sites that develop teachers who see participating in social movements as part of their role as an educator.

Active Solidarity 4: Supporting and Defending In-Service Teachers Aligned With #BLM

If teacher education is successful in preparing teacher activists who take seriously the impact of anti-Black violence and teach and struggle for a more just world inside and outside of the classroom (NYCoRE, 2003), our responsibility cannot end at their graduation. Such educators need ongoing relationships, critical professional development, and, in some cases, material, legal, and professional support. Teachers who strive to be in active solidarity with #BLM in schools in this neoliberal multiculturalist era are at risk: They are isolated without like-minded colleagues (Picower, 2009), working in racially hostile climates (Kohli, 2016), provided with irrelevant professional development (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015), and are often fired for teaching about racism (Meyerson, 2016).

To be in active solidarity with #BLM, teacher education has to take responsibility for the new teachers who enter the field and attempt to put into practice what they have learned in our institutions. How can teacher education possibly be in active solidarity without engaging in such projects knowing the anti-Black context in which educators work? In reality, there are several postgraduation strategies that teacher education can put into practice. We can provide the kinds of professional development opportunities that allow educators to continue to develop their analysis and liberatory practice (Kohli et al., 2015), we can connect them with teacher activist collectives to deepen their work (Martinez, Valdez, & Cariaga, 2016) as well as to social justice-centered teacher unions (Weiner, 2013), and we can stand by their

side providing resources, networks, and support if they are held to the fire for their practice (Meyerson, 2016).

Conclusion

The vision and actions of #BLM make clear that, with some exceptions, teacher education operates under an “All Lives Matter” approach to teacher preparation. A focus on teacher training that ignores the cultural political economy that shapes education, a teaching force that remains majority White and lacking in an awareness of intersecting forms of oppression, and a superficial and apolitical construction of multicultural education, will fail to disrupt, and in some cases advance, anti-Black violence and racial capitalism. If Nelson Mandela’s often quoted statement that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (as quoted in Strauss, 2013b) is taken seriously, then it is essential that we actively work to be in solidarity with #BLM and the struggle for Black liberation. To do this, teacher education must take up a race radical approach by understanding society and our field within the context of racial capitalism, engaging in a politic that seeks to upend the war on Black life, and taking great care in bringing our teacher candidates into the intellectual and political discussions that put Black life at the center of efforts to transform society. If we do not ourselves act in solidarity with the struggle for Black liberation, then we cannot expect our teacher candidates to do so. Doing this heavy lifting within our field is a first move in the practice of active solidarity in the pursuit of helping all of us to “get free.”

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