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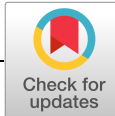
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# Mobilizing betrayal: Black feminist pedagogy and Black women graduate student educators

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## Abstract

This article addresses Black women graduate students' educational labor in higher education teacher training programs. We ground this reflective account of our respective teaching praxis in the educational betrayal we endured as younger students, connecting it to our engagement of Black feminist pedagogy. We illustrate how this praxis empowered us as undergraduate educators to implement pedagogies of equity and justice. Employing a structured vignette analysis framework, we draw on a Black feminist paradigm and Black feminist autoethnography to examine field notes of our teaching praxis. These two field notes, one from Francena and one from ArCasia, demonstrate challenges that emerged in our instruction of mostly white undergraduates. Despite the precarious nature of our political and professional positions, we discuss why working toward an anti-oppression praxis remains our ultimate pedagogical aim.

## KEYWORDS

autoethnography, Black feminism, Black feminist pedagogy, graduate students, teacher education

Sitting in my African American history class, I was inundated with a caustic sense of betrayal. Learning about Black literature, revolutionaries, and movements forced me to confront that my K-12 education had not provided me, a "high-achiever," with such integral knowledge about my people. With a

righteous indignation, I contemplated the gaping holes in my history education, which promoted this dishonest, distorted version of the past—one in which I was erased.

*ArCasia*

I planned to go to my high school library, sit in the stacks, and read Malcolm X's autobiography. But that did not happen. Instead, on this day, I closed my book and crossed my arms, tearfully searching the tiny African American section of our library—aisle by aisle—for books authored by Black writers. I could have gone to the librarian, but they trained us to find books by last name and I, an academically gifted student, had not been taught the names of any Black authors.

*Francena*

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

We remember the sense of betrayal. We remember where we were when we realized that much of what we learned in our K-12 schooling was only part of the story, intentionally so. The indoctrination recast as knowledge demanded our assimilation into and compliance within an oppressive system of inequity and injustice, one we were unable to recognize or combat with our traditional schooling. Rather than teaching us to think critically, our schooling taught us obedience, compliance, and memorization (Freire, 2005). These realizations occurred when Francena was a senior in high school, and ArCasia was a freshman in college. Until then, we were allegedly stellar students, whose education dissuaded us from critically analyzing what we were learning, what this knowledge meant, or whom it served. But once we began to carefully reconsider our own educational experiences and the omissions that severely limited them, we began to rethink everything around us.

These realizations fundamentally shape our Black feminist pedagogy (BFP), which works to in part expose and contest epistemologies that rationalize, obscure, and perpetuate the oppression-laden experiences of racially marginalized peoples (Henry, 2005; Joseph, 1995). We understand pedagogy as involving “the entire organization of practices between the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they produce together. This interaction can change consciousness” (Henry, 2005, p. 93). Therefore, we craft our pedagogies to account for the truths our education and its agents kept from us. Having both been raised in the South, we recognize our southern epistemologies also color our perceptions of our experiences, especially in the classroom—a contested site of knowledge production (Collins, 1986). Ultimately, as Black women and graduate student educators, we aim to help our students “develop a pedagogy of social action, advocacy, [and] counter-knowledge that challenges internalized ideologies” of white racial domination and subjugation (Freire, 2005, p. 134).

As a result, we seek to mobilize our betrayal to help our students, many of whom are white pre-service teachers, examine their education from a more critical set of assumptions that challenge racial oppression. Many of our concerns center on the education of Black children, a preoccupation in tension with the mostly white students we instruct. Our current students, however, will likely teach Black children, making our work both urgent and imperative. Furthermore, Joseph (1995) argues that “schooling in white capitalist America nourishes a system that helps to train/teach young white children to carry out racial violence,” and that schooling “instills its white students with a cultural imperialism and intellectual ethnocentrism, which fuels them with a white superiority that implicitly and explicitly encourages racism, sexism, and heterosexism” (p. 470). Thus, integral to our praxis are our efforts to disrupt this messaging by imparting what J. King (1991) describes as a “critical, transformative, liberatory education for social change” (pp. 133–146).

Despite the perils, we must navigate the contested, hostile spaces of the academy as multiply marginalized educators, who strive to center Black feminist perspectives in our praxis. Our marginalization stems from our status as Black women graduate student educators who remain well aware that “our very presence in the academy

critiques [and threatens] White patriarchy” (Henry, 2005, p. 95). Regardless, we must persist. In this, we are not alone, as

many people of color who become politically relevant teachers are motivated by their experiences with and conceptual understandings of social injustice. [Like us,] these teachers feel personally committed to and responsible for breaking the cycle of subordination in which they believe schools to participate. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, p. 705)

In what follows, we examine field note reflections from our time as Black women graduate students teaching mostly white undergraduates at a large, research-intensive, predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest. We drafted these field notes while teaching as graduate students. We illustrate that “Black-feminist pedagogy is premised upon the possibility of social change” (Henry, 2005, p. 100), is a “pedagogy of liberation” (Joseph, 1995, p. 467), and “rests on an epistemology that critiques American/Western education” (Henry, 2005, p. 91). Hence, this essay explores how our multiply marginalized identities and formative educational experiences influence our pedagogical orientations, considerations, and goals.

We agree with Evans-Winters’ (2019) assertion that “research faculty and theoreticians must acknowledge the marginalization of Black women scholars’ voices in contemporary qualitative debates” (p. 1). Her point highlights the significance of our work given that little scholarship focuses on Black women graduate student educators, their pedagogy, or tensions that arise from the racio-cultural mismatch between them and their students. Thus, we add to this small body of work (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005), thereby “blur[ing] the boundaries between research, theory, and practice” because we find it difficult, futile even, to disassociate the parts of ourselves that (in)form our pedagogy (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 2).

To frame our examination, we draw on a Black feminist paradigm that helps us explore our engagement of BFP (Henry, 2005; Joseph, 1995). We also rely on Griffin’s (2012) Black feminist autoethnography (BFA) by way of Pitard’s (2016) structured vignette analysis framework to examine field notes of our teaching praxis. These two field notes, one from Francena and one from ArCasia, demonstrate our respective pedagogical strategies toward an anti-oppression praxis. We conclude with implications that highlight the precarity of our positions and emphasize structural injustice in teacher education.

## 2 | BLACK FEMINIST PARADIGM AS A GUIDE AND FRAME

Iterations of Black feminist theory, namely Black feminist thought (BFT) and BFP, serve as our conceptual lens, which is also informed by key Black feminist autoethnographic principles as we discuss in the following pages. These perspectives are founded upon the simultaneity of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1979; Smith, 1983), and they undergird our teaching dispositions and wider worldviews.

For us, Black feminist theory represents a lifeway (i.e., praxis—the lived merger of theory and practice) that affirms and nurtures all parts of who we are as educators, scholars, and Black women more broadly. Specifically, Collins (1989) explained that BFT “specializes in formulating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African American women” as “the more specialized knowledge furnished by experts who are part of a group and who express the group’s standpoint” (p. 750). To mobilize the betrayal we sustained, we consciously teach using Joseph’s (1995) and Henry’s (2005) articulations of BFP, which build upon BFT, because they “invite critique and alternatives to traditional education by opening up new thinking about previously unexplored curricula; they also can advance new, alternative, and sometimes oppositional interpretations and analyses to help change students’ consciousness” (Henry, 2005, p. 96). We deem such understandings essential because “they aim to help students unmask the often-hidden dimensions of power and oppression in order

to envision alternatives toward the well-being of all humanity” (Henry, 2005, p. 98). Similarly, Joseph (1995) conceptualized BFP as one

designed to raise the political consciousness of students by introducing a worldview with an Afrocentric orientation to reality, and the inclusion of gender and patriarchy as central to an understanding of all historical phenomena. Political, social, and economic concepts introduced from a curriculum planned and taught by teachers possessing a Black feminist perspective/consciousness would introduce a radical educational methodological imperative. (p. 465)

Joseph (1995) went on to assert that BFP aspires to foster the development of all races of people prepared to fight for radical change in capitalist white America. Understanding these actions as crucial for social and racial justice, we engage this praxis.

In a similar vein, Henry (2005) argued “the insights of Black women teachers on the epistemic margins, teaching from critical and feminist perspectives at the college and university levels, has exposed the complexities of teaching in counter-hegemonic and transgressive ways such as trying to articulate alternative visions along with students” (p. 95). For our work with students, these insights speak to the ways in which we seek to support students in transforming their perceptions of the world by critically interrogating social and cultural norms. As with BFT, Joseph and Henry connect Afrocentrism with issues related to patriarchy and sexism; these associations align with other expressions of Black feminism, such as womanism (Walker, 1984) and intersectionality (Beale, 1970; D. K. King, 1988), by holistically theorizing Black women's lived experiences rather than reinforcing hierarchies of oppression (e.g., race over gender). These perspectives inform our pedagogies, helping us “not only challenge the content of what currently passes as ‘truth,’ but simultaneously challenge the process of arriving at that truth” (Joseph, 1995, p. 465). Exploring BFP via our lived experiences is facilitated by autoethnography.

## 2.1 | Autoethnography

Anthropologist McClaurin (2016) discussed subtle distinctions between self-writing approaches that we find helpful here, as we envision our analysis speaking to broader concerns that reach beyond our individualized experiences. She conceptualized autoethnography as “self (auto), collective/nation (ethno) and writing (graphy)” and further posited

autoethnography is dialogical in that it represents the speaker/writer's subjective discourse, but in the language of the colonizer. In speaking the colonizer's language, the “native” demonstrates her capacity to be both like the colonizer and unlike him. The term autoethnography has a double sense—referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. When the dual nature of the meaning is apprehended, it is a useful term with which to question the binary conventions of a self/society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective. (McClaurin, 2016, p. 64)

As such, autoethnography is apt for this exploration because our lived experiences ground our pedagogy. Moreover, our translations, as McClaurin argues, demonstrate our ability to speak to multiple audiences while pushing back on stifling expectations of the academy that work to pigeonhole us, our knowledge, and our praxis. Fortunately, autoethnography helps illuminate wider trends across Black women's experiences in the academy and education broadly, terrains on which we cultivate resistance strategies against domination.

## 2.2 | Black feminist autoethnography

Taking autoethnography a step further, Griffin (2012) argued that “autoethnography can be productively coupled with BFT for Black female scholars to ‘look in’ (at themselves) and out (at the world) connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 143). A formal conceptualization of BFA

renders Black women more visible in the realm of autoethnography. Such writing exposes, politicizes, and narrates the “subjugated knowledge” birthed from a standpoint informed by intersectionality ... BFA offers a narrative means for Black women to highlight struggles common to Black womanhood without erasing the diversity among Black women coupled with strategically “talking back,” to systems of oppression. Fusing BFT and autoethnography together necessitates an explicit commitment to move from merely looking at life toward a standpoint rooted in interrogation, resistance and praxis. (p. 143)

Deftly merging central tenets of Black feminism with autoethnography, this approach contextualizes and clarifies the importance of our realities and struggles as Black women in working to enhance our students' sense of duty with regard to equity and justice. Hence, we embrace BFA as a means to share and analyze our educational trajectories, teaching experiences, and thought processes as they relate to our positions as graduate student educators.

## 2.3 | Structured vignette analysis

Drawing on the aforementioned conceptual influences, we offer the following accounts as representative of classroom challenges we have confronted. To do so, we have adapted Pitard's (2016) six-part framework for reporting autoethnography: context, anecdote (field note), emotional response, reflexivity, strategies developed, and conclusive comments. She developed this analytical strategy because she felt limited by common narrative write-up models that she sensed were incompatible with the presentation of vignettes that “needed to be described in context without an overarching narrative” (Pitard, 2016, p. 2). This approach is fitting because “it allows an in-depth exploration of the researcher as a teacher” (p. 1), enabling us “to create a collaborative journey between the author and the reader” (p. 2). Leaning into the ethnography aspect of this model, we present our anecdotes as field notes, which we subsequently analyze (Evans-Winters, 2019). These field notes present salient episodes in our teaching that were jarring for us both emotionally and professionally. The personal effects of these instances square with Pitard's impetus for creating the structured vignette analysis framework, and Francena's reflection begins in a social justice classroom.

# 3 | FRANCENA: CHECKING ASSUMPTIONS AT THE DOOR

## 3.1 | Context

I teach classes dealing with issues of diversity and social justice. I was born and raised in the US South and my children and I are products of southern and Midwestern public schools. I earned my degrees from various public institutions. I share this information as a way to begin explaining both my positionality and my vulnerability as I entered and worked through graduate school and teaching. Furthermore, I employ an explicit Black feminist teaching philosophy, specifically as it relates to anti-oppressive education as explained by Jordan (1992), Joseph (1995), and Evans-Winters (2009). Evans-Winters (2009) noted:

The primary difference between me and the typical preservice teacher I come in contact with is that I entered the field of education with the intent of advocating on behalf of the oppressed, raising the critical consciousness of the marginalized, while at the same time fighting against the subjugation of my own mind and body ... I emphatically recognize that education can serve as a veil to oppression or it can serve to expose oppression in people's lives. (p. 149)

The specific course I analyze here is required for teacher education students and is meant to give students a chance to reflect on socially constructed identities—including their own—and their educational background through new and critical lenses. Most of our students are future teachers, but the course also meets general education requirements, so students from across campus departments regularly enroll. As is the case with most US teacher education programs, our student population is overwhelmingly composed of white women from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds from suburban areas. The graduate student educators, however, are mostly people of color (Evans-Winters, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1996). I taught this particular class of 30 students during the fall of 2016—during the height of the Clinton/Trump presidential election.

Each week, students attended a 1-hour lecture with a professor and a 2-hour discussion section with me. Typically, I divided students into groups and assigned them a reading—which they were responsible for synthesizing and presenting—and a date on which they would present. Students also had a community placement component where they volunteered for a community organization for a set number of hours distributed over the semester. The community placement component was designed to encourage students to see children as members of communities before they thought of them as students. These efforts were designed to give my students insights into the ways in which they were or were not parts of the same communities.

### 3.2 | Field note

I greeted my students with a good morning and asked them to sit at the tables designated for their respective community sites. Periodically, I devoted 10–20 minutes of class time to discussing their logistics, experiences, concerns, and how these connected to our course material. Over time, I became increasingly worried about my students' hyper-focus on controlling the children's bodies. Most of this focus centered on after-school programs with built-in playtime. When I asked them about their concerns, I got responses such as: "They're having a really hard time sitting still." and "They're loud." Upon looking at my notes and calendar, I saw that the next week's readings were clearly aimed at making students aware of white privilege while also making them comfortable in a way that did not require genuine challenges to their own perceptions of "bad" behavior. The student-led presentation and the class responses showed me that my students did not push themselves to think critically about white privilege. They tended to distance themselves from the conversation by emphasizing the degree to which the privileges they had existed through no individual fault of their own as opposed to how white privilege functioned to oppress non-white peoples.

This course and other courses like it are seen as "white guilt" courses by white students. Evans-Winters (2009) and Evans-Winters and Hoff (2011) define white guilt classes as diversity or "-ism" based courses that white students need or are required to complete while knowing full well that they do not have to engage the material or meaningfully apply what they learn to their lives. In short, white students often feel that these kinds of courses are meant to be survived as opposed to taken seriously. Although this attitude toward the class was not universal, it was pervasive. I decided to push their presentations further during the next class session in an effort to provide them with contextualizing information that might aid them in seeing their interactions with and beliefs about the children of color in their placements differently and that might give them reasons to critically examine their beliefs around white privilege.

### 3.3 | Emotional response

In initial iterations of this section, I realize that it was difficult for me to convey my emotional response in print form because I did not want to admit that I was not simply “troubled” or “concerned.” I was angry. Griffin (2012) speaks to the usefulness of acknowledging anger and the anxiety it can induce when “the angry Black woman” trope often serves to deny us our full humanity when she said,

Preparing to encounter my anger on the page, I imagine we will mutually feel unnerved, upset, and unsettled—perhaps even bludgeoned by my candor. Audre Lorde reminds us that angry emotions “will not kill us if we can articulate them with precision, if we listen to the content of what is said with at least as much intensity as we defend ourselves against the manner of saying.” (p. 147)

Several components angered me at one time. First, as a Black southern woman and an emerging education and social movements historian, a mother of three children educated in public schools, and the product of a public-school education myself, I knew what this focus on policing the bodies of students of color meant and continues to mean. It means that Tamir Rice could not exist in a park and play with a toy gun like so many other children have always done in the United States (Ohlheiser, 2014). It means that Dajerria Becton could not attend a pool party (Hauser, 2017).

Second, I could not be sure my students knew what their seemingly innocuous calls for, essentially, classroom management meant in a broader context. I found that my students operated from a set of decontextualized assumptions and stereotypes about children of color as inherently bad or wayward—in need of control. Moreover, I realized that I struggled with how the class was designed. In trying not to subject students to banking—a unidirectional teaching style where the teacher gives information and the student receives it—we were encouraged to allow the students to engage with the material in more conversational ways (Evans-Winters, 2009; Freire, 2005). Some things, however, needed to be explicitly taught or introduced because the students needed context that the readings simply did not provide. My students were also largely silent regardless of class activity variation. The silence was deafening (Ladson-Billings, 1996) because I did not know if it meant that they did not understand, did not care, or did not agree. I was struggling with what I urgently *needed* to convey in light of what the class was supposed to *do*. So much of what I had to do as a parent centered on repairing my children from the violence of seemingly innocuous and routine classroom management. Much of the work I had to do as a Black woman centered on remembering my own P-12 experiences that conditioned *me* to “sit still” and to not be “too loud” (Fordham, 1993).

I did not address my students' concerns or the readings' weak treatment of white privilege in the moment because I was frustrated, and I felt my thoughts were not collected or organized enough to provide an effective, impromptu, corrective lesson. Neither the class period nor the semester was long enough for that. As this class is often one of very few required foundational courses, I was drowning under self-imposed pressure to make it meaningful. In reflection, I was also terrified of pushing too far too fast and losing my job.

### 3.4 | Reflexivity

Adopting the BFT principle of using dialogue to assess knowledge claims, I decided to have the class work together to analyze the assigned readings for embedded assumptions (Collins, 1989, 1990). We started with a Huffington Post article by Jeff Cook, Director of Student Ministries and Community Groups at Tower Hill Church in Red Bank, NJ, entitled “Why I'm a Racist,” which he published on July 19, 2016. There were two major assumptions in his piece that troubled me. First, Cook asserted that “people of color (POC) have formed a thicker skin to the subject [racism] and are more free [sic] to discuss it.” Second, Cook referred to police officers (i.e., authority figures) as “... the people



who are meant to protect them [students of color].” In line with Black feminist tenets of using lived experiences for criterion of meaning and the notion of connected knowers, I shared some of my educational experiences in predominantly white environments and my experiences as a teaching assistant at a PWI as symbolic vehicles to explain how the article’s first assumption is not necessarily true because POCs are not more “free to discuss” racism; rather, studying, analyzing, and critiquing racist systems and structures is a survival imperative (Collins, 1989, 1990). There was nothing easy about disclosing my lived experiences to audiences that often look nothing like me and in spaces where it is easy to mark me as an exception while holding tightly to stereotypical, misinformed views about Black people writ large. And because teaching assistants are not protected by tenure, my very livelihood was at stake when I entered these classrooms. Discussing racialized experiences and issues—often with students who have never *had* to discuss them—placed me in an incredibly vulnerable position.

Grounded in history, I referred to the Black Codes to dispute the article’s second assumption, which situated police officers as authority figures who are meant to protect communities and the individuals therein (Joseph, 1995). After explaining that police are often used to enforcing white supremacist aims (e.g., enslavement, hyper-criminalization, and imprisonment), we revisited whether students of color, particularly Black students, can assume that the police, and by extension any state authority figure, is “there to protect them” or if the authority figure can assume that they should be seen as a protector. Slowly, my students picked up on the theme of policing Black bodies across time and space. I was thrilled!

Two weeks later, I invited a fellow doctoral student whose work examined the hyper-policing of Black students and the school as a carceral space to guest lecture. While he was speaking, it occurred to me that a relatively current event got right to the heart of what had been bothering me all along. Students who exist in classrooms where their teachers are more attuned to disciplining them than teaching or engaging them are often at risk of being harmed for any perceived slight to authority. Most of the students in my class were white women who would end up teaching students of color for at least some portion of their careers. I decided to pull up an account of the 2015 Spring Valley High School case where Deputy Ben Fields assaulted a Black female student in a classroom. I called their attention to a still picture of one of several videos recorded by students. The class recognized the scene. School resource officer, Ben Fields, body slammed 16-year-old Shakara to the floor after the teacher called for assistance removing her from the classroom for being “disruptive” and/or not putting her cell phone away in class (Moore & Silverstein, 2015).

I asked my students if they were familiar with what happened in that classroom on that day. They all said that they were. I asked them if they knew how the resource officer got into the classroom. They grew quiet. I asked if they knew who called the resource officer. Still silence. I asked them if they thought having a cell phone out during class warranted being body slammed and dragged out of the class. I asked them if they understood that the teacher in that room was also hyper-focused on discipline. I asked them what might explain why a student who was new to her school might risk harm to keep her cell phone. Silence. Together, the doctoral student and I explained that teachers are often the conduits between their students and the police and that—far too often—relatively normal childhood or teen behavior results in students of color, particularly Black students, being suspended or physically harmed by the “people who are meant to protect them.”

### 3.5 | Strategies developed

I am not sure what I wanted or needed my students to say or if I needed them to say anything at all. Ladson-Billings (1996) and Evans-Winter and Hoff (2011) critically examine and urge further critical examination of white student silence in teacher education programs. My way of carefully going through the readings for assumptions, probing those assumptions, and inviting speakers who specialize in issues surrounding the assumptions were effective ways to stop and take stock of what was happening both in class and at my students’ community sites.

### 3.6 | Conclusive comments

I was nervous preparing for and sharing the information for the two class sessions. The 2016 election took place between my assumptions lecture and my guest speaker. The classroom atmosphere shifted from a tentative lukewarm to ice cold within the span of a week. I could not be sure if the seemingly heavier silences were because my students were more emboldened to reject my teaching than before the election, or if they did not want to or could not respond. This was not an easy topic for me to address, and I imagine it was difficult for my students to read, hear, or engage the material. I suppose I needed them to know something of how vital it was that they begin to think differently about the children in their community sites and the students in their future classrooms while also examining themselves as community members, students, and future educators. While students remain silent for a myriad of reasons, I could have extended the reach of my work by assigning a written critical reflection that required them to more deeply engage their hyper-interest in controlling the children in their respective sites' bodies and their hypo-interest in engaging white privilege scholarship or conversations.

I further realized that my anger and my feeling and fear of betrayal was less about my pre-service teaching students and more about the systemic design of both teacher education and, more broadly, higher education. More often than not, pre-service teachers are set up for failure in terms of courses like the one I discuss in this essay. University and college administrators and professors assume that our predominantly white students cannot handle "too much at once." This coddling abuts their future students' of color experiences living the very realities that are considered "too much." Here, "too much" refers to explicit discussions of the historical, social, political, and material underpinnings and consequences of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, xenophobia, etc. I am a student-centered educator, but I struggle with how to best facilitate consciousness raising in my pre-service teaching students with the ultimate goal of providing their future students a better P-12 education than the one I received. With a similar set of goals, ArCasia's experience and frustration with inciting consciousness raising unfolded in an educational foundations course.

## 4 | ARCASIA: CHEAT CODES FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

### 4.1 | Context

I taught an educational foundations course open to all undergraduates because it satisfied general education requirements, and most of the students were aspiring prospective teachers. Students met in a professor-led lecture twice a week for 1 hour with approximately 100 of their classmates; I taught 20 of these students in a smaller section once a week for 2 hours. My students were disproportionately white, middle to upper middle class, and had been raised in affluent suburbs; their background starkly contrasted my Black southern working-class one. Of the more than 100 students I have taught, about 10 have been students of color, and 6 of them identified as Black. This teaching context was strikingly different than that with which I am familiar. In prior experiences, I taught virtually all students of color of which Black students constituted the majority. Likewise, with the exception of part of elementary school, my K-12 education has been at public schools, where students of color were in the numerical majority; however, my status as an honors student often meant that I did not often see or interact regularly with my peers of color.

This educational foundations course concentrated in part on inequality and inequity in education. Students' assigned readings covered topics such as school (de)segregation, assimilation, academic tracking, and the consequences of class stratification on schooling. Chiefly, we encouraged students to think about how these issues would affect their teaching philosophy from primarily philosophical and historical perspectives.

Throughout the course, I watched my students work through the meaning of these educational problems, as they wrestled with related consequences for their careers as future educators and concerned citizens. Many of

their concerns centered on issues of race, racism, and the simultaneity of oppression likely because those are the topics on which I am most focused as a scholar and practitioner. However, at times, their identities as Midwestern, white, middle to upper middle-class persons from the suburbs undermined their capacity to critically engage said issues. This difficulty was heightened by their incessant requests for concrete, clear-cut solutions to the issues we unpack in class. They expressed a desire to receive from me action-steps—a script of sorts—that would ensure they did not commit the same racist wrongs of the past. Seeking pointed instructions to teach against the racial injustice built into the very institutions of which they are training to become a part, my students' calls hindered them from enacting the autonomy demanded of self-aware citizens, who understand the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992) and its relationship to other interlocking forms of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1979; Smith, 1983).

I designed our class according to BFT, which demands meaningful dialogue to validate knowledge claims, engagement of personal accountability ethics, and rigorous engagement with concrete experiences (Collins, 1989, 1991). These criteria required that we spent time working through texts' central assumptions and employing concrete, marginalized perspectives to test them. Students typically used these exercises as an opportunity to raise questions reflecting their concern for the state of society and the plight of racially oppressed groups. It is during these conversations that cognitive dissonance set in, and my hope was to leave students in this place as they departed so they could reckon with the new understandings they were building. This discomfort and the process of their working through it taught them valuable and necessary lessons I could not. Their demands for ways to avoid perpetuating educational injustice regularly dominated the final minutes of our time together each week.

## 4.2 | Field note

When discussing Oakes' (1985) study of academic tracking, my students found many points salient given her emphasis on how racism was embedded within schools' tracking system. To this point and as an emerging historian of African American education and educational policy, I reminded them of tracking's role in furthering school segregation in nominally desegregated schools. During this particular week toward the close of the semester, some students' pleas were pronounced for specific, actionable steps they could implement to prevent racial subjugation in their own classrooms. As we proceeded with our discussion, most students offered contributions that underscored their urgent desire for ways to mitigate and, hopefully, completely avoid reinforcing the status quo of racism in their own educational praxis.

Quickly moving from comments revealing their disconcertion to questions about exactly what they should do, many students grew highly troubled and frantic. One more vocal student asked, "How do we make sure we're not feeding into this system, too? What power do we have as teachers to fight against these forces that have been here for so long?" Their classmates responded with questions echoing similar sentiments. My attempts to reply were futile, as I waffled between offering concrete examples of ways I had navigated comparable circumstances as a middle school teacher and scolding them for wanting another's solution to specific problems they might face. Their urgent need for explicit methods (Bartolome, 1994) manifested in what felt to me like unproductive chaos, and this back and forth is how we ended our time together.

## 4.3 | Emotional response

In the moment, I felt incredibly flustered and inadequate because I sensed I was unable to provide my students with the information they were seeking. Despite my best efforts to shape class along key Black feminist considerations, offering my concrete experiences was insufficient, and their refusal of personal accountability enraged me. I clearly

had not anticipated their pleas. My feelings were further complicated by the appreciation I wanted to show for their racial justice concerns. I thought my best recourse was to respond affirmatively to their attempts to be socially just educators, for if not, they might be inclined to slip back into the neoliberal logics that order education and schooling (Lipman, 2011).

#### 4.4 | Reflexivity

As I reflected more deeply on our discussion, I realized I was frustrated due to my students' pressing demand for solutions—for ways to fix structural issues that they did not take the time to think through themselves and that they lacked specific context to fully understand. Although I was thankful that they were searching for best practices to challenge racism in the classroom, I was simultaneously miffed by their assumption that they, as individual educators, could secure a how-to manual for enacting educational justice in their future classrooms. They assumed this task was my job, which troubled me. Women of color have long lamented about how common this tendency is, being expected to serve as a bridge to white folks' understanding of racial and gender oppression (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Expectation held that I, as a Black woman, ought to set aside my feelings and politely correct and instruct them, so as not to provoke white guilt or shame; I soon realized that their pleas tracked with a long history of Black women being asked the same (J. King, 1991).

Soon, it became clear that I was upset because I felt my students were fixating too much on prevention strategies before stopping to understand what the specific problems were and why they existed. Their collective obstinacy against applying key BFT considerations deeply disturbed me, for my students refused to sit in the critical contemplation necessary to more fully understand the many manifestations of racial injustice. They just wanted (my) answers; they wanted someone else; in this case, me; to do the hard work for them—or so it felt! Betrayal was once again staring me in the face—but this time, rather than omitting whole swaths of history and literature, it was characterized by an attempted betrayal of the process one undergoes to become a racially just educator due to the belief that problems could be circumvented rather than worked *through*.

My frustration stems from the work I know should go into raising one's consciousness and becoming more aware of interlocking systems of oppression. Clearly, my students were not working from a set of critical assumptions that enabled them to question *what*, *why*, and *how*. At the moment, I did not realize this was why I was frustrated; this realization came later when I reflected back on our discussion, how it ended, and how it made me feel. It upset me that my students seemed to want to absolve themselves of the responsibility that comes with living a racially just praxis in that they were requesting someone else's antidote. This request reflected the blame they could level should the prescribed remedy prove ineffective.

My negative feelings about my students' questions, responses, and expectations stem from my own consciousness-raising journey. As Black feminism came to contour my sense of social and racial justice, I employed self-reflexive contemplation that helped me reinterpret my life through the critical lenses I was cultivating (Collins, 1989, 1990). My own concrete experiences formed the foundation of my perspective, and rethinking these in light of Black feminism was sobering yet liberating for me.

The role of dialogue in the process, as BFT stresses, is integral; this dialogue, however, functions as simply one part of the process toward learning to notice and understanding the ubiquity of racial oppression (Collins, 1989, 1990). My students helped me see that they understood this phase to be the full extent of consciousness raising. Revisiting my own concrete experiences through dialogue transformed me, and this is the step I was witnessing my students forego. For me, this bypass represented another betrayal.

After reflecting on my own process of awakening, I realized that my frustration came from my observation that my students were trying to shortchange the consciousness-raising process, thus stunting their intellectual growth and doing a disservice to their future students. The assumptions on which my students based their questions indicated that they had not yet accepted that there are no cheat codes for educational justice; that no one can do

this work for another. As schools are microcosms for society, racial oppression manifests in complicated yet evident ways that are shaped by social forces seeking to reproduce the status quo (Bell, 1992). This observation saddened and angered me largely because I had tried to structure our class to facilitate their awareness and acceptance of these truths.

#### 4.5 | Strategies developed

From that point forward, I offered a point of clarification at the beginning of each discussion meeting, stressing that our time would be dedicated to raising critical questions and trying to deconstruct dominant ideologies around the systemic racial oppression that upheld them. This clarification point included a disclaimer that stressed the complex nature of racial oppression, which they could not magically undo. I stressed that opting-out of thinking for one's self violates the knowledge-validation process, which ought to be informed by the rich context and specific needs of their future school communities, whom they did not yet know. I explained how opting-out in this way serves to absolve individuals from the accountability required in the process of becoming more socially and racially aware. I realized that in order to guide my students in rejecting dominant, racist epistemologies and replacing them with Black feminist ones, I had to be more explicit and model the dialogue necessary for such. Albeit late, I was fortunate to witness growth in many of my students over the course of the remainder of the semester. Nevertheless, I could have done more to foster their development by assigning readings, podcasts, or documentaries that interrogate similar issues, designing response essay opportunities or inviting specialized guest speakers.

#### 4.6 | Conclusive comments

Although many of my students had done relatively well in the course by satisfying key objectives, I was surprised that my challenging their desire for my solutions to racial injustice would unnerve me as much as it did. Wanting them to take racial oppression seriously and realize how significantly it shapes the lives of racially marginalized folks took precedence, so much so that my students ended up being hyper-concerned about how to make society better before understanding how conditions had become what they were or hearing firsthand from the educational communities enduring subjugation. Introducing to them pervasively racist issues in schools, I hoped to set them on a more promising path to sit longer in their urgency and panic—sentiments that spurred my sense of betrayal and mirrored my entry into anti-oppression praxis. I resolved that if my students were to develop a sense of betrayal at all, I wanted theirs, unlike mine, to be rooted in their aversion to discomfort, nuance, and contingencies; I wanted them to feel deceived by their assumptions that an instructor can teach one how to humanize the racially marginalized other and that they could redress educational problems without talking to or hearing from the educational communities experiencing them. In this process, I have come to realize that their yearning to know exactly what to do often obstructs their understanding why they must ask that question at all.

I learned to respond, provide disclaimers, be transparent, and set clearer parameters, but I remain unsure that I made the correct decision. Too, I learned that naming issues as they arise and explicitly underlining the prevailing worldviews they represent is integral to this work and my BFP; doing so opens possibilities for helping students construct new ways of knowing and, thus, new ways of being. Pressing my students to center the marginalized other, work toward racial equity, and seek out and value diverse community perspectives helped me refine my commitment to BFP. Thinking more critically through the rampant desire for simple, decontextualized answers to pressing social and racial issues—for cheat codes—is work I must continue to do.

## 5 | IMPLICATIONS

In fighting to create pedagogical conditions inhospitable to the betrayal and miseducation we weathered as students, we encountered challenges. Henry (2005) well characterized our educational tribulations in positing that “students from oppressed and marginalized social groups are denied the right to learn about their own cultures from critical, informed perspectives” (p. 93); instead, our (mis)education reinforced the alleged superiority of whiteness, inferiority of Blackness, and misogyny, contempt for Black women (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). Nevertheless, our concrete experiences dictated our pedagogy, enabling both our knowledge and wisdom as Black women to drive our classroom decisions.

Saliently describing a source and consequence of our betrayal, Henry (2005) observed that “the distortions and omissions of traditional curricula [and schooling writ large] not only damage Black people (by omission of their contributions, perspectives, and issues of concern to them), they also damage all people” (p. 96). It is with this contention that we prepare our mostly white students, especially those intending to become educators, to resist in their pedagogy perpetuating the status quo of “imperialist white supremacist capitalist [hetero]patriarchy” (hooks, 2003, p. 1).

While we fully acknowledge the privileges that come with our classes centering on social justice, giving us the flexibility to capitalize on its importance, this detail does not nullify the obstacles we must endure as extensions of higher education's neoliberal project (Giroux, 2010; Joseph, 1995). To this point, “one has to critically examine the discourses of diversity, critical pedagogy, and social justice ... [that may be] still anchored in traditional dominant narratives”; these strongholds compel one to “interrogate how power is created and sustained through texts and ideas” (Henry, 2005, p. 97). Such critical examination and interrogations of power elucidate that the educational system responsible for, perhaps differently, miseducating and betraying our students and ourselves must be held to account and transformed. Neglecting to do so risks miseducating the Black and other historically underserved children for whom we ultimately teach.

The precarious nature of our position as graduate student educators warrants special attention from a research and epistemological standpoint, as this status raises specific considerations that impact the learning experiences of myriad undergraduate students across the country. Our inability to independently design syllabi motivates us to find ways to innovatively supplement student learning. Nevertheless, a lack of job security and the concomitant anxiety that this reality invites simultaneously constrains our pedagogy. With BFP as our guide, however, we have made and continue to make difficult pedagogical decisions that provoke “visible signs of being uncomfortable” as students ruminate in “silent ... discontent” (Joseph, 1995, p. 470). We maintain that this discomfort, however, is necessary for consciousness raising, which is integral to “the liberation of humankind” (Joseph, 1995, p. 467).

## 6 | CONCLUSION

By Francena integrating critical voices to contest dominant epistemologies that expose and challenge anti-Blackness and ArCasia stressing that the journey to develop a racial justice praxis is a singular one, we offer these pedagogical approaches as a testament to our trying to do better because we now know better. As Evans-Winters and Hoff (2011) remind us, “many Black professors (or educators more broadly), like us, are points of entry in the struggle for racial equity in programs of education” (p. 464). These considerations inform our hope that our students' awareness empowers them to prioritize social and racial justice in their pedagogy. Chiefly, our wish is that our mostly white students challenge the anti-Blackness in education we helped them notice, bringing us all closer to the freedom and justice toward which we are struggling.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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