

Narrative of Curriculum in the South

Lives In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class, and Power

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IN THIS *JCT SPECIAL ISSUE on Narrative of Curriculum in the South: Lives In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class, and Power* of *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, we continue the dialogue on curriculum of the South with a particular focus on the power of counter narrative as a means to contest the official or meta narrative that often portrays disenfranchised individuals and groups as deficient and inferior. It is our intention that the counter narratives to be featured in this special issue challenge traditional ways of engaging in and interpreting curriculum research and affirm the significance of curriculum inquiry as a form of liberatory or radical democratic practice. It is also our intention that counter narratives help tell silenced and neglected stories of repressions, suppressions, and subjugations that challenge stereotypes of Southern women, Blacks, and other disenfranchised individuals and groups and encourage examination of the forces of slavery, racism, sexism, classism, religious repression, and other forms of oppression and suppression on life and curriculum in schools, neighborhoods, and communities in the South.

The articulation and examination of counter narratives continues to flourish interdisciplinary interest as evidenced in the works of critical theorists (e.g., Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996), Black feminist theorists (e.g., hooks, 1989; Ross, 2007, 2013), and critical race theorists (e.g., Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). One reason for the persistent interest in counter narratives seems to lie in their potential to illuminate the nuances of unjust, dominating, or hegemonic relationships. In their work “Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research,” Daniel Solorzano and Tara Yosso (2002) argue that counter stories, or those stories told by socially marginalized groups, have two significant functions. First, counter stories can serve as sources of survival and sources of political and cultural resistance for socially marginalized individuals and groups; Second, counter stories challenge master narratives of race and other intersectional markers of identity that promote stereotypical and deficit-oriented representations of people of color

(Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In the latter sense, counter stories can be understood as a form of talking back - a means by which marginalized groups can speak truth to power and, in so doing, begin the task of moving from silence and marginalization to speech and liberation (hooks, 1989). hooks discusses the emancipatory potential of talking back in the following excerpt.

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back,” that is no mere gesture of empty words, [it] is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice. (hooks, 1989, p. 9)

In this *JCT Special Issue*, we invoke the emancipatory power of counter narratives to explore issues of race, gender, class, and power in the U.S. South. We recognize that a study of curricula of place that builds upon previous curriculum studies work by Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) who argued that denial and repression of Southern racial history continues to negatively influence race, class, and gender relationships among people of the contemporary U.S. South. While Kincheloe and Pinar employed social psychoanalysis as a tool for bringing Southern denial to awareness, we employ the use of counter narratives to articulate and examine those hidden, repressed, denied, silenced, and misunderstood stories of the U.S. South that forestall work for social justice. We hope that the counter narratives to be featured in this issue will facilitate the survival and resistance of marginalized groups. Moreover, our hope is the examination of the counter narratives articulated in this special issue will forge pathways towards more socially just ways of being and interacting in the world. In his book chapter entitled “Considering Counter Narratives,” Michael Bamberg (2004) articulates the emancipatory possibilities of examining counter narratives.

If it is possible to delineate more clearly where and how discourses that run counter to hegemonic discourses emerge, and if it is possible to describe the fabric of these counter discourses in more detail, we should be able to make headway in designing alternative strategies to public, institutionalized power relations, resulting in more egalitarian reciprocity and universal moral respect. (p. 353)

The counter narratives of contested race, gender, class, power, and place are exemplified in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Douglass, 1845/2004), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Jacobs, 1861/2001), *Borderlands: La Frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1987), *A Voice from the South* (Cooper, 1988), *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Minh-Ha, 1989), *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (Anzaldúa, 1990), *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (Bell, 1992), *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (Kozol, 1992), *Their Highest Potential: An African-American School Community in the Segregated South* (Siddle-Walker, 1996), *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform* (Anyon, 1997), *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS* (Lather & Smithies, 1997), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), *A River Forever Flowing: Cross-Cultural Lives and Identities in the Multicultural Landscape* (He, 2003), *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Grande, 2004), *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the*

Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit (Archibald, 2008), *Race Is--Race Isn't: Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Studies in Education* (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999), and *Personal~Passionate~Participatory Inquiry into Social Justice in Education* (He & Phillion, 2008). The counter narratives are also demonstrated in Southern women writers' fictions such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston, 1937/1965/2000), *Strange Fruit* (Smith, 1944), *Killers of the Dream* (Smith, 1949/1961), *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970), and *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982).

This dialogue on narrative of curriculum in the South is originated from an exploration of the issue of place in *Curriculum as Social Psychoanalysis: The Significance of Place* (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991), continued in *An Indigenous Curriculum of Place* (Ng-A-Fook, 2007), *This Corner of Canaan: Curriculum Studies of Place & the Reconstruction of the South* (Whitlock, 2007), and *The Autobiographical Demand of Place: Curriculum Inquiry in the American South* (Casemore, 2008). This dialogue on narrative of curriculum in the South also occurs in other works outside the field of curriculum studies such as *Rooted in Place: Family and Belonging in a Southern Black Community* (Falk, 2004), *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (hooks, 2009), and *Necessary Spaces: Exploring the Richness of African American Childhood in the South* (Nettles, 2013).

This dialogue is further invigorated by the analyses of the South begun by William M. Reynolds and Julie Webber in *The Civic Gospel: A Political Cartography of Christianity* (2009), continues to emerge in *A Curriculum of Place: Understandings Emerging through the Southern Mist* (Reynolds, 2013) and in explorations on multiple intersections of Southern place--religion, politics, sexuality, race, education" in *Queer South Rising: Voices of a Contested Place* (Whitlock, 2013, backcover), *Black Womanist Orientations to Curriculum* (Ross, 2013), *A Quiet Awakening: Spinning Yarns from Granny's Table in the New Rural South* (Haynes, 2013), *Are You Mixed? A War Bride's Granddaughter's Narrative of Lives In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class and Power* (Janis, 2013), and *Reaping what you sow: Southern culture, Black traditions, and Black women* (Mikell, 2013), and *Exile Curriculum: Compelled to Live In-Between* (He, 2013).

In this *JCT Special Issue*, we feature 12 programs of curriculum research on lives in-between contested race, gender, class, and power in the U. S. South. This work, done by a diverse group of practitioner researchers, educators, and scholars, "connects the personal with the political, the theoretical with the practical, and research with social and educational change" (He & Phillion, 2008, p. 1). "The principal aspect of this work that distinguishes it from other work is that the researcher is not separate from the sociopolitical and cultural phenomena of the inquiry, the [stories] collected, [findings/awakenings], interpretations, or writing" (He & Phillion, 2008, p.1). These curriculum inquirers explore eclectic ways of engaging in activist oriented inquiries, telling counter narratives, and critically reflect upon their backgrounds, experiences, and values and the ways in which their personal histories, languages, cultures, identities, and experiences affect who they are as curriculum workers, how they interact with others, and how they live their lives in the South.

In "Lifting as We Climb: A Black Woman's Reflections on Teaching and Learning at One Southern HBCU," Shawn Ricks highlights abundant literature on the negative experiences of Black women faculty working within predominantly White institutions to call attention to the absence of literature on the negative experiences of Black women faculty employed within historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). Drawing on Black feminist writers to help her survive both the challenges of teaching for social justice within an HBCU in the South and

the negative consequences of revealing those experiences to the public, Ricks' counter narrative identifies internalized sources of institutional and interpersonal oppression as well as the historical mechanisms that have allowed them to persist.

In "The Other Side of Silence: The Look of Separation," Wynnetta Scott-Simmons critically reflects upon her experience as a Black women faculty member to challenge "the look of separation," exclusion, and suppression--"the look of a racial microaggression"--that "conveys a message of splintered racial astonishment and fractured cultural misalignment" in a racialized society. Scott-Simmons draws upon her own work on "self, others, and jump rope community" that explores the lives of four young African American women as they leave their culturally insular surroundings, Jump Rope Communities, to seek access to the codes of power and registers of language in all-White, all-girl, elite private schools during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Building upon the works of Critical Race Theory, Critical Literacy, and Black Feminist Thought, she tells counternarratives "framed on the fringes and in-between worlds" and "bordered by denial and determined access" to "highlight the devalued minority community wisdoms and the...silent struggled histories of African American women in academia. She calls for a courageous and creative move that transgresses "looks of despair and disappointment" to creatively build upon the funds of knowledge of "self, others, and jump rope community" to interrogate, critique, and challenge the meta narratives that marginalize, suppress, and silence disenfranchised individuals and groups, and to make "a stronger commitment to antiracist stewardship to thrive in silently carved out spaces in-between ropes moving into the realm of liberation."

In "*Nuevas voces en el Nuevo Sur: Latino/a Immigrant Youth in Georgia*," using the metaphor of roots, Lucy Bush juxtaposes her own roots as someone socialized into the knowledge and cultural traditions of the Southern mountains with the newly forming roots of Latino youth who immigrated to the South. Bush's article is a counter narrative that resists stereotypical representations of the uninformed and intolerant Southerner. Importantly, her story also counters the master narrative of the Black-White binary in the South. By focusing on ways in which Latino youth in southern schools are acting as agents of their own liberation, Bush's article brings much needed attention to the multiplicity of racial identities that make up the U.S. South.

In "Being Uprooted: Autobiographical Reflections of Learning in the [New] South," Qiana M. Cutts, Bettina L. Love, and Corrie L. Davis tell their counternarrative or scholarly personal narratives with the intent to empower other Black women in academia. Through critical race feminism, they challenge the "racial, dominant, hegemonic, heteronormative" representation of the Black women in the academia. They explore how they, three Black women from diverse regional and socioeconomic backgrounds with similar experiences of silenced places in the South, build up resilience to resist the marginalization, fight against injustice, and thrive in adversity in academia by forming a critical friends group.

In "Reimagining Civil Rights and School Desegregation in the South after 50 years of the Civil Rights Movement Through Historical Narrative of Holly Spring in Mississippi," David M. Callejo Pérez engages a curriculum study of place to explore macro and micro level factors influencing the specific trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Amidst the backdrop of larger socio-political changes resulting from civil rights legislation and the resulting violent racial clashes, Callejo Perez connects the local story of Holly Springs, Mississippi and the failed attempts by Black residents to garner educational change to broader issues of racial retrenchment and educational inequality.

Much critical and/or feminist research has called attention to the inherent power differentials between researchers and research participants and the ways that these power differentials can negatively influence the research environment (e.g., Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007). In “It’s a Combination of the Bible and What’s in Your Heart: Unresolvable Tensions and Contested Narratives in a Southern Child Care Center,” Allison Henward and Laurie MacGillivray enlist a bricolage of critical race theory, post structuralist theory, and feminist poststructuralist theory to interrogate and complicate their own interpretations of child care practices engaged by a group of African American and mostly female pre-school teachers in the South. Paying close attention to the influence of history, geography, and social class on human perceptions and behavior, the authors’ counter narrative serves as a critique of the master narrative of “appropriate child-care practices.”

How are we to understand the narrative account of a Black female educator, born and raised in the South, that contains few explicit references to race? Mark Kissling grapples with this question in “A Living Curriculum of Place(s).” In this lived curriculum of place, Kissling tells the story of Rosie Baker (pseudonym) a Black gifted education teacher from Mobile, Alabama, and the many terrains that connect her past, present, and future teaching selves. In telling her stories for Kissling’s inquiry project, Rosie made few overt mentions of race even though she was married to a White man (in a geographical region that had historically made such unions illegal) and taught school for three years in an all-Black, high poverty school district. In interrogating Rosie’s silence on the issue of race, Kissling interrogates his own complicity (as a White male researcher) in her silence and then engages in alternative readings of Rosie’s narrative that ultimately reveal racial openings in her stories. Kissling’s article is provocative in that it calls into question master narratives of authority and authorial subjectivity. His work encourages us to complicate notions of how we receive and interpret the narratives of others.

In “Am I Enough? A Multi-Race Teacher’s Experience In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class, and Power,” Sonia Janis explores her multi-race and mixed race experience of childhood, adolescence, college years, teaching and administration, pursuing curriculum studies, and working as a pre-service teacher educator in a predominantly White institution. She explores the spaces in-between race and place as an educator who is multiracial, or mixed race, and/or hapa (Janis, 2013). As she searches for language to portray the experience of people of mixed race such as herself, she has recognized that the complexity of situating oneself in predetermined demographic categories is uncovered as interactions in-between those categories transpire with misconnections and miscommunications. She particularly explores her “rememory” of lives in two distinct regions of the United States: the Midwest and the South. The shifting contexts complicate the interactions that she lives in-between race and place, and teaches her to embrace differences, contradictions, and complexities in schools, neighborhoods and communities. Drawing upon the works of multi-racial theorists, curriculum theorists perceiving curriculum as a racial text, multicultural theorists, and critical race theory, she problematizes notions of race, gender, class, and power and explores the in-betweenness of her life as a multiracial person. She also draws upon a wide array of methodological approaches to lived experience such as autobiography, narrative, and memoir, she attempts to transgress “monocultures of the mind,” to hear, to make meaning of, and to honor the differences, contradictions, and complexities of multi-race lives in-between race and place. She calls for educators, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to view the educational experience of students with multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual backgrounds by shattering predetermined categories and stereotyped classifications and looking into unknown and fluid realms of the in-betweenness of their lives to create equitable

and just opportunities for all in diverse schools, communities, neighborhoods, tribes, and societies.

In “A Critical Pedagogy of Place,” Qiana M. Cutts, who was born, educated, and nurtured in the South and has witnessed how race, gender, and class perpetuate hegemonic power to non-marginalized people, tells counter stories of her educational experience from K-12 to graduate school. As she composes those counternarratives, she slides back and forth between her innate connection to African culture and history and the Eurocentric view of Africans that is imposed upon Black students in U.S. schools. She challenges federal mandates for accountability that continue to impose on education with an increasing emphasis on standards, testing, and classroom pedagogies that push to “teach to the test” and “support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy” while keeping teachers and students isolated from the personal, social, and ecological dimensions of places where they live. To counter such a displaced education, she calls for a critical pedagogy of place that respects and honors learners with diverse educational, social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. She encourages students and educators such as herself in the South to liberate themselves from all forms of suppression and marginalization to act upon a liberatory and inclusive curriculum.

In “Memoir of A Black Female Social Worker: Re-Collections on Black Women Parenting and Parental Involvement in the Education of Black Children,” Jacquelyn Anthony explores Black parental involvement by re-collecting her experience as parent and social worker through memoir. Based on her family members and the parents and children she has assisted in various schools, she fictionalizes events, periods, and identities to protect herself and the people in her stories. Drawing upon the work of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, she highlights othermothering as a means to expand the notions of Black parental involvement in schools to provide a communal approach that supports Black children’s education. She tells counternarratives and raises challenging questions to disrupt the universalized constructions of Black parental involvement. She hopes that her counternarratives spark an imaginative activity that encourages policy makers, educational researchers and practitioners to look into Black orientations to parental involvement in schools to redress universalization, hegemonization, and silencing of Black parents’ engagement in their children’s schooling, to dismantle pervasive individual, structural, and political agendas and practices that negatively affect Black children’s success in schools and life, and to recognize how Black parents’ varying identities influence their perceptions and interactions with their children’s schools. This imaginative activity helps construct a dialogical relationship between the home, school and community that honors multiple ways of knowing about Black communal parental involvement that inspires all Black children to reach their highest potential.

In “Using Fiction to Research Silenced or Counter Narratives of Lives In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class and Power in the South,” Cynthia Mikell explores Southern cultures, Black traditions, and Black women with a focus on the life journey of one Black woman educator through racial, sexual, class, and cultural oppression to womanhood. She draws upon the works of Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Alice Walker, Patricia Hills Collins, and Derrick Bell. To protect herself and the characters in her life, she transcends methodological boundaries to fictionalize stories which parallel real life events. She creates a composite character to tell key life events and experiences using novellas and seasonal metaphors in her writing. Each novella begins with a prelude that introduces time, place, and setting and ends with an interlude that summarizes and theorizes the novella. The main character’s life is broken down into specific seasons: early childhood, teen years, and adulthood (relationships, teaching career, military, and

doctoral candidate). She hopes that her counternarratives of struggles, survivals, and triumphs would challenge stereotypes about Southern cultures, Black traditions, and Black women to foster a just and invigorating world for all.

In “Nappy Roots, Split Ends, New Growth, and No Lye: The Experience of a Black Woman Educator In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class, Culture, and Place in the South,” Michel Mitchell Pantin explores the ways that race, gender, class, culture, and place shape who she was and how she became who she is as a Black woman educator. Building on the works of Patricia Collins, William Cross, Geneva Gay, Ming Fang He, bell hooks, and Alfred Tatum, she uses Black women hair metaphors such as nappy roots, split ends, new growth, and no lye to comb through the phases of her life as a mobile urban youth growing up in the U. S. South. She transgresses methodological boundaries to fictionalize characters, events, settings, and time to protect herself and characters in her life to capture the complexities of Black girlhood, to provide necessary spaces for recurring themes of resilience, strength, and determination embedded in her stories. Although her inquiry focuses on her personal experience of race, gender, class, culture, and place, it has implications for educators, teachers, administrators, parents, and education policy makers to understand the identity development of Black girls, their cultural roots, learning styles, academic achievements, and highest potentials in schools and greater social environments.

In this *JCT Special Issue*, we highlight the counter stories of a number of educational practitioners in order to blur the boundaries between curriculum theorizing and curriculum practice. These educational practitioners share stories of awakenings that have inspired them to engage in specific curriculum inquiry projects. While the stories of these practitioners counter official or hegemonic narratives of oppression, these practitioner narratives also counter the general lack of visibility practitioners engage in curriculum studies scholarship. Our inclusion of this work is an attempt to blur the persistent theory/practice dichotomy in curriculum studies (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2006). In sharing these practitioner counter narratives, we affirm the significance of curriculum inquiry as a form of radical democratic practice.

We applaud with our hearts and souls that inquirers featured in this *JCT Special Issue*, in some degree, raise challenging questions, transcend inquiry boundaries, transgress orthodoxy and dogma, research silenced narratives of underrepresented or disenfranchised individuals and groups. They embed inquiry in school, neighborhood, and community life to transform research into positive social and educational change. They “exile voluntarily from the crazy and commodified world” (He, 2013) and work with underrepresented or disenfranchised individuals and groups to embody a particular stance in relation to power, freedom, and human possibility and to promote a more balanced and equitable human condition that embodies cultural, linguistic, and ecological diversity and plurality of identities of individuals, groups, tribes, and societies that is conducive to the flourishing of creative capacities that invigorate intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence for all.

We deeply appreciate that *Afterthought* by Professor Reta Ugena Whitlock, a highly regarded scholar in curriculum studies of the South, will invigorate more dialogues on narrative of curriculum in an increasingly diversified, complicated, and contested South.

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