

# Our Ancestors' Wildest Dreams (Re)membering the Freedom Dreams of Black Women Abolitionist Teachers

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MUCH OF THE HISTORY OF ABOLITIONISM is written about the efforts of religious, Northern, philanthropic whites to eradicate slavery. The picture of an abolitionist usually calls to mind white men and women advocating on behalf of the enslaved; however, revolutionary African-Americans prompted much of the effort and were early anti-slavery agitators (Quarles, 1969; Sinha, 2016). Furthermore, Black women abolitionists, many of whom were teachers, played an undeniably significant role in the shaping of the movement. Black women teachers' personification of abolition was not singularly about the eradication of the transatlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, or slavery's afterlives (Hartman, 2007), but about bringing the humanity of Black people into fuller view. These women conjured revolutionary dreams of freedom—the life force that animated their motivations for teaching, pedagogies, and sociopolitical activism. These visionary teachers radically imagined a New World outside of what their existing condition prescribed. By utilizing education as a primary tool for their resistance, teaching was an abolitionist activity, in slavery *and* freedom. Love (2019) posited that abolitionist teaching is built on the radical imagination, cultural modes of expression, freedom dreams, visionary thinking—and other methods of abolitionists—to eradicate and fight for injustice, inside and outside of schools.

This chapter reframes the limited, historical understandings of abolition as being synonymous with androcentric, overt, and violent resistance in order to privilege the rooted, spiritual, and imaginative interior sources of Black women teachers' abolitionist ethos. As such, we look to the wisdom of Black women abolitionist teachers throughout history for guidance; first, by placing their struggles for educational freedom within a historical context; and second, by intentionally (re)membering (Dillard, 2012) and recalling their freedom dreams (Kelley, 2002) for education. Inspired, we offer our own freedom dreams as a way to connect the thread between the past, present, and future of teacher education. Finally, this chapter serves as a call to conscious and action for education researchers, practitioners, and teacher educators to realize their own dreams for the educational freedom of all students.

## Conceptualizing Freedom Dreams

In Robin D. G. Kelley's (2002) seminal work *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, he defined freedom dreams as the visions of the future that motivate activists in various social, cultural, and political movements. He elucidated the power and centrality of dreaming within all challenges to hegemony, antiblackness, and injustice. Kelley argued that dreams are central to the fight for justice and freedom and that, without new visions, we risk singular focus on deconstruction, rather than reconstruction. More clearly, freedom dreams not only provide a critical analysis and understanding of present-day injustice, but offer liberatory space to imagine a world once injustices are eradicated and our full humanity realized. Kelley (2002) stated,

Any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and unfolding a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality. (p.193)

He suggested that many historic, radical social movements had clear visions of what they were up against, fighting for, and dreaming of. He shed light on this historic reality by reminding us of the individual and collective visions, hopes, and imaginations that brought about radical movements during the last four hundred years. In one chapter, Kelley explored the particular ways in which Black women have dared to envision alternatives to their reality and concludes that they actually led the charge for social change.

### The Freedom Dreams of Black Women

Black women have been dreaming of freedom and carving out spaces for liberation since we arrived on these shores (Cooper, 2018). Historically and contemporarily, we have used dreaming as a way to escape interlocking oppressions often rooted in white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. Black women dreamt our way through The Middle Passage, chattel slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim (and Jane) Crow legislation, segregated schools, sexism, unemployment, and police brutality. In modern times, Black women continue to conjure dreams of what it might look, be, and feel like for *all* Black lives to matter (Khan-Cullors et al., 2017). Revolutionary Black women, like those in the Combahee River Collective highlighted the intersectional oppressions among Black women yet sought the abolition of oppressive systems for the freedom of *all* people (Taylor, 2017). Black women have always embodied a Black radical imagination, producing a vision of liberation expansive enough for all people (Kelley, 2002). As such, their freedom dreams are indispensable as they offer a pathway toward liberation for all.

Freedom dreaming as the conceptual framework for this chapter allows us to explore the alternative visions and articulations of hope among Black women abolitionist teachers whose willingness to dream other worlds inspire modern renderings. The centrality of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in Black women's work opens necessary discourse among educators about the ways that schools and classrooms can create conditions for students to bring their full selves to school. It is from a place of intersectionality, where humanity and wholeness are central, that all students are able to thrive and not simply survive (Love, 2019). Therefore, we (re)member the freedom dreams of Black women abolitionist teachers and glean from their well of brilliance,

wisdom, and joy to inform new generations of teachers and teacher educators to persist in the struggle for change and dream up an education that is equitable and just.

### **Necessitating Freedom Dreams for Today's Educational Climate**

In the last several decades, the field of teacher education has experienced significant shifts with special initiatives to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. Initiatives include increased efforts for a more racially and ethnically diverse teaching force by recruiting and retaining teachers of color (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). It also includes the development of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), and cultural sustaining (Paris, 2012) pedagogies. Critical race theory (CRT) has been conceptualized as an effective analytic tool to deconstruct the ways in which race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact the social structures, practices, and discourses in schools (Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Professional development programs have been developed to empower educators to create supportive learning environments for queer students (Payne & Smith, 2011). We asked and attempted to answer what constitutes good teaching of Black students, how we can support new and veteran teachers, and how to reconnect schools to communities of color. We endeavored to transform teacher education as a result of new technologies, shifting political terrains, and emerging social movements.

Yet, contemporary education research continues to document the adverse experiences of Black students in schools. Black students continue to be disproportionately represented in school suspensions (Skiba et al., 2002) and special education yet underrepresented in gifted and advanced placement courses (Harry et al., 2005). Schools serving predominantly students of color enact the school-to-prison nexus by employing more police officers than social workers, community activists, and psychologists (Meiners, 2011). Despite serving the same number of students, school districts with a majority of students of color received approximately \$23 billion less in funding than mostly white school districts in 2016 (edbuild, 2019). Schools enact curriculum violence (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010) in their deliberate manipulation of academic programming that exclusively teaches a one-sided narrative of Black people as slaves, rather than showcasing their historical brilliance, resilience, and determination. Black teachers, though relatively small in number, find themselves preparing Black students to deal with injustice outside of school and providing students the tools to navigate the racism they experience *within* school spaces (Duncan, 2019). Schools continue to be steeped in whiteness and white supremacy, compromising the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010). Essentially, schools are gradually murdering the spirits (Williams, 1991) of Black students by perpetuating injustice and serving as sites of racialized trauma.

As the African-American community contends with the ubiquitous nature of antiblackness, inside and outside of schools, simultaneously, they have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The economic, social, emotional, and educational impacts of a fatal, global pandemic has reverberated within the Black community. It has also illuminated centuries of educational inequity as school districts across the nation now face the demands of remote learning, social distancing mandates, food services, and ensuring that the social-emotional needs of students are met. Our current educational climate necessitates a wide range of methodological, pedagogical, theoretical, epistemological, and historical perspectives to support those students who have been least well supported in our society and in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The field of teacher education must contend with where it presently stands and where it wants to go. Freedom dreaming is exactly what these conditions call for, as it takes inventory of the complexity, urgency, and unprecedented nature of our present moment and dares us to dream the future anew. We turn to the wisdom of Black women who, throughout time, leveraged their educational practice as social activism and committed to seeing Black children afforded better futures. A radical tradition persists among Black women teachers being at the forefront of making education inclusive for all children, leaving us a roadmap for social change and educational justice (Muhammad et al., 2020). We look to their freedom dreams.

### **The Freedom Dreams of Historic Black Women Abolitionist Teachers**

History recounts the struggles on the part of African-Americans to gain equal access to quality education in the United States. During the era of slavery, the education of African Americans, both enslaved and free, was often discouraged and eventually made illegal in many of the Southern states following slave insurrections (Aptheker, 1937). Fearing that literacy would prove a great threat to the financially lucrative slave system, whites in the Deep South passed strict laws, otherwise known as slave codes, forbidding enslaved people from learning to read or write and making it a crime for others to teach them (Rasmussen, 2010). Fears also included the spread of abolitionist materials, additional slave insurrections, and the ability to forge freedom papers and slave passes. These laws effectively placed restrictions on enslaved people's ability to communicate with one another, travel, and learn (Albanese, 1976). The penalties for enslaved people caught reading or writing were severe. Common punishment included dozens of lashes, jail time, amputation, and even death (Cornelius, 1983). These public demonstrations served as methods of deterrence to stifle any desire for education among enslaved people.

#### **Lily Ann Granderson**

Despite the inherent risks, both free and enslaved African Americans continued to learn to read and write, often as a result of the clandestine efforts of Black women. Davis (1983) detailed the efforts of one Black woman teacher.

Resistance was often more subtle than revolts, escapes and sabotage. It involved, for example, the clandestine acquisition of reading and writing skills and the imparting of this knowledge to others ... a slave woman ran a "midnight school", teaching her people between the hours of eleven and two until she had "graduated" hundreds. (p. 22)

The woman described here was Lily Ann Granderson, an enslaved woman who used the literacy skills acquired from her master's children to establish a clandestine night school for enslaved children (Haviland, 1882). She taught twelve children at a time, and when she imparted in them all the knowledge she knew, she graduated them. Granderson successfully operated her clandestine school for about seven years without being discovered. However, word soon leaked about her illegal class sessions. Although the law prohibited whites from educating slaves, she found no clause regarding an enslaved person educating other enslaved people. As a result, she opened a

Sabbath school in addition to her midnight school. Granderson grew to prominence as a result of her educational influence on hundreds during her lifetime (Hine & Thompson, 1998).

Although archival sources about the life of Lily Ann Granderson remain limited in scope, creative speculation allows us to read, interpret, and imagine her motivations and movements. It is clear, however, that Granderson envisioned education, and the paths it opened, as being worth the danger and risks. Granderson's determination to improve the lives of enslaved people through literacy is a testament to the dream of freedom and the hope for a better future she personified. She must have dreamed of Black people exercising social and political power, reading abolitionist materials, and leveraging their literacy skills to free themselves, which her students later did (Hine & Thompson, 1998). She must have dreamed of her students as adults, fully armed with literacy skills, equipping future generations with this powerful ammunition. She must have dreamed of Black children growing up to be productive U.S. citizens who led radical social movements. Granderson's practices of refusal, resistance, and agitation embody a freedom dream of education as a path toward liberation.

### **Mary Smith Peake**

Mary Smith Peake was born free in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1823. At a young age, she was sent to live with her aunt in Alexandria, where she attended a school for African Americans (Lockwood, 1862). However, after ten years, her schooling was interrupted when the United States Congress enacted a law that ceased education for free Blacks in the state (Butchart, 1996; Taylor, 2005). As a result, all schools for free Black people were closed, and education for enslaved Black people was outlawed. Despite the pause in Peake's education, she maintained a love for learning and developed a love for teaching. After relocating with her family to Hampton, Virginia, her teaching career began. Like Granderson, Peake secretly taught enslaved and free Blacks to read and write in her home, despite it being forbidden by law (Taylor, 2005). Lerner (1972) offered an explanation for why Peake took the risk of teaching Black people. He stated, "In the Negro's long struggle for survival, education was always a foremost goal, both as a tool for advancement and acceptance in the general society and as a means of uplifting and improving life in the Black community" (p. 75).

Early in the Civil War, the Peake home was destroyed when Confederate forces torched Hampton (Lockwood, 1862). Blacks worked tirelessly to rebuild the community, including fishing, gardening, farming, and construction work (Lockwood, 1969). Soon thereafter, Peake was requested to resume her teaching by adults and children, alike (Taylor, 2005). In 1861, under the shade of a large oak tree, Peake continued her teaching practice (National Park Service, 2020). The thirst for knowledge was evident as enrollment grew exponentially over the course of several days (Lockwood, 1969). The American Missionary Association (AMA) eventually hired Peake as their first Black educator and provided a cottage for her school (Taylor, 2005). Even as her health deteriorated, as a result of tuberculosis, Peake remained steadfast in her devotion to teaching freed children and adults. Rev. Lewis C. Lockwood (1862), a missionary commissioned to the area by the AMA described her resolve,

She exhibited a martyr spirit, of the true type. Often when she was confined to her bed, her pupils would be found around her, drawing knowledge as if it were from her very life. Again and again did Dr. Browne, brigade surgeon, who concerned himself for her like a

brother, advised her to consider her weakness, and intermit her exhausting duties. The scene of these labors was the Brown Cottage, near the seminary, fronting on Hampton Roads. The school room was the front room, first story. Her own family apartment was the front room, second story. It will ever be a place about which precious memories will linger. (pp. 34–35)

Lockwood's assessment of Peake clearly shows her persistence and commitment to the education of Black people; it likewise demonstrates the freedom dream she embodied. Her refusal to stop, creativity, and radical love for Black people is yet another example of Black women abolitionist teachers' ability to move beyond what legal, social, and political conditions dictate to create space for liberation.

### **Charlotte Forten**

Mary Peake's commitment to the education of enslaved and free Black people inspired other Black women abolitionist teachers, including Charlotte Forten. Forten was born in Philadelphia into a prominent, wealthy, and free Black family with a strong legacy of abolitionist activities. As a child, she often witnessed fugitive slaves given refuge at her grandfather's home, in addition to numerous lively discussions and debates around abolition (Taylor, 2005). At 16, when the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 threatened the freedom of escaped slaves and free Blacks, Forten was sent to Salem, Massachusetts, to attend a private school where she was the sole African American student (Billington, 1953). Continuing her family's tradition of abolitionist work, she soon joined the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society and became acquainted with many of the leading Black and white abolitionists of the time. Shortly after arriving in Salem, in 1854, she began a diary, which she maintained for a decade, offering a rare first-hand account of a free Black woman during the antebellum era. It likewise illustrates her freedom dream for education. On September 12th, 1855, Forten wrote,

Let us labor earnestly and faithfully to acquire knowledge, to break down the barriers of prejudice and oppression. Let us take courage; never ceasing to work—hoping and believing that if not for us, for another generation there is a better, brighter day in store—when slavery and prejudice shall vanish before the glorious light of Liberty and Truth; when the rights of every colored man shall everywhere be acknowledged and respected. (Taylor, 2005, p.132 )

After graduating in 1856, she began her teaching career in Salem schools as the first Black teacher hired to teach white students in the state of Massachusetts (Taylor, 2005). After two years, however, she resigned due to failing health and returned to her family home in Philadelphia. Throughout her recovery, she wrote poetry, much of which detailed abolitionism and anti-slavery activism. In 1862, she was back in the classroom, this time, in the South, teaching formerly enslaved Black people on St. Helena Island, South Carolina (Billington, 1961). She chronicled this experience in two articles published in the May and June 1864 issues of the *Atlantic Monthly*, entitled "Life on the Sea Islands." In describing her experiences teaching Black children, she stated,

I never before saw children so eager to learn, although I had had several years' experience in New-England schools. Coming to school is a constant delight and recreation to them. They come here as other children go to play. The older ones, during the summer, work in the fields from early morning until eleven or twelve o'clock, and then come into school, after their hard toil in the hot sun, as bright and anxious to learn as ever. . . . The majority learn with wonderful rapidity. Many of the grown people are desirous of learning to read. It is wonderful how a people who have been so long crushed to the earth, so imbruted as these have been,—and they are said to be among the most degraded negroes of the South—can have so great a desire for knowledge, and such a capability for attaining it. (Forten, 1864, pp. 591–592)

Forten refused the racist stereotype of Black people as inherently unlearned and inferior. She saw the beauty of her students, thought of them as fully capable of learning, and held high expectations for them. Her lessons not only provided students with fundamental literacy skills, but instilled in them a strong sense of racial pride. In her entry on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1862, she described one of her lessons.

Talked to the children a little while to-day about the noble Toussaint [L'Ouverture]. They listened very attentively. It is well that they should know what one of their own color could do for his race. I long to inspire them with courage and ambition (of a noble sort), and high purpose. (Turkel, 2009, p. 63)

Forten's freedom dream was not only about changing the perception of Black people among whites, but centered on Black people seeing themselves as inherently brilliant, worthy, and capable of wondrous things. Above all, her life was wholly dedicated to justice and liberation.

The stories of Lily Ann Granderson, Mary Peake, Charlotte Forten, and thousands of other Black women abolitionist teachers are filled with determination, commitment, love, refusal, and self-sacrifice. They embody a visionary politic, subversive pedagogy, and radical imaginary that dared to dream the impossible. They envisioned schools as being revolutionary sites and used their classrooms as spaces to humanize Black bodies and minds. In remembering her early school experience, hooks (1994) professed,

For black folks teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in anti-racist struggle. Indeed, my all-black grade schools became the location where I experienced learning as revolution. Almost all our teachers at Booker T. Washington were black women. They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers—black folks who used our “minds.” We learned early on that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. (p. 2)

Not only did Black women place infinite value on the power and progress of education, but they dreamed up, developed, and implemented elaborate plans of action to obtain it (Williams, 2005). The education they provided was directly tied to collective liberation with teaching strategies rooted in the mental, physical, and spiritual welfare of Black people. Their stories exemplify Love's (2019) assertion that abolitionist teaching is not a way to teach, but a way of life.

## **Our Ancestors' Wildest Dreams: Contemporary Freedom Dreams**

In what follows, we offer our own freedom dreams order to connect the thread between the past, present, and future of teacher education, in the belief that teachers must commit to a dream of education that is sound in theory and abolitionist praxis.

### **Damaris' Freedom Dream – Black Girl Poetic Joy as Protest**

Black girl  
age fourteen, 5'5", with deep brown eyes,  
head full of kinky curls, adorned with a flower crown.  
Representing and signifying  
the thirty-four Black girls,  
gone.  
Missing.

Black girl  
age fourteen, 5'5", with deep brown eyes,  
poet at the Schomburg Center.  
Seeing herself in Shaniya Boyd,  
hypervisible, yet invisible.  
No public outcry, no adequate news coverage.  
Saddened and enraged, she asks  
"When will America see me?"

Black girl  
age fourteen, 5'5", with deep brown eyes,  
reciting protest poetry about the neglect of  
America's Black girls.  
Fully aware that the white girlhood  
of her classmates  
won't ever protect her,  
or make room for her,  
Black girl.

Black girl  
age fourteen, 5'5", with deep brown eyes,  
successfully putting the specialized high school test behind her,  
now determined to enroll into that which is specialized  
schooling.  
Her choice,  
her choosing.  
A small chance  
of being saved,  
of being seen.  
Brilliant Black girl.



Black girl  
age fourteen, 5'5", with deep brown eyes,  
whose Black mother is  
adamant about education,  
with the hope that her own daughter  
will not go missing.  
Yet, fully conscious that education alone,  
will not save her  
from the violence that often awaits  
Black girl turned Black woman.

Black girl  
age fourteen, 5'5", with deep brown eyes.  
Not lost, found  
her voice on the very stage  
that Maya and Toni recited prose and poetry,  
in the Langston Hughes auditorium.  
Protesting with voice and pen.  
Etching Black girls into herstory,  
determined to make Black girls visible,  
in all their glory.  
Beaming, radiant, joyous.  
Black girl, being.

As I watched the country mourn for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor's murderers remained unapprehended. Reflecting, I recalled the lack of public outrage for the thirty-four Black girls who went missing in the District of Columbia in 2017. My Black girl scholars at the Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture, in New York, wrote and recited poems about the missing girls. Their memorials served as a daunting reminder of America's legacy of violence against the bodies, minds, and spirits of Black girls and women and how their lives are often disregarded. Having co-taught spoken word for four years at the Schomburg Center, I penned the above poem as a way to acknowledge the multiplicity of ways in which abolitionist teachers, of the past and present, communicate their lived experiences. Charlotte Forten was a poet, as was abolitionist teacher Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Hartman (2020) argued that Black feminist poetics is a plan for abolition, while Black feminist poet and writer, Audre Lorde (1984) professed,

Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (p. 37)

Accordingly, I use this art form to dream, hope, and desire. When I say, "beaming, radiant, joyous", these are my hopes for Black girls; "etching Black girls into herstory" as my freedom dream; and "When will America see me?" is the call for dominant culture to fully realize the humanity of Black girls.

In schools, Black girls are used to pain—the pain of being pushed out (Morris, 2016), unseen, unheard, unprotected, and misunderstood. In South Carolina, school resource officer Ben

Fields tossed a Black girl from her desk then dragged her across the classroom floor for refusing to surrender her cellular phone (Ortiz & Melvin, 2015). In upstate New York, school administrators stripped four middle school Black girls of their clothing under suspicions of being under the influence of drugs (Griffith, 2019). In Boston, an elementary school apologized for having a Black girl play the role of an enslaved person (Mikkelsen, 2017). The oppression of Black girls is ever present in the very spaces that should keep them safe. In comparison to their white counterparts, Black girls are six times more likely to receive out of school suspension, three times more likely to be court involved, and make up 20% of those detained (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Because Black girls are amongst the most vulnerable, teachers and teacher educators must commit to their safety and well-being in schools and actively resist the normalization of Black girl pain, hypersexualization, criminalization, and marginalization. Though joy has been theorized across disciplines, it has only recently made its way to education (Love, 2019). What would happen, then, if teachers began to share in the communal responsibility of Black girl joy in school spaces? What if we raised questions of pedagogy and epistemology as it relates to Black girl joy? How can it be embodied in school spaces?

The Black girl joy I freedom dream about can be found in Black women and girls' poetry, literature, and visual artistry; in the movement of our bodies when we hear a new hip-hop track; the way we wear our hair; and the way we dress to express our identities. The Black girl joy I freedom dream about is riddled with anti-racist therapy interventions for educators (Love, 2020), field trips that center our experiences, and pedagogies that honor the multiplicity of our ways of being and knowing. The freedom dream I conceive means that Black girls are no longer at war with an educational system that, for centuries, has been committed to erasing our herstories, showing us that we are not welcome, typecasting our literacies as ghetto or inarticulate, and policing our voices and bodies. My freedom dream for Black girls is not steeped in performative allyship because it's popular to be socially conscious but rooted in a soul-stirring resolve to dismantle systems that chronically murder the spirits of Black girls. My freedom dream includes educators who look like us, nurture our growth, and create space for sisterhood to take shape. This Black woman abolitionist educator's freedom dream is seeing Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Aiyana Jones, Tanisha Anderson, and Rekia Boyd alive and thriving. I dream of Black girls, being. Joy.

### **Amber's Freedom Dream – Hope to Break the Spirit**

It was a blazing, hot summer day in July 2013, two months after I moved to Houston, Texas, and one month until I embarked on my new career as a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. I sat by the pool, feet dangling, water splashing, music blasting, conversing with friends about the happenings of the world. Though this wasn't normal conversation for the celebration of a birthday, everyone was in anticipation of the verdict. I reassured my friends that there were mothers on the jury, and despite their race, assuredly, they would see Trayvon Martin as a teenager, a child essentially. After a few more laughs and a squelched argument, a hush fell around the pool as my friends and I eagerly awaited the announcement. Time seemed to move in slow-motion, as the words “n o t g u i l t y” poured from the juror's mouth. As I perused the area, I noticed mouths moving but couldn't quite make out the words. All I remember are the faces; the faces of disbelief, rage, and weariness. As I gathered myself into one piece, slowly rising to my feet, I staggered into the restroom where I wept. I travailed for Trayvon and interceded for his mother, his family, his classmates, and the

Black community. How could they allow someone to murder a child, with impunity? He was somebody's child. He was *our* child. The not-guilty verdict broke something in my spirit with the realization that even our children weren't safe. This breaking of the spirit wasn't in reference to the destruction of self-esteem, joy, or hope, as in the traditional sense, but a transformational shift in my thinking as a Black woman teacher. It ignited a fiery sense of urgency that fueled many Black women abolitionist teachers before me. It likewise necessitated a radical dream for the freedom of Black children.

Prior to Trayvon Martin's murder, I was indoctrinated in grit, resilience, "no excuses", growth mindsets, and other "educational gimmicks" (Love, 2019). I was inundated with advice from veteran teachers to build relationships with students, not for the sake of community building, but so students would want to please me and perform well on state-sponsored normative assessments. I was taught to follow the strict curriculum provided by the district and not deviate from its plan. I was taught to disregard the social, familial, and spiritual conditions of Black students, but how could I when my professional background prior to teaching was *soulcial* work? I spent the remainder of the summer dreaming, looking toward the future, and envisioning what I wanted my classroom, community, pedagogies, and relationships with students and families to be like, feel, sound, and look like once school began.

hooks (2003) talked about hopelessness as being the core of dominator culture. It is a tool to maintain the ideologies of imperialist whitesupremacistcapitalistpatriarchy, which normalizes violence and makes citizens believe that peace, humanity, and freedom is not possible. She suggested, "When despair prevails, we cannot create life sustaining communities of resistance. ... Our visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now" (p.12). Hope causes a radical breaking of the spirit, where cynicism, realism, and sarcasm dissipates. It snaps you out of reality and into something bigger. My freedom dream is centered on my hope for the evidence of things not yet seen: Black children truly being free.

I dream of vibrant buildings draped in cheerful reds, lush greens, and majestic Black. As students and families arrive at school, they are welcomed by ancestors through gospel, jazz, and reggae, symbolizing the start of a bustling day. Classes begin with James Weldon Johnson's affirmation of liberation and a communal greeting that offers appreciation for each person's presence in school, because Ubuntu—I am, because you are (Dillard & Neal, 2020). I dream of a school where Black brilliance is inheritance, joy is unspeakable, laughter is uncontained, and mattering is the minimum. I dream of a radical coalition of abolitionists: teachers, administrators, parents, paraprofessionals, and community leaders willing to sacrifice and lay down their very livelihoods for the wellness of Black children—aware yet unafraid of the risks associated with agitation, disrupting and abolishing unjust systems, inside and outside of schools. I dream of paper burning to ash, "knowledge of the oppressor / I know it hurts to burn / To imagine a time of silence / or few words" (Rich, 1974/2016, pp. 303–304); libraries filled with Afrofuturism, African folklore, poetry, romance, memoirs, mystery, and coming of age tales penned by Black authors; books that represent the African diaspora; books that teach the brutality and inhumanity of enslavement, *and* stories of resistance, uprisings, and rebellion. I dream of pedagogies of the spirit (Dillard et al., 2000; Ryoo et al., 2009;) grounded in nurturing the whole Black child, reclaiming humanity through radical love (hooks, 2000; Moore, 2018), beloved community (King, 1994), and collective care (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002); pedagogies that welcome students to be vulnerable, emptying the heaviness of their hearts and minds, and being filled to the brim. Schools without police, but as many social workers, psychologists, dance instructors, exhorters, and healers as

teachers, who allow the full spectrum of human emotion and bodily experience. I dream of the classroom as a site to strategize, mobilize, and organize; where students develop critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness inspiring active resistance and social action; where they “read” their worlds through historical lenses; interrogate canonical texts and answer questions of power and privilege; where every academic subject and teacher therein address white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, racism, and antiblackness, and provide necessary tools to combat their insidious nature. I dream of schools “where Black children, outside the gaze of whiteness and surveillance of white supremacy dream weightless; where Black radical imagination dances wildly into the night—quenching the thirst of yearning and learning, giving birth to becoming” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 436). I dream of Black kids, being. Free.

### **Our Collective Freedom Dream for Contemporary Teacher Education**

Contemporary forms of oppression, antiblackness, and white supremacy in schools call for a new network of abolitionist teachers. This contemporary movement is centered on the total eradication of ideologies, systems, policies, practices, and laws that continue to oppress and suppress the advancement of Black, Indigenous, people of color. However, much is required. It requires educators to be critically conscious of the nation’s history of educational inequity and the truth that schools were never created for Black children to thrive. It requires an understanding of the ways that racism is endemic to American society (Bell, 1995), and it requires the self-actualization that teachers have unconsciously, and consciously, perpetuated it. It requires teachers who are willing to place their power, privilege, and positioning on the line to dismantle oppressive structures that murder the spirits of Black children. It requires divestment in seemingly progressive, neoliberal reforms and investment in radically imagining what education will be once those structures are gone. It requires teachers to organize with communities of color and build local and state partnerships. It requires teachers to truly believe that *all* Black lives matter, and as such the well-being, safety, humanity, and liberation of Black children matter. The contemporary abolitionist movement in schools needs teachers who dare to dream of freedom.

It is our belief that the field of teacher education could learn a great deal from historic Black women abolitionist teachers for a more equitable and just vision of teaching and learning. Their approach should be taken up in this moment as they provide a model for an abolitionist ethos and praxis: resolve, creativity, imagination, immediacy, refusal, and liberation, all rooted in radical love. Black women abolitionists like Lily Ann Granderson, Mary Peake, Charlotte Forten, and countless others used their dreams to fuel social, political, and educational movements. The manifestations of their dreams set the stage for us to now radically dream and (re)imagine the future of teacher education. It is our hope that in (re)membering Black women abolitionist teachers, we acknowledge their ongoing, lifelong commitment to liberation and recommit to a vision of teacher education that centers education as a path toward freedom.

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