Article

"What's Going On?": A Critical Race Theory Perspective on Black Lives Matter and Activism in Education

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Abstract

This article explores activism, education, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Using critical race theory (CRT), I analyze what this emergence of primarily youth-led activism means in the context of decades of neoliberal education reform. I raise specific questions about how youth-led activism, which has its genesis in and is largely shaped by social media, not only reflects limited robust mainstream discourses on race but also a failure of education, particularly schools and districts that serve students of color in under-resourced urban communities, to teach about and contextualize other historical movements for justice and racial equity.

Keywords

identity, race, Critical Race Theory, cultural relevant, social, diversity, racism, social, Black females, subjects, Black males, urban education, Multicultural education

The death of Michael Brown and the ensuing protests in the summer of 2015 in Ferguson, Missouri, a small municipality in metropolitan St. Louis, sparked a national discourse on the quality and value of Black life in the United States. The outrage over Brown's death, the circumstances of his death, and

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what appeared to many onlookers, both on the scene and via the national media, as the mishandling of his remains, exemplified how little value Black lives matter to the police, and by extension, the state.

The subsequent murders of John Crawford and Tamir Rice in Dayton and Cleveland, Ohio; Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; Sandra Bland in Waller County, Texas; Rekia Boyd in Chicago, Illinois; and a tragically long and growing list of unarmed Black men and women who were murdered by police during routine traffic stops or unnecessary interactions, gave rise to the now popular Twitter hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM), that has since grown into a national movement with chapters in a number of cities across the United States. This article addresses activism, multicultural education (MCE), and the #BLM movement. Using critical race theory (CRT), I analyze what this emergence of activism, primarily youth-led, means in the context of decades of multicultural curriculum and neoliberal education reform. I raise specific questions about how youth-led activism, which has its genesis in and is largely shaped by social media, reflects not only limited robust mainstream discourses on race but also a failure of education, particularly schools and districts that serve students of color in under-resourced urban communities, to teach about and contextualize other historical movements for justice and racial equity.

CRT and Education: A Very Brief History

> . . . education is an important part of the total picture of the struggle toward equality. (Charles R. Payne and Benjamin H. Welsh, 2000)

As the quote by sociologists Charles R. Payne and Benjamin H. Welsh reminds us, struggles for equality (and equity) have always included the fight for education. For African Americans, this fight for equality began in hush harbors during slavery with enslaved Africans learning to read and write (Anderson, 1988). In contemporary times, the struggle for equity is waged in city centers, not only to learn to read and write but also for the very right to attend a high-quality and well-resourced school with expert teachers (Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015). Related to this fight for educational equity are the fights for safe and affordable housing, gainful employment with a livable wage, access to health care, and rather ironically, considering the rhetoric of racial progress by many conservative pundits, protection from police violence. Legal scholars developed CRT to understand and provide interventions for these issues, especially as they affect the lives of people of color. The nearly 30-year history of CRT in the legal field and its usage in education is well documented (Crenshaw, 2011; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997).

However, it is important to briefly outline the roots of CRT, especially considering this article's focus on BLM.

CRT emerged as a response to the limitations of the class-only analysis by Critical Legal Scholars (CLS), who engaged a Marxist critique of U.S. *jurisprudence* (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996). While not abandoning class as an explanatory factor, CRT scholars believed that the law played a specific role in reifying (and was often responsible for) racial subordination and inequity. In education, and following their colleagues in legal scholarship, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that education policies and practices in the United States often contributed to inequitable educational outcomes for students of color and was a logical consequence of a larger inequitable social and political system that is premised on the subordination of people of color and people who live in poverty. Moreover, they argued that race was undertheorized in education. Twenty years after Ladson-Billings and Tate's initial publication on CRT and education, CRT has emerged as a full-fledged subfield in education that has drawn on and extended the CRT legal scholarship (Dixson & Rousseau, 2016). It is important to note that for both CRT in the legal scholarship and CRT in educational scholarship, a critical tenet is social change. That is, for CRT scholars regardless of their field of study, this study of race and racism, and theorizing on race is more than just an intellectual exercise. CRT scholars in both the law and in education believe that examining and exposing the ways that racialized inequity manifests and persists must inform social actions that can lead to social change. Thus, although CRT scholars in education typically engage CRT constructs to analyze an educational issue, policy, practice, or event to understand and/or theorize on why racialized educational inequities persist, the ultimate end, whether realized or not, is the fight for social change. That is, CRT scholars recognize that while racism is endemic in the United States, the fight for equity is a noble and worthy endeavor (Bell, 1995). For this article, I am operating from the premise that examining BLM as a social justice project aimed at social change aligns with the goal of CRT. My critique of BLM is how it functions as a consequence of an anemic public education system that has failed, or perhaps never intended, to engage in a substantive MCE project that was oriented in racial and social justice.[1]

Intersectionality and Black Feminist Theories

Gendered and feminist analyses are foundational concepts in CRT. Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia J. Williams, Regina Austin, Dorothy E. Roberts, and Linda Greene contributed a Black feminist discourse to CRT. Crenshaw introduced intersectionality to demonstrate how race, class, gender, sexual

identity, marital status, citizenship status, and other social identities often serve as points of marginality (Crenshaw, 1989). Scholars in Women's Studies employ Kimberle Crenshaw's analytical intervention to examine and understand persistent inequity for women of color, and identify it as one of the most important contributions to women's studies in the last 20 years (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008). The concept of intersectionality is important within the context of #BLM.

The women credited with founding #BLM have invoked intersectionality as a way of naming their experiences as queer women of color (Garza, n.d.) and demanding that as #BLM gains popularity, mainstream media and other outlets recognize and properly credit them for their contributions to founding the "movement." This notion of erasure of Black women and queer Black people from liberation movements has historical antecedents in the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Liberation Movement. Indeed, it is important that we recognize the contributions and perspectives of Black women and queer Black people as they not only helped shape movements for liberation but also represent and contribute to the diversity of the Black experience in the United States that is often portrayed as monolithic and homogenized. My concern, however, is that much of the discourse about #BLM, at least in the early phases of its "founding" and to a certain extent over the summer 2016, has been focused more on the erasure of the founders than articulating clear action steps ("BlackLivesMatter, Herstory," 2016). To be sure, #BLM clearly articulates its values and beliefs but has ceded the development of a platform to a coalition of grassroots organizations across the United States. While this may be in keeping with the notion that #BLM is grassroots in its origins, it is difficult to describe it as a movement. I argue, however, that #BLM's lack of coherence as a movement, in the sense that we have seen movements in the United States, is related to the failures of multicultural education and curricula to present not only accurate information about social movements in the United States but also the diversity and nuances of perspectives within those movements.

MCE Does Not Care About Black People

Roots of MCE

Education scholar, James A. Banks, locates the genesis of MCE in the social unrest related to racial inequity, anti-war demonstrations, and a growing labor movement in the 1960s (Banks, 1995). Payne and Welsh (2000) suggest that we can trace the "concept of multicultural education" to "2,500 years of arduous struggles for dignity, duty, equality, freedom and fundamental human

rights" (p. 30). While identifying the exact origin of MCE is irrelevant to a certain extent, understanding the origins of MCE within the context of its substance, form, and intent is important for the argument I want to make here.

Payne and Welsh (2000) critique Banks's (1995) assertion that MCE originates from the scholarship of W. E. B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson. They argue that at the turn of the century, White ethnic groups, namely, Catholics and German Americans, demanded that public-school curricula be more inclusive of their histories, perspectives, and languages (Payne & Welsh, 2000, p. 32). This point is important but does not negate the influence of DuBois and Woodson's agitation for curricula that was "culturally relevant" for African Americans. Moreover, it is important to note that this agitation for inclusion by Catholics and German Americans waned as they became subsumed under and adopted a generic "White" identity, whereby their ethnic identities became secondary to their "American" identities (Ramsey, 2002). Catholics, as a result of the sometimes violent protests that they saw as the pro-Protestant/Anti-Catholic focus in public schools established a national network of Catholic schools that all but conceded Protestantism as the invisible, yet prevailing ideology in American public schools. German Americans withdrew their support for German language instruction in schools because of World War I, the atrocities of the Jewish Holocaust, and the palpable anti-German sentiment that intensified in several U.S. cities (Payne & Welsh, 2000, p. 293). For African Americans during this same period and indeed for most of our history in the United States, however, agitation for curricular inclusion was the least of our worries. Access to a quality education was and continues to be the primary focus of African American education advocacy and agitation. Other marginalized groups, White women, Asian Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, and people with disabilities have waged similar battles for access and equity. Thus, while Banks identifies the 1960s as the primary moment that birthed MCE, Payne and Welsh remind us,

> One of the most amazing human accomplishments of the past two millennia is that the concept of human equality was kept alive in the face of world slavery; extremely powerful, tyrannical, unethical political and religious leaders; and world wars. (Payne & Welsh, 2000, p. 30)

Payne and Welsh rightly identify this desire of human equality as generally being universal, however, the way that the educational establishment has attempted to translate this universal desire for human equality into curricula that is inclusive, socially just and responsive to the diversity in American public schools remains not only disappointing, but also ends up being a simplistic rendering of cultural groups, their histories, perspectives and customs. Most of

what appears in the "official curriculum" (Apple, 1979) of public schools fail to adequately, if at all, represent with any modicum of the accuracy of the struggles by several historically marginalized groups, both separately and in coalition, to participate as full members of America's democracy.

The Watering Down of MCE

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) critique MCE as it was (and is still) implemented in classrooms as focusing more on a celebration of difference through the "foods and festivals" approach (Ladson-Billings, 1994) rather than a critical one, or what Sleeter and Grant (1987) describe as a social reconstructionist approach. That is, Payne and Welsh's claim that MCE has as its goal, human equality, aligns with the ways in which most schools, school districts, teachers, and textbook companies understand and interpret the purposes of not only MCE but also public education in general: a celebration of America's melting pot, or the current liberal cliché, gumbo. The metaphor of the melting pot or gumbo fits well with the prevailing colorblind ideology that people must shun their ethnic and cultural differences in favor of an amalgamated and generic American identity. In the abstract, this idea of a unified American identity is seductive; however, history reminds us that for people of color in America, differences are rarely celebrated, much less equitably incorporated into this fictitious and allusive "American" identity.

Schools do not operate autonomously from the milieu of their local and regional politics. The Texas Board of Education, for example has sought to rewrite the history of the United States by recasting U.S. chattel slavery as a "work program" and enslaved Africans as "voluntary workers" Fernandez & Hauser, 2015. While there was push back by university scholars and parents, it is significant that the official curriculum in the State of Texas is not only revisionist but also wholly inaccurate. Left uncorrected, this curriculum will have far-reaching impact on generations of students who will believe that American slavery was a benign work program for immigrants. Moreover, this distortion of American history serves a more insidious purpose of rendering all demands for equity by African Americans as unwarranted claims for special treatment and unearned favors. While this is a prevailing view by a particular demographic, this distortion of history in the official public education curriculum is now institutionalized. Texas is just one example of the complicity of a state board of education in undermining the social reconstructionist potential of MCE. Teacher training programs, both alternative and traditional, have also failed not only to adequately prepare teachers to teach in socially just and culturally relevant ways but also to offer them an opportunity to plan and implement an MCE curriculum that is social reconstructionist.

As a CRT scholar who has studied teacher preparation and teaching in urban schools and who participated in an alternative training program and worked in university-based teacher training programs, I have found many of these sites as contributors to the superficiality of MCE. In addition, in most cases, this superficiality reflects a reluctance to engage in a critical and substantive discourse on race and racism and its intersection (Crenshaw, 1989) with other aspects of identity. Thus, the shortcomings of MCE as a critical and social reconstructionist project reflects the unwillingness of teachers, teacher candidates, faculty, administrators, or in the case of Texas, boards of education, to engage in a critical perspective on what it means to live in the United States, not only for people of color but also for White people. Teachers and schools, therefore, offer an educational experience that is distorted and often patently incorrect. This reluctance obviously has an impact on students in terms of what they understand about the history of the United States but also what they can imagine as possible in terms of social change and living in a multicultural society. I offer a brief story from my teaching as a university professor to illustrate both the reluctance of teachers to engage in critical MCE, its potential impact on students, and what we as a community of educators may be teaching students about protest and social change.

Several years ago, I was a social studies educator at a large university in the southeastern United States. I taught the required social studies methods course to undergraduate students in their senior year of a middle school licensure program. As per my training at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, my orientation to and perspective on social studies was from a social reconstructionist perspective. I began the first day of classes with a lecture on the history of social studies explaining to students that social studies as a field has as its mission to educate students about what it means to live in a democratic, multicultural society. Thus, the curriculum in my course framed the study of social life in the United States by highlighting the experiences, perspectives, and struggles of the oppressed: people of color, White women, people who live in poverty, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, and religious and linguistic minorities. I pushed students to think beyond the master narrative that casts U.S. exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny as natural outcomes of an otherwise fair and equitable set of circumstances that just so happened to position White landowners as the framers of the Constitution and leaders of the burgeoning United States. I challenged them to find alternative explanations for the persistence of this hegemonic structure. We read James Loewen's (1995) Lies *My Teachers Told Me: Everything your American History Textbook Got Wrong* as a primary text, and I supplemented it with young adult literature and films like *Glory, Cry Freedom, Sarafina!, Billy Elliott, Rabbitproof Fence*, among others. The students in my course and

many of my colleagues had varying responses to my approach to social studies and the texts I assigned. One student, a young White woman, informed me that her husband did not approve of her reading the Loewen book because he viewed it as encouraging her to be unpatriotic. Because the text resonated with her, she asked for advice on how to respond to her husband's request that she not read the book. She did not want to hide the book from him, and withdrawing from the course was not an option since she was a semester away from graduating. Stunned that in 2002, a man would forbid a woman from reading to read a book and that she would consider abiding by the demand, I encouraged her to talk to him about patriotism and explain the Boston Tea Party as an example of unlawful behavior that ultimately worked out favorably for the founding of the United States and her citizens. I wondered what would happen when this young woman graduated from our program and was teaching in a school district. Would her husband insist on approving the texts that she used and assigned in her classroom? Given the perspective from which I framed the course, she was ostensibly trained to teach from a social reconstructionist perspective. What and who would have more influence? Would it be her training as a social studies educator or her loyalty to her husband's ideology on patriotism and propriety? Although surprising, this experience was not the most striking in terms of the ways that our failures to fully implement a social reconstructionist MCE curriculum affect our students.

I volunteered to observe the students from my fall social studies methods course during their spring student teaching experience. During one visit to a seventh-grade state history course, I observed a lesson on the Harper's Ferry raid taught by a White woman who was a native of the state. During her lesson, she offered the students a brief biography of John Brown and described him as biracial with an African American parent. I stopped her lesson and clarified that in fact, John Brown was not biracial with an African American parent, but a White male with two White parents, a White wife, and White children. Flustered, the student teacher apologized and finished her lesson. During our postobservation debriefing, I asked about her source on John Brown's parentage. She responded that she read it somewhere and thought that perhaps it was in her teacher's edition of the textbook. I pressed her to locate the citation, but she could not. I explained to her that it was important that she have accurate resources especially given the topic she covered in the course. In addition, she needed to further contextualize John Brown, lest students falsely believe that the Harper's Ferry raid was an isolated incident carried about by one man. In fact, John Brown was part of a coalition of abolitionists, albeit he was one of only a few who believed in violent insurrections. I believed that I had done the appropriate intervention and that my student had learned from her mistake. She apologized, and we concluded our

debriefing session. The next day, I was called into a meeting with the chair of my department and told that I could no longer go to schools and observe "our" students. The chair chastised me for "embarrassing" the student in front of her students.

What is both striking and illustrative about this incident is that the chair was not concerned that "our" student had, in fact, taught information that she had invented and was therefore misinforming her students; she was more concerned about the student-teacher. The student, it appeared, was also more concerned about being embarrassed than about teaching her students accurate information. Because I was also prohibited from going back into schools to observe, I was not able to verify that what we had examined in the methods course translated into their practice. Perhaps potentially more tragic than what this student did not learn professionally is that through her lesson and her misrepresentation of John Brown, her students, both students of color and White students, inadvertently would have learned that John Brown's fight for racial justice was self-serving *because* he was Black. Furthermore, rather than learning that Black and White people worked in coalition and that John Brown was part of a network of enslaved Africans and White Christian men who believed very passionately about racial justice and who would resort to violence to eradicate it, constructing Brown as biracial deradicalized his activism. John Brown's story, located within a multiracial history of the United States, more accurately reflects those moments, however brief, when both Blacks and Whites not only worked across racial lines to redress inequity but also viewed their activism as part of an assertive, proactive Christian project of activism in which they took up arms for their beliefs. The lone and violent activist narrative fits within a broader neoliberal narrative that privileges the performance of "peaceful" marches and protests that often fail to manifest in material outcomes and disruptions to the hegemonic structure that have historically prompted social unrest and violent protests.

These stories from my teaching experiences also offer a limited glimpse into the challenges of not only preparing teachers to teach from an MCE perspective but also the narrow and distorted perspective on history and the history of activism our students receive in school. If we multiply my experiences, some I have documented elsewhere (Dixson, 2015; Dixson & Dingus, 2007) by the hundreds of other faculty in education and specifically in teacher training programs, both traditional and alternative, I would argue that the experiences described here are representative. Furthermore, if the only information students receive about racial justice movements is that they were carried out by a lone biracial man, in the case of John Brown, or a violent and crazed slave, as in the case of Nat Turner, or a tired African American woman, Rose Parks, after a long day of work, we end up teaching students that there were

no righteous fights for racial justice where protestors worked in coalition, were trained in engaging in direct actions, had deliberate intentions to disrupt the status quo, and in some cases, were willing to take up arms.[2] Moreover, because we fail to contextualize and provide nuance to the struggles for social justice in the 1960s, and highlight King's nonviolent civil disobedient ideology as the only acceptable way to engage in protest, we communicate that all organizing against oppression occurs in a unified fashion with all parties in agreement about the process and the agenda. Beyond just presenting the muted voices of all the participants in the struggle, that is, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bayard Rustin, Elaine Brown, among others who have often been left out of the story of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, our pedagogies and curricula have either omitted the coalition stories and/or failed to even present the ways that struggles for equality have always been intersectional (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Crenshaw, 2015). Thus, what we teach students by omission is that there is *one* way to struggle against oppression and *one* agenda for change. It is with this context in mind that I attempt to theorize on the meaning of the #BLM movement within the context of urban education.

#BLM and Millennial Activism: "A Moment, Not a Movement"

> Movements take a very long time to build. (Angela Davis, 2016)

> We need to be able to distinguish between a dynamic movement and a press conference. (Adolph Reed, Jr., 2016)

By now, even the person most reluctant to use social media has heard about Black Lives Matter (BLM). Long before the infamous standoff with Bernie Sanders in Seattle or confronting Hillary Clinton at a fundraiser, BLM members engaged in organized protests primarily over police violence against Black women and men. According to their website, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi founded the #BlackLivesMatter Twitter hashtag in 2012

> as a call to action for Black people after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder and the killer, George Zimmerman, was not held accountable for the crime he committed. It was a response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society and, unfortunately, our movements. (Blacklivesmatter, 2016)

They expanded their social media activism to Ferguson, Missouri, when they sponsored the "Black Lives Matter ride" to support the protests when Michael

Brown was killed by Ferguson police officer, Darren Wilson (Blacklivesmatter, Herstory 2016). They describe their work as a movement, not a moment. Members have organized chapters in cities across the United States. There is one BLM chapter in Canada. A similar movement has emerged in the United Kingdom.

After criticism by conservative detractors and advocates of "All Lives Matter" on one end of the U.S. political spectrum and skeptics from the liberal-left on the other, two different organizations, that is, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), of which the Black Lives Matter Network is a member, and Campaign Zero, wrote policy statements that address public education and the eradication of police violence (Krayewski, 2016). While several media outlets have credited BLM with these policy statements, neither appear on their website. Thus, I think it is important to distinguish "the work" of BLM as per Garza, Tometi, and Cullors, and the projects that are led by organizations that may have been inspired by BLM. Both organizations, M4BL and Campaign Zero, unveiled these statements in August 2016.

The M4BL education statement, part of M4BL's "Platform," much to the chagrin of some education reformers who support the broader BLM network,[3] denounced charter schools, school closings in communities of color, police presence in schools, the eradication of Teach for America (TFA), and the Broad Foundation's school superintendent fellowship (A Vision for Black Lives, 2016). While the BLM Network is a member of M4BL's "United Front," they do not appear as endorsers of the platform (The Movement for Black Lives, 2016). Thus, it is not clear what, if anything, the BLM supports in the M4BL platform. The educational statement is laudable for identifying some of the most challenging educational issues that disproportionately affect urban school districts and students of color, especially African American students. The statements are bold in their calls for the eradication of what it identifies as an assault on Black people. Yet both statements and BLM in general reflect the limitations of how we as a nation understand movements and movement building. Primarily, these limitations reflect my critique of MCE for failing to live up to its mission of teaching us how to live in a democratic, multicultural, and socially just society.

Neoliberal Antiracism and Nouveau Activism

A lament and critique by one of the most prominent scholars on Black politics, Adolph Reed Jr., is that much of what is circulating in the mainstream media and on social media as left, antiracist political activism just naturalizes capitalist domination, or what Reed calls, "ascriptive hierarchies of worth" (Warren, Reed, et al., 2016, p. 2). For Reed, the agendas of #BLM, and other activist groups that rely primarily on "identitarian" politics, often homogenize "the

Black experience" and conflate it with what he calls the "Black professional managerial class." This is an important critique and one that as a CRT scholar in education, I take seriously as those of us who identify with CRT are often criticized for "abandoning class" or for putting "race over class." Reed's broader arguments regarding the limits of antiracist organizing in relation to general class disparities has considerable purchase in terms of CRT. Reed's critiques raise an important, yet understated (or undertheorized) perspective on class disparities as they pertain to people of color, and in the case of #BLM, class disparities among and between African Americans. Again, I raise this critique not to minimize the importance of how #BLM has sought to uncover the ways that the carceral state (of which education is often in service) serves as the enforcement arm of a broader project of an upward economic redistribution, but to remind us to be mindful of the nuances of race and class in this particular socio-historical moment.

Moreover, Reed's argument raises questions about how our organizing against oppression must be coalitional (Ball, 2016). While I appreciate Garza, Cullors, and Tometi's insistence that the media and supporters acknowledge their role in founding #BLM, it is difficult to build a movement and "do the work" while also trying to both create *and* correct the historical record. Thus, while we now know that Black women's labor was erased from or minimalized within the Civil Rights Movement, women like Ella Baker, Septima Clark, and even Rosa Parks did "the work" of building the movement, rather than insist on being recognized for their work. Hence, recognizing Black Queer women for their labor in liberation efforts is important and significant, but the recognition cannot trump the actual work (and outcomes). In this way, I argue that because our efforts, within a K-12 context, to teach about movements and uprisings against oppression have failed to represent not only the diversity within movements in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality, people who are inspired to "do" something do so with a concern about erasure that, in many ways, makes it challenging to do the work they believe is important and necessary for liberation and social equity. From my observation, the movement appears to have an incredible public relations strategy that has sought to ensure that Garza, Tumeti, and Cullors's names are always associated with it. Will this now be the strategy for grassroots organizing and advocacy? That is, will all women of color both develop an agenda for social change that includes a statement about its founding and a strategy to be featured in print, radio, and television? One can imagine how this may make "the work" that much more difficult to launch if one must assemble such a diverse and media savvy team of organizers.

As it pertains to education and #BLM, what exactly are we agitating for when it comes to educational equity? What are the outcomes of MCE that is

premised on social reconstruction? Do our children end their K-12 educational careers committed to participating in an economic and political system that has historically disenfranchised all but the 1%? Is gaining admission to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, or other Predominantly White Institutions a logical outcome of a radical social justice movement? How do we imagine, organize, and enact a politics of liberation that operates outside of, if not dislodges, a neoliberalism that ostensibly functions as both a political and economic system? In many ways, outcomes that suggest fitting into the status quo as equity and social justice are reflective of the rhetoric of education reform in the United States (and growing increasingly in the United Kingdom). Indeed, these outcomes, that is, entry into Ivy League universities and other PWIs, employment at Fortune 500 companies, and/or creating nonprofit organizations that attempt to address educational equity by circumventing (or in many cases supplanting) the traditional public infrastructure, reflect the rhetoric and commitments of several educational nonprofits and philanthropic organizations that have targeted communities of color as sites in which they engage.

To be fair, the M4BL statement names explicit strategies to ensure that families and communities have more control over public education. Their calls to end TFA and the Broad Superintendent Academy are perhaps the boldest parts of the statement as these groups not only have bipartisan support at the Federal level but also receive considerable financial support from the private and philanthropic sectors. Given the spread of what is now known as "New Orleans style" education reform (Anderson & Dixson, 2016; Dixson, 2015), calling for the end of TFA and Broad Superintendents Academy (Broad) is radical. In terms of urban education and school districts that serve primarily communities of color, both Broad and TFA have a significant presence. In New Orleans, both are major actors in school leadership, at the state and local level, and the teaching force. It is important, however, to also hold university teacher training programs and school districts accountable for training preservice teachers to teach in urban schools and utilize culturally relevant pedagogical practices. Similarly, the demands should also be to hold school districts accountable for providing teachers with professional development and the school supports that would allow them to teach in culturally relevant ways. Thus, if we are calling for community control of schools, eradication of alternative teacher and administrator programs, and charter schools, we must also have a vision and plan for curriculum, student outcomes that align with that vision and curriculum and teachers (and the training of teachers) who can teach in ways that support and advance an MCE that is social reconstructionist. These are important to ensure that students not only understand the history of movements and organizing but can also draw

on that history to organize and form movements that are coalitional and intersectional.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to argue that although the #BLM is commendable in its scope and reach given the short time that they have been in existence, the movement also reflects the limitations and failings of the public education system. I argue that #BLM in many ways reflects a failing of public education to fully embrace and implement an MCE that is critical in tone and social reconstructionist in nature. Moreover, I argue that public school systems have refused to present an MCE that engages inter-racial movements for racial and economic justice but, rather, dilutes them to the individual actions and agendas of crazed or lone individuals. This master narrative about social change and organizing is not only distorted but has also operated such that it narrows or limits the ways that marginalized and oppressed groups can both organize against oppression and imagine a liberation that is outside of the existing system.

In our educational organizing, we must demand not only structural changes but also substantive changes to curriculum with a clear vision of what it means to be educated. Do we want our children to participate in an inequitable system with the hope that their accumulation of the master's tools will lead to a more just system? We must engage in a politics that moves beyond demanding what appears at times to be more concerned that its organizers receive recognition than we are for the work and its outcomes.

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Notes

1. It is interesting to note that a vocal and active supporter of Black Lives Matter (BLM) in Minneapolis made a public statement denouncing the education policy statement and announced that he was breaking away from BLM (Randall, 2016). See also an interesting critique by Ed Krayewski who draws a very clear line between Campaign Zero, an organization founded by TFA Alums, DeRay McKesson and Brittany Packnett, the group responsible for the policy statement

on police violence, and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), the group responsible for the education statement (http://reason.com/blog/2016/08/04/movement-for-black-lives-releases-agenda)

2. I am aware that social justice is a loaded concept. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the history and critique of social justice as a concept. I am using the term as a shorthand to describe an educational project that aims to be social reconstructionist and equity-focused particularly as it claims to marginalized groups, that is, People of Color, White women, sexual minorities, religious minorities among others.
3. I am not advocating violence but rather making the point that significant change in the United States has typically occurred through bold and assertive actions by the oppressed. MLK's policy of nonviolent, civil disobedience is an example of the oppressed taking a passive–aggressive stance toward social change although they were met with resistance by opponents who took up arms.

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