

JOLLE@UGA[®]

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

The Black Literacies of Urban High School Youth Countering Antiracism in the Context of Neoliberal Multiculturalism

Justin A. Coles, Ph.D.

Abstract: In this article, I examine how the permanent structure of antiracism has been invisibilized by neoliberal multiculturalism. Neoliberalism in the U.S. works to disappear and disconnect Black history and suffering from the consciousness of American citizens, which causes schools and society to ineffectively address contemporary racial issues, as the issues are positioned as newly emerged, rather than connected to a deep history of racial animus. Drawing from a year-long Black Critical Theory-driven ethnography with Black girls and boys attending an urban high school, I rely on the Black literacies of the students to explicate how antiracism functions in their schooling and societal lives in ways that counter narratives that purport that the U.S. is post-antiracism. I analyze literacy artifacts collected in a co-created after-school space and semi-structured interview data, which unearth the capacity for Black literacies to catalyze humanizing pedagogies for educators to teach and learn through antiracism. My analysis revealed a two-tiered process of the ways the Black urban youth resist antiracism in a context of neoliberal multiculturalism: (1) understanding antiracism as a historical and permanent component of U.S. life and (2) composing life in ways that resist complicity in antiracism; refusing to be defeated by antiracism.

Keywords: antiracism, literacy, neoliberalism, urban education



Justin A. Coles is Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of Adolescent English Language Arts in the division of Curriculum and Teaching at Fordham University, Graduate School of Education. His multidisciplinary research agenda draws from critical race studies, urban education, and language and literacy to understand the ways the literacies of Black urban youth inform justice-centered educator preparation, particularly helping to inform the ways we develop counter structures to oppressive school and societal regimes. He can be reached at jcoles4@fordham.edu.

Introduction¹

Propelled by the neoliberal multicultural imagination or the presumption “that racism is no longer a barrier to equal opportunity” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 430), the specificity of anti-Black racism has been rendered invisible within the past several decades. According to Giroux (2003), neoliberalism “imagines human agency as simply a matter of individualized choices, the only obstacle to effective citizenship and agency being the lack of principled self-help and moral responsibility” (p. 191). As Dumas & ross (2016) outlined:

...those groups that do not experience upward mobility and greater civic (and buying) power are presumed to have failed on their own, as a result of their own choices in the marketplace and/or their own inability to internalize national values of competition, and individual determination and hard work. (p. 430)

Thus, in the neoliberal multicultural imagination, racially-oriented oppressive structural regimes (e.g. antiblackness, the legacy of chattel slavery) become seen as having little to no impact on the social mobility of historically marginalized peoples—Black people in the case of this paper. Neoliberalism, which produces “neoracism,” persistently attacks “the value of public memory, public goods, and democracy itself” (Giroux, 2003, p. 197). In relation to Blackness, neoliberalism in the U.S. works to disappear, or rather, disconnect Black history and suffering from the consciousness of American citizens. This disconnection from a racial history causes Blacks and non-Blacks to ineffectively address contemporary racial issues, since the issues are positioned as newly emerged, rather than

connected to a deep history of racial animus. Through neoliberal multicultural imaginings, history and social contexts are ignored and a lack of social mobility or achievement is attributed to a lack of effort or skill on the part of an individual (Labaree, 1997). The complete and definitive history of race and racism, which is a barrier to effective citizenship for Black people is invisibilized through neoliberal multiculturalism.

Antiblackness and Neoliberalism in the Age of Barack Obama

Just as neoliberalism “negates racism as an ethical issue” (Giroux, 2003, p. 196), it also negates the specificity of antiblackness as an ethical issue (or as a non-issue entirely). Here, I define antiblackness as the legacy of U.S. chattel and plantation style slavery, which represents the human races structurally embedded degradation of Black people and communities through imagining Blackness as inherently negative, needing to be policed and/or neutralized, and as outside the realms of humanity (Hartman, 1997; Morrill & Tuck, 2016; Moten, 2013; Sexton, 2008; Sharpe, 2016; Smith, 2012; Wilderson, 2010). As outlined by educational scholars Dancy, Edwards, and Earl Davis (2018), antiblackness is “constitutive to the U.S. settler colonial state, a tool and driving strategy in the racial contract, and essential postcolonial legacy” (p. 178). Despite the ways antiblackness functions as a structural necessity to the operation of the U.S. social climate, imaginings of an America that has transcended its settler colonial roots, thusly freeing itself of anti-Black racism, have flourished. This transcendence from anti-Black racism has been especially catalyzed by the election of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, who self identifies as a Black man.

¹ I acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this article I use

pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves.

Throughout Obama's campaign and the entirety of his consecutive eight years in office, national neoliberal discourses wrestled with whether or not antiblackness could still be considered as a structural barrier to the success of Black people and communities. Through equating Obama's election with Black liberation, specifically using it as a tool to disappear race from historically and presently limiting Black achievement, antiblackness became further invisibilized. Through such erasure, ideals of neoliberalism become palatable, in that Blackness—a despised thing “in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and white” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417)—becomes deceptively characterized as free from the historical restrictions which have concretized

antiblackness (e.g. chattel slavery, Jim Crow, etc.). I use the election of Obama to paint a clear picture of neoliberal multiculturalism, because it served (and still serves) as a defining moment where many Black and non-Black people considered the nation to be breaching the beginnings of equal opportunity.

Additionally, I use Obama's signification of a post-racial America in that the Black urban high school girls and boys who provide the data for this paper were coming of age during Obama's eight years in power. A Black male president as the embodiment of racial progress informed much of their socio-political understandings as Black youth.

Simultaneously, such narratives have worked to shape “the damage-centered research and public discourse used to define Black youth's educational trajectories as well as the social services designed to support them” (Baldrige, 2014, p. 445). Even beyond my participants, the election of Obama came to signify a new era of racial progress for a great majority of U.S. citizens (Adjei & Gill, 2013;

Esposito & Finley, 2009; López, 2010; Love & Tosolt, 2010; Parks & Hughey, 2011; Smith & Brown, 2014; Wingfield & Feagin, 2012). In the wake of Obama's election, the perfidious narrative was that our democracy has defeated the centuries of anti-Black racism prior to his taking office. For example, Ward Connerly, founder of the American Civil Rights Institute and a Black man, noted that the election of Obama made way for Blacks to be “free to be Americans stripped from the legacy of second-class citizenship...as inherently as capable as others without the historical restrictions imposed by skin color...Obama's election represented the first day of the rest of most blacks lives, symbolically” (National Review Symposium, 2008).

“As a structural regime, individual incidents (positive or negative) do not directly amplify or lessen the presence of antiblackness in a nation birthed on the basis of anti-Black ideology.”

Viewing U.S. society as mostly progressive and fair towards Black people misses the “far greater misery routinely imposed through established social patterns, impersonal bureaucratic policies, and the market's indifferent hand” (López, 2010, p. 1070).

Therefore, focusing on Black exceptions to the rule of

antiblackness (e.g. accentuating one Black male president in relation to forty-four, now forty-five white male presidents) or limiting understandings of antiblackness to discrete violence (e.g. an unarmed Black child being shot by a police officer or vigilante citizen) is irresponsible in that it causes a misrecognition of antiblackness as a structural regime. As a structural regime, individual incidents (positive or negative) do not directly amplify or lessen the presence of antiblackness in a nation birthed on the basis of anti-Black ideology. Through this understanding, it can be deduced that a progressive and fair society, where antiblackness is a constitutive function, does not take shape through imaginings of antiblackness' absence. Rather, any

possibility of a nation structured around antiblackness can only reveal the possibilities of a just social realm when the presence and function of antiblackness is courageously confronted.

The Wall of Antiblackness, Neoliberal Multiculturalism, and Black Literacies

Building with recent discussions from educational scholars on antiblackness (Coles & Powell, 2019; Dancy, Edwards, & Earl Davis, 2018; Dumas, 2014, 2016a, 2016b; Mayorga & Picower, 2018; Bishop, 2017; Parker, 2017; Sung, 2018; Warren, 2017; Wun, 2016; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016), I theorize antiblackness as a permanent wall that dictates the ways Black people and communities are dis/engaged by the nation at the level of the individual, institution, and society. In theorizing antiblackness as a wall, it can be better understood how anti-Black racism is a pillar of white supremacy (Smith, 2012); a structure erected to safeguard, uplift, preserve whiteness anchored in the degradation of Black people. Moreover, visualizing the continuous structure of a wall provides the basis to reject possibilities of antiblackness being interrupted. Beyond mere metaphor, it is important to understand as articulated by Coates (2015), the wall of anti-Black racism, as connected to white supremacy, “dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth” (p. 10). Antiblackness produces tangible damage. Through her concept of the afterlife of slavery, Hartman (2007) captures the wall of antiblackness as the ways Black lives are “imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” marked by “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (p. 6).

In this paper, I specifically examine how antiblackness functions in the schooling and societal lives of Black urban youth in ways that seek to erase the reality of antiblackness from their lived

experiences. To explicate the functioning of antiblackness in the lives of the youth, I examine their Black literacies. As a former secondary English teacher to Black and Brown urban youth and now an urban English teacher educator, I am interested in understanding how Black urban youth use literacy (and are embodiments of literacy) to make sense of antiblackness. While antiblackness is a permanent structure, I argue that Black literacies, which are interconnected to the lived experiences of Black people, can provide the foundation for the ways educators develop humanizing pedagogies (Paris & Winn, 2013) to teach and learn through antiblackness. While antiblackness has concretized as a permanent structure throughout the history of the U.S. and well before the nation’s founding, more recently the phenomenon has been pushed to the margins in favor of imagining an America where race (specifically one’s Blackness) does not dictate social realities. The literacies or textual expressivities of Black youth work to directly challenge the idealism of a nation where race does not structure our realities by functioning as counter to the “sedating rhetorics of racial mythology—chiefly post-racialism and the promises of progress” (Kirkland, 2017, p. 16).

Since Black literacies are directly informed by lived experience, I position them as a timely and necessary lens for educators to commit to seeing antiblackness, which includes seeing how we are implicated in maintaining antiblackness and the boundaries it sets. The boundaries set by antiblackness function to erase Black girlhood (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017) and to render Black boyhood as “unimagined and unimaginable” (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 28). The unwillingness of educators and researchers to explicitly acknowledge and grapple with antiblackness and the boundaries it creates for Black youth perpetuates antiblackness and the associated violence. I do not claim here that our attentiveness to antiblackness will result in its

elimination, but rather that an acknowledgement of the structure will allow us to engage in equity and justice-oriented teaching and learning practices that take antiblackness into account. Whether we as educators address antiblackness or not, Black youth wrestle with the structure daily. Given this, without such attentiveness, we participate as individuals and as upholders of a system in the ways antiblackness limits the social and educational futures of Black youth. Black literacies, if paid attention to and valued, have the potential to facilitate the ways educators work towards cultivating school environments that invest in lessening the effects of antiblackness, to the extent allowable.

Defining Black Literacies

My approach to examining ways for educators to teach and learn through antiblackness and the social and academic barriers it creates is informed by the literacy lives (Fisher, 2008) of the Black urban youth in my study and the ways they have come to critically examine the world through their individual literate bodies. Literacy lives or everyday literacy practices can be understood as “what people do with literacy to manage and enjoy their lives, what opportunities, demands and constraints they face in relation to their literacy practices” (Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge, & Tusting, 2012, p. 53). While stemming from variations of reading, writing, and speaking, my conception of literacy is much broader than the aforementioned definition (Collins & Blot, 2003; Moje, 1996); “not simply a technical and neutral skill” but rather “always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2003, p. 77). In line with Bausch (2014), my understanding of what counts as literacy is expansive, encompassing all the ways people engage with the texts of the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In other words, I view literacy as

“To teach and learn through antiblackness, we must commit to seeing it.”

what we do with words, images, our bodies, and countless other texts in the world. For example, Bausch (2014) explained her broadened definition of literacy as encompassing “literacy as a book, a story, a painting, a song, a poem, a dance, a slide under a microscope, a mathematical formula” (p. 9). Considering my focus on the literacy lives of Black urban youth, throughout this paper, I specifically use the term Black literacies to capture their specific uses and enactments of literacy.

Due to Black literacies being anchored in a “radical love for Blackness,” they are inherently antithetical to the social suffering perpetuated by antiblackness (Johnson, Jackson, Stovall, & Baszile, 2017, p. 63). Moreover, Johnson et al. (2017), characterize Black literacies as affirming “the lives, spirit, language, and knowledge of Black people and culture,” through being “grounded in Black liberatory thought, which supports and empowers the emotional, psychological, and spiritual conditions of Black people throughout the Diaspora” (p. 63). Rooted in such an affirmation, the literacies of the youth in my study function as key tools in critically unearthing the perpetual presence of antiblackness, particularly in the face of neoliberal multicultural narratives. By being attentive to Black literacies, it becomes evident that antiblackness and its associated violence has not disappeared into a race-free abyss. Simultaneously, we learn that justice-oriented teaching and learning through antiblackness is not achieved through relying on colorblind ideologies (Brownell & Coles, 2016) that equate not seeing (read: refusing to see) antiblackness to a literal dismantling of the phenomenon. To teach and learn through antiblackness, we must commit to seeing it.

Given their unique social positioning and identities, Black urban youth experience antiblackness and thus it is not necessarily something that they find

difficult to talk about or strive to imagine as out of sight. Through the uniqueness of their experiences, Black youth have the power to lead the charge in critically examining their conditions. Therefore, Black youth and their perspectives and firsthand documentation of their experiences are placed at the center of this research paper. I do this, because like Skerrett and Bomer (2011), I believe that youth in American society who are often framed solely through deficit perspectives “carry out purposeful, practical richly literate lives” (p. 1257). These literate lives have the potential to help Black youth, their families, communities, schools, and society, think about how we can re-shape urban schooling and the world via a critical examination of antiblackness.

Coupled with my interest in the power of Black literacies to unearth antiblackness and the potential for these literacies to inform educational space and practice, my chief research questions for this paper are: (1) What do Black urban youth literacies reveal about the structure of antiblackness, particularly its historical legacy and relation to the Black past? (2) How can these revelations from Black urban youth literacies inform the ways educators teach and learn through the structure of antiblackness?

Literature Review: Historicizing Antiblackness and the Utility of Black Literacies

Antiblackness: The Legacy of Slavery

Introduced during the transatlantic slave trade, the social structure of the United States is facilitated by the continuous presence of plantation and chattel style slavery (Rawley & Behrendt, 2005), which birthed antiblackness. As the legacy of slavery, antiblackness is a structural regime that enacts gratuitous material and psychic assaults against Black people and communities, stemming from the belief that Blacks are property, problem people, and inherently criminal. Like racism in American society, antiblackness is an immutable fact (Dei,

2017; Dumas, 2016a; Moten, 2013; Sexton, 2008; Sharpe, 2016; Wilderson, 2010). Through slavery, the slave “became an intrinsic part of the American experience” (Davis, 1999, p. 41). America’s success is predicated on the slaveability or the rendering of Black people as nothing more than property (Smith, A., 2012). According to Smith (2012), antiblackness creates the conditions for non-Blacks “to accept their lot in life because they can feel that at least they are not at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy: at least they are not property; at least they are not slaveable” (p. 69). Even though the U.S. had only a peripheral role in the Atlantic slave trade, “during the three decades preceding the Civil War” they became “the greatest slave power in the Western world and the bulwark of resistance to the abolition of slavery” (Fogel & Engerman, 1995, p. 29). While the United States began as a slave society (Loury, 1998), whites’ interest in marginalizing Black people and viewing them as less than human existed before the formal institution of slavery. In fact, “the racialization of identity and the racial subordination of Blacks and Native Americans provided the ideological basis for slavery and conquest” (Harris, 1993, p. 1715). As Day (2015) outlined, many white settler colonies have been characterized by colonial dispossession, whereas white settler colonialism in the U.S. is characterized by the unshakeable legacy of slavery and anti-Black racism. This unshakeable legacy is what has allowed the wall of antiblackness to concretize.

Social existence in the continental U.S. (e.g. relationships with people and institutions) exists within the confines of a slave society, with the key characteristic being the institutionalized degradation of Black people (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2009; Hill, 2017; Reidy, 1997). Thus, slavery is not a finite period buried in the depths of America’s past, but rather it is a structure with no respect for time and space. While the optics often associated with slavery, such as groups of Black

people toiling the unforgiving land for cotton or being whipped and/or castrated juxtaposed to the pastoral aesthetics of the south are dated, the violence that fueled these optics persists. For example, all one has to do is google phrases such as “unarmed Black people shot by police,” “Black prison population,” or “Black racial incidents in school” to understand that antiblackness, as an embedded structural regime, has not been discontinued. Spivey (1978) helped us to understand why anti-Black violence continues post-slavery when he reminded us that cotton and tobacco still needed to be picked and tended to. In other words, while Blacks were granted freedom from bondage via the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, the social positioning of Blacks in the U.S. desperately needed to be maintained as it anchors capitalism (Smith, 2012). Slavery was a life sentence as underscored by a 1661 bill by a Maryland legislature explaining that “All Negroes and other slaves shall serve Durante Vita [for life]” (Harris, 1993, p. 1716). This has resulted in an arduous existence for Blacks in America in that they tenaciously author visions of futurity, positioning themselves as beneficiaries of the liberation they were promised in 1868, while facing anti-Black resistance to this liberation in almost every aspect of U.S. social life. One of the prime ways we see the limiting of such liberatory futurity is through the historic and contemporary ways Black people have had their literacy lives suppressed, particularly through being denied access to literacy. Most recently, a federal district judge in Detroit ruled that Black youth’s access to literacy is not a fundamental right (Fortin, 2018).

The suppression of Black literacies.

In the examination of Black literacies in an anti-Black nation, it must be understood that literacy has always been thought of as a humanizing tool. Thusly, during and after slavery, Black people have been structurally barred from literacy engagements. Rogers and Mosely (2006) explained, “with social

struggles for freedom and justice, literacy has always been deeply enmeshed with race” (p. 462). Despite the power with which Blacks always regarded literacy, they “were deemed ‘naturally’ unfit for literacy by colonial era intellectuals and Enlightenment philosophers more generally. In particular, the argument was that “African Americans were inherently inferior to Europeans because they lacked the capacity for reason” (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 79). Excluding Blacks from literacy was the major way they were excluded from gaining full access to society by having the rights and privileges of full citizenship (i.e. access to formal schooling) denied. According to Doc Daniel Dowdy, a former slave in Madison County, Georgia, “The first time you was caught trying to read or write, you was whipped with a cow-hide, the next time with a cat-o-nine-tails and the third time they cut the first jint offen your forefinger” (Cornelius, 1983, p. 174). Here we see the direct connection of the violence of antiblackness to the suppression of Black literacies. Prompted by the Stono Rebellion of 1739 (Thornton, 1991), South Carolina’s Act of 1740 was enacted, which among other things denied the teaching of literacy to slaves. In the reprinting of the act by Halpern and Lago (2008), Section XLV stated:

Whereas, the having slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe, in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, current money. (pp. 16-18)

As evidenced here, there was capital to be maintained by excluding the slave from literacy, which is logical considering slavery’s role in

America's rise as a capitalist super power. In other words, there was a direct correlation made in U.S. society that Black liberation would result in the loss of capital. Conceptualized as property, slavery worked to separate the mind and body of the slave; in fact it worked to render use of the mind and thinking as an impossibility. As Barrett (1995) explained, restricting Blacks to life without literacy "is seemingly to immure them in bodily existences having little or nothing to do with the life of the mind and its representation" (p. 419). Thus, it must be understood that "to enter into literacy is to gain important skills for extending oneself beyond the condition and geography of the body" (Barrett, 1995, p. 419). As a result, the youth in this research who used literacy to counter antiblackness were able to begin extending themselves beyond the confines of bodily existences; they were able to create and sustain knowledge on their own terms.

Literacy as Means to Teach and Learn through Antiblackness

Using literacy as a tool for Black urban youth to unearth their experiences with antiblackness is important due to the ability of violence to silence populations. Kirkland (2013) explained, "the study of literacy quite literally means to search past silences, to listen to the behaviors of words as they perform meaning in people's lives" (p. 9). In Kirkland's work with Black males, he wrote that in many ways U.S. society enforces the code by which they are to be barred from literacy, which again has its roots in U.S. chattel slavery. Throughout chattel slavery, Blacks were punished severely if they attempted to read or write, specifically because text revealed a world beyond bondage (Williams, 2009). This world beyond bondage, "provided the means to write a pass to freedom and because it most often happened in secret, the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship" (p. 7). Therefore, it can be deduced that literacy reveals a world where it can be understood that it is

unnatural for Blacks to experience gratuitous, structural violence.

If Black students are not exposed to such notions of literacy, they may not develop the means to effectively disrupt power imbalances in their school and society that are responsible for the antiblackness they experience. Today, Black children are marginalized in education due to the role whiteness has played throughout history as a means to oppress (Feagin, 2010; Leonardo, 2009; Lipman, 2011). America currently has an education debt that "comprises historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components" as a result of the exclusion of Blacks from an equal education (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). As noted by Anderson (1988), Black people came out of slavery with a burning desire to learn to read and write and were outraged at the institution of slavery for keeping them illiterate. One ex-slaved mentioned, "There is one sin that slavery committed against me which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education" (p. 5). As expressed by this ex-slave, Blacks were marginalized since they were placed in society with little to no literacy skills and expected to compete with white citizens whose families had been literate (at least formally taught) for generations.

Despite this negative history of barring Blacks from literacy, the power of literacy still remains. The major beauty for me of literacy is that while Blacks were being denied access to it during slavery and well beyond, they were simultaneously engaging in very dynamic literacy practices that were subversive to white racial domination. This literacy that Blacks used and still use has been instrumental in critically examining conditions of U.S. life that negatively impact Black communities.

Given the power of language and literacy and the often-overlooked ways Black youth compose the text of their lives, many educational scholars have

examined language and literacy practices with Black youth and other youth of color and how it both empowers youth and challenges inequity (Camangian, 2010, 2013; Everett, 2016; Garcia, Mirra, Morrell, Martinez, & Scorza, 2015; Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland, 2011, 2013; McArthur, 2016; Morrell, 2015; Muhammad, 2012; Patel, 2019; Watson, 2016; Winn, 2010). Particularly noting Kinloch's (2011) edited collection, *Urban Literacies: Critical Perspectives on Language, Learning, and Community*, I, too, operate in this tradition for my research of using literacy with historically marginalized youth to disrupt systems of inequity and structural unfairness. When thinking of literacy as a disruptive intervention, I am reminded of the work of Wissman (2007), who, while working with Black females, explained that they used language and literacy to navigate the complexities of the sociopolitical landscape and to resist the politics of silencing, through their desires to author themselves outside of dominant discourses. Or the work of McCormick (2000) with urban teenage youth, where she discovered that the poetry that students developed provided them a "sanctuary within, a place to play out conflict and imagine multiple possibilities for identity" (p. 194). The language of a "sanctuary within" reflects the idea of revealing worlds beyond bondage, a world beyond current normalized social contexts in America shrouded in inequity and antiblackness. I build on the work of researchers who have documented the richness of the literacy lives of Black youth and move that work to now centering these literacy lives as timely and necessary analytics that allow us to teach and learn through antiblackness.

Like Kinloch (2010), I am concerned with how the lived experiences of urban youth represent literacy stories, or narratives, about place, struggle, and identity, especially considering that these stories are typically not part of the work that students do in schools (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996), a place that

reproduces and sustains violence. Using the framing of "literacy is who I am...with literacy, my word's my weapon" (Kinloch 2010, p. 11), the data I collected is rooted in the idea that literacy is deeply embedded within the lives of Black students and that when cultivated and engaged, can serve as a powerful analytic of/for American life. In operating with this framing of literacy, I seek to build this notion for students and myself that despite countless efforts, Blacks cannot be truly barred from literacy, because literacy is who Black people are. As noted earlier, Black youth literacies arise from the U.S.'s suppression of their voices and lived experiences. With this framing, it is my hope that Black youth will be able to resist and disrupt any narrative that ignores the realities of their existence as Black children in America, and the world. As purported by Souto-Manning (2010), "Children are already skilled and intentional. The challenge then is for teachers and schools to embrace this notion and acknowledge the skills and intentionality children bring with them to schools" (p. 156). Moreover, the information that is revealed from these skills and intentions must be looked to for guidance on how we can teach and learn through the boundaries of antiblackness.

Theoretical Frameworks

My exploration into what Black literacies reveal about urban youth's sense making of antiblackness and what these revelations teach us about teaching and learning through antiblackness is guided by a convergence of three distinct, yet interrelated framings: Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) (Dumas & Ross, 2016), Critical Race English Education (CREE) (Johnson et al., 2017), and the concept of living Black history (Marable, 2006). In this paper, BlackCrit provides the basis to understanding antiblackness as endemic, CREE situates Black literacies as a counter to antiblackness and Black suffering, and living Black history explains that the history (i.e. chattel slavery) that created and sustains

the permanence of antiblackness is fundamental to a collective Black destiny—denying the historical or current presence of anti-Black racism does not benefit Black people. My networking of these theories undergirds my thinking about how I understood and researched the problem in which this paper is situated. The problem being that antiblackness has been invisibilized in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism, while still existing as a permanent social structure that limits possibilities for social and educational equity in the lives of urban Black youth.

Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit)

The intentionality of this project is framed through BlackCrit in that it moves beyond broad theories of racism (e.g. Critical Race Theory) to specifically addressing the ways anti-Black racism “informs and facilitates racist ideology and institutional practice” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417). In particular, the four framings of BlackCrit ground my exploration of antiblackness through urban youth’s Black literacies, which include: (1) antiblackness as endemic; (2) exists in tension with the neoliberal multicultural imagination; (3) revisits revisionist history that disappears whites from a history of racial dominance; and (4) creates space for Black liberatory fantasy (Dumas & ross, 2016).

Understanding the endemic role of antiblackness undergirds my conceptualization of antiblackness as a continuous structure that Black youth are enclosed by constantly. The neoliberal multicultural imagination, or the idea that in the 21st century society is largely equitable and fair to all races, ignores the fact that at every level of social interaction within the U.S.—individual, institutional, and societal—antiblackness is operational. Refusing to see not only a community, but also the systems and structures that work to dehumanize an entire community is a deeply violent practice.

A major reason such refusal to acknowledge antiblackness happens under the guise of progress is that it helps non-Blacks, whites in particular, disconnect themselves from the history of white domination and Black degradation. With this historical erasure of racial dominance, society is able to deny systemic oppression in favor of individual reasons for the negative social positioning of Black people (e.g. naming Black people and communities as responsible for their own oppression).

Lastly, BlackCrit caused me to be intentional in prioritizing the voices and lived experiences of youth through the co-creation of a research space that allowed for a radical re-imagining of Black futures within the context of antiblackness.

Critical Race English Education (CREE)

As a theoretical framework, CREE works to (1) “addresses race, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, and anti-blackness within school and out-of-school”; (2) “seeks to dismantle dominant texts”; (3) “highlights how language and literacy can be used as tools to uplift and transform the lives of people who are often on the margins in society and P-20 spaces”; and (4) “highlights Black literacies” (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 63). As a result of the endemic nature of antiblackness, Black youth often misrecognize the structure, particularly when the wall is masked by dominant texts such as multicultural narratives. My use of CREE to highlight and center Black literacies works to disrupt misrecognitions of antiblackness through unearthing the texts of urban Black youth’s lives, which are deeply impacted by antiblackness. Black literacies or the core of Black lived experience, is the tool that can and should be used to commit to seeing antiblackness. In turn, this creates a commitment to seeing the full humanity of Black youth in classrooms and society. Black life and Black literacies are antithetical to antiblackness.

Since urban Black youth are witnesses and receivers of anti-Black racism, they cannot disappear the material and psychic realities of the phenomenon from their social imagination and their actual social realities. These Black voices are necessary in getting others who can easily disappear antiblackness from their social frames of reference to think about teaching and learning through this structure. Black literacies provide a blueprint or reorientation to how educators must read and re-read the world in ways that expose the antiblackness that the neoliberal multicultural imagination seeks to bury. Leaning in towards Black literacies to confront antiblackness is not about adopting a social lens of despair, but rather a social lens that is honest. Only then can we move forward in ways that are truly just and equitable for both Black and non-Black children.

Living Black History

Marable's (2006) concept of living Black history is rooted in the principle that for the Black community, "the past is not simply prologue; it is indelibly part of the fabric of our collective destiny" (p. 14). For those who have been relegated beyond the brutal boundaries of U.S. social practice, the past has the ability to serve as a "ragged bundle of hope" (p. 1). Attempts to sever Blacks from the past make sense when considering the historical logic of whiteness or that "black Americans have nothing to complain about, because they have no collective history worth remembering" (p. 21). Antiblackness can only flourish (read be rationalized and justified) "through the suppression of black counternarratives that challenge society's understanding about itself and its own past" (p. 20). Given this, history for Black people is not to be considered as something disconnected from their lived reality, but rather a critical component to this reality. Rooted in the idea that U.S. society is "historically organized around structural racism," living Black history rejects the suppression of historical evidence that seeks to position the American experience as universal (p. 2-

3). History is what fuels Black people into the future. The idea that outside of individual incidents (e.g. the death of Laquan McDonald or Shakara being thrown out of her chair by a school police officer or Andrew Johnson being forced to have his dreadlocks cut off to wrestle) American society is largely equitable and fair is completely disconnected from the Black past. In the Black past, which directly informs the present and future of Black life, Blacks were designated as property, imagined as outside the realms of full humanity. For the scope of this paper, I mention this not to argue that Blacks are still legally conceptualized as such, but rather to note that this legacy of slavery directly influences how Black people are currently dis/engaged by society. In this vein, the particulars of legality do not matter, but rather the social reality does.

In this era of neoliberalism, being colorblind and ahistorical equates to liberation and progress. This is dangerous and this is not only counter to Black life, but of course counter to Black literacies. I network the concept of Living Black history with BlackCrit and CREE in that it asserts that "we all live history every day" (Marable, 2006, p. 1); there is no possibility that the structure of antiblackness can be discontinued. Moreover, living Black history provides the understanding that when it comes to striving for racial equity, severing the present from the past is not beneficial, but in fact, violent.

Methodology: BlackCrit Ethnography

The data presented in this paper were gathered from a year-long BlackCrit ethnography, which I conducted over the course of the 2016-2017 academic school year. Guided by the framings of BlackCrit, my ethnography sought to uncover what the critical literacies of nine urban Black high-school aged girls and boys revealed about (1) their understandings of antiblackness and (2) how they resist antiblackness in their urban schooling and societal lives. Uptown High School (pseudonym), an urban intensive

(Milner, 2012) Title I school in Philadelphia, PA served as the research site.

The design of this BlackCrit ethnography was a narrowing of Critical Race ethnography (Duncan, 2002, 2005; Vaught, 2011), not a divergence. Duncan (2005) conceptualized Critical Race ethnography as “the analysis of the various ontological categories that inform the way race functions as a stratifying force in school and society, as one measure to build around and advance the rich corpus of CRT studies in education” (p. 95). Through BlackCrit, I contribute to this advancement by moving from broad understandings of race and racism (along the spectrum of white and non-white) to analyze the social and educational experiences of urban Black youth through the lenses of Blackness and antiblackness (along the spectrum of Black and non-Black).

Research Context

The research I present here took place during the tail end of campaigning for the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election to the swearing in of the 45th President of the U.S., Donald Trump. This political moment is present in many of the data points, particularly the ways students thought about current enactments of antiblackness and white supremacy. In particular, larger national discourses on race and nationality at the time were centered around sanctuary campuses and cities. According to Reilly (2016), a sanctuary campus is a term derived from sanctuary cities or cities that “have pledged to do what they can to protect residents from deportation.” A major campaign promise from Trump was to “increase deportations and end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program,” putting many undocumented students at risk (Reilly, 2016). Specifically, he promised to “immediately deport approximately 2 to 3 million undocumented immigrants” (Schultheis, 2016). Throughout the fall of 2016 as universities across the

nation were ensuring that they would protect their undocumented students, in a sense serving as sites of refuge, I began to think about these very physical and ideological spaces being created for individuals who are not citizens of America in relation to the space being cultivated by my participants and I. As the youth and I were being really intentional about creating community around their lived experiences in the U.S., the social context of the time caused us to be reflective of the ways we were creating sanctuary space.

My considerations of sanctuary for the Black youth in my study who are U.S. citizens and descendants of chattel slaves is not intended to take away from the necessity of sanctuary campuses and cities for undocumented peoples. Rather, it is meant to confront the anti-Black nation state that rests on Black people not being provided sanctuary. As outlined by the Urban Youth Collaborative (2017), while 50 cities in the U.S. claim to be sanctuary cities,

Black and Brown youth and their families in these same cities are not protected from unjust, unforgiving and discriminatory local criminal legal systems. From “broken windows” policing, to Stop and Frisk, to criminalizing the poor, and the school-to-prison pipeline, systems that Black and Brown youth are forced to navigate everyday make finding sanctuaries an impossible task.

Black life in the U.S. has never been positioned in a way where the necessity of refuge was considered or prioritized. In fact, in the U.S., Black life is predicated on the exact opposite of refuge: Blackness in many ways is understood through its non-ownership of safe space, of being without sanctuary always. For example, on April 12, 2018 Donte Robinson and Rashon Nelson (both 23-years-old) were arrested at a Starbucks in Philadelphia, PA, where my research took place. Within two minutes of arriving at the Starbucks, the manager

called the police and the two young men were arrested for not purchasing anything and refusing to leave (Stevens, 2018). Rashon Nelson explained in a later interview that “he was worried about the situation spinning out of control and that he might possibly die” (Held, 2018). This incident at Starbucks, in relation to the larger socio-political climate (e.g. 2016 Presidential Election and #BlackLivesMatter era) represents the context in which this study took place.

Critical Self-Reflexive Stance

In this youth-centered research (see Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006), I was not a neutral observer who positioned the youth and their literacies as

something needing to be examined from a distance. Rather, I was deeply engaged in the co-construction of the knowledge production within BE, which came to represent the data I present here. As a result of my direct participation, I write this paper from the

perspective of a “worthy witness” (Winn & Ubiles, 2011) or a researcher who was not solely gathering data for a study, but becoming a legitimate partner with these nine students in “forging literate identities with youth marginalized by systems of inequality” (Paris & Winn, 2013, p. xiv). My goal was to commit to “understand fully” (Paris, 2011) the complexities of the youth in my study, by working alongside them rather than above them or distant from them. This does not mean that the data presented here was co-produced by me or represented my thoughts, but that instead of watching student knowledge production from a distance, I was in direct contact and communication with them as they produced the knowledge. Such an approach, or what Kinloch and San Pedro (2014)

conceptualize as a project in humanization is “framed within a discourse of care and listening as relationships with people are created, as conversations among those people are exchanged, and as interactions rooted in difference, conflict, vulnerabilities, and respect are forged” (p. 28).

Since Black people experience an enormous amount of violence (material and psychic), I believe that efforts to lessen and subvert this violence (for example, urban schooling working to create environments and curricula that lessen antiblackness) must privilege the voices and experiences of Black people, and Black youth in particular. To counter such violence means that educators must be willing to expose racist

“To counter such violence means that educators must be willing to expose racist transgressions, regardless of their severity, committed against Black youth in an effort to challenge the ways Black bodies have been routinely controlled...”

transgressions, regardless of their severity, committed against Black youth in an effort to challenge the ways Black bodies have been routinely controlled, this way Black youth have the ability to create their futures knowing how to counter antiblackness in

meaningful and liberatory ways.

Given this stance, my epistemological leanings entering this research were deeply aligned with the ideological intervention of #BlackLivesMatter in that I conducted this research with “an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (Garza, 2016). As Freire (2000) explained, “To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people” (p. 50). While I engaged in empirical and theoretical research, I, too, just as my Black youth participants, am both directly and indirectly impacted by the presence and effects of

antiblackness and am invested in countering the phenomenon.

Recruitment

I used purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007) at Uptown High so that I could work with students (1) who were willing to engage in conversations around Black identity and antiblackness and (2) who were interested in engaging in a community of students to discuss and examine their Black-specific existence through a variety of critical literacy practices. The nine students, six Black girls and three Black boys, who came to form this research community were selected based on my judgment and the purpose of the research (Babbie, 1995; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2012; Schwandt, 1997), which caused me to seek Black youth who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988 p. 150). The students who became my participants were selected because they had the information needed to answer the research questions (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011) and were willing to engage in a collective journey to answer the questions. Purposive sampling is the opposite of random sampling methods and it does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). Therefore, my primary focus was not to determine a specific number of participants, but rather to select a group of students who would be “outspoken and opinionated” (Love, 2008, p. 88) in efforts to create rich data. More importantly, since this project spanned an entire academic year, I also needed students who would be willing and able to commit to engaging in the study throughout the entire time.

I visited the study hall classrooms of all the high school students at Uptown High to talk about my interests in order to have direct contact with students, which mainly drove my recruitment. All students who heard me discuss my project were invited to fill out a preliminary questionnaire if they were interested in learning more and participating. Due to my capacity as a researcher and wanting to engage deeply with a small group over the course of an academic year, I began to narrow in on 12th graders. The totality of their experiences at Uptown High coupled with an assumed stronger articulation of lived experiences as compared to underclassmen at the high school would make for the dynamic discussions necessary to yield enough data to sufficiently answer my research questions. I invited nine students to join. These were also young people willing to engage in a collective journey to explore racial phenomena over the course of an entire academic year. The choosing was mutual. I chose the students, but they also had to choose to participate. The group of nine students were all students at Uptown High. One student was in tenth grade with all other students being twelfth graders. All students self-identified as Black/African American. The data in this paper comes from seven of the nine students in the study, whose demographic information is outlined in Table 1. The individual data of the seven students presented here are representative of the ways all nine students’ literacies in my larger BlackCrit ethnography revealed a countering of anti-Blackness. However, these data points specifically speak to a countering of antiblackness as it relates to neoliberal multiculturalism, specifically.

Table 1: Participants

Name (pseudonyms)	Race	Gender Pronouns	Grade

Raheem	Black/African-American	he/him/his	12 th
Calvin	Black/African-American	he/him/his	10 th
Anita	Black/African-American	she/her/hers	12 th
Rochelle	Black/African-American	she/her/hers	12 th
Sonia	Black/African-American	she/her/hers	12 th
Toni	Black/African-American	she/her/hers	12 th
Khalif	Black/African-American	he/him/his	12 th

Black Excellence: The Ethnographic Social Location

The specific ethnographic social location within Uptown High was a co-created (the students and I collectively conceptualized the parameters) after school space, which the students referred to as Black Excellence (BE). For the students, the term Black excellence was not used to position themselves as more excellent than other Black people, but rather to position Blackness and Black people, in totality, as excellence. The nine students and I decided to meet once a week (many times twice a week) throughout the academic year between 60 – 90 minutes each session. BE was not a pre-existing after-school space for students and it was also not connected to official school programming. We collectively decided that being in community with each other after school would provide us with flexibility and not interrupt student routines during the school day. This communal activity, or “the interactions that occur as adolescents negotiate, reinvent, and jointly create their lifeworlds with others of their own age and with the adults who share their world” (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999, p. 222), was the prime site where I collected data.

BE was directly influenced by the intersection of my theoretical frameworks: the intentionality of BE was informed by critically analyzing Black-specific racism (BlackCrit) through the unique Black literacies and lived experiences of the students (CREE), with a particular emphasis on how this has unfolded across time and space (living Black history). BE provided a space for the youth and me to think about how things could be—how education for Black youth could exist when Black youth intentionally develop the capacity to name and challenge antiblackness. At the core of this collaboration was the participants engaging in literacy to search past the silences Black voices are often shrouded in, particularly in school settings (Kirkland, 2013). While working with similarly situated youth, Camitta (1993) argued “that the youth she studies perceived that writing for their own purposes and in their own mediums could be a powerful and meaningful way to capture and even to alter their experiences” (as cited in Mahiri, 2004, p. 20). My research provided a platform for students to begin to alter their experiences with their school site through literacy in ways that will be productive for their future engagement in urban schooling and the world. The students had the opportunity to document their developing understanding of antiblackness within the context of their lives in

order to move forward in addressing the issue collectively; truly embodying the idea that a student’s word is their weapon (Kinloch, 2010).

Data Collection and Analysis

Complete data collection for this study included three semi-structured interviews (one being an Exit interview), one life history interview, participant and non-participant observations (including field notes), audio-visual recorded after-school sessions, digital dialogic journaling (group multimodal text messages), student academic and disciplinary data, researcher reflection journal memos, and literacy artifacts (e.g. photographs, school mapping, body maps, visual concepts of racism, autobiographies, clothing, etc.). In this paper, the data I present comes directly from three literacy artifacts (Concept of Racism, 2016 Presidential Election Artifact, and Body Map), excerpts from the three semi-structured interviews I conducted with each student, and an excerpt from a life history interview. As a result of our commitment in BE to develop an improvisational space (counter to the often routine and predictive space of urban schooling), there was no official curriculum. What mainly drove our organic explorations of the topic were students’ experiences with Blackness and antiblackness in real time; during the school day, outside of school, on social media, and in current events. More specifically, the critical literacy artifacts that the students and I produced were developed by me in response to data that emerged from my non-participant observations (i.e. classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and after-school events), BE after-school sessions, common themes or incidents in interviews, dialogue from the digital dialogic journal, and direct responses to our shared readings (e.g. excerpts from literary texts, spoken word videos, social media posts, etc.). For example, a student shared a social media posts to our digital dialogic journal with a

“Cause this economy it's like based off of wealthy white men.”

quote from Mohandas Gandhi, “Kaffirs (blacks) are as a rule uncivilized...the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty, and live almost like animals.” This propelled me to have the students engage in a body map artifact. In this artifact, the students drew themselves and on the outside they wrote all the words and phrases that would represent society’s description of their raced and gendered bodies, and on the inside they wrote all of the words and phrases they would use to describe themselves. It is important to note that throughout this ethnography, I did not lead the youth to the findings and conclusions I arrived to, but rather the activities and prompts that I facilitated invited the students into a space of such criticality that allowed this knowledge to surface.

I analyzed data for the larger BlackCrit ethnography at three distinct levels, which included (1) organizing data into large conceptual categories, (2) finding initial themes, and (3) interpreting my results (LeCompte & Schensul, J. J., 2010). The data I present here, was categorized under two large conceptual categories, representing the ways my nine participants demonstrated how they resisted antiblackness throughout the research project. To explicate new insights from this data that adhered to my research questions, I conducted a new analysis specifically guided by the theoretical and methodological framings which guide this paper—BlackCrit, CREE, and living Black history. Throughout this analytical process, my goal was to specifically understand what the Black literacies revealed about the structure of antiblackness in relation to Black literacies. Thus, while coding the data I sought to explicate how they represented students’ resistance to antiblackness, while adhering to my theoretical frames and literatures. My analysis led me to address what Black literacies reveal about the structure of antiblackness and how these

revelations can inform teaching and learning through antiblackness. The two major themes that emerged include: antiblackness as embedded historical regime and authoring life counter to antiblackness. Still situated within the original larger conceptual category which spoke to resisting antiblackness, these themes revealed a two-tiered process to resisting: (1) understanding antiblackness as a historical and permanent component of U.S. life and (2) composing life in ways that resist complicity in antiblackness; refusing to be defeated by antiblackness.

In the next section, I present the data excerpts under the two themes, antiblackness as embedded historical regime and authoring life counter to antiblackness. Each data excerpt is titled according to direct phrasing and language or In Vivo codes (Saldaña, 2009) from the participants, which capture the essence of the data and its relationship to the particular themes.

Findings and Discussion

Antiblackness as Embedded Historical Regime

“Cause this economy it's like based off of wealthy white men.”

The first semi-structured in-depth interview I conducted with each student, which I will subsequently refer to as Semi 1, primarily focused on their understandings of education, especially what a quality education looks like for Black students. American schooling is often painted as a site that provides students from every background (e.g. race, class, gender) with the same access and opportunities to the future, with seldom acknowledgement that this has not been the case for Black children. In Semi 1, I asked all students to explain what they understand to be a quality education. Raheem explained that quality education looks different depending on your class status, which led me to ask: “So, based off your definition of

quality education, is a quality education for Black kids different than a quality education for white kids?” The following is Raheem's response:

Raheem: Yeah. ‘Cause it's a lot more rich white people than there are rich Black people. ‘Cause that's how like how this economy is built. So yeah, it is technically structured to race. ‘Cause this economy it's like based off of wealthy white men. Like it's not that many Black people ‘cause they not giving them any opportunities ‘cause of like the past with what Black people went through, what we went through. So, we don't have as much opportunities as white people. Like, they were always living good. We had to fight to get to where we are. And like now that we at a equal point, we still like gotta build up higher than to get to where they are. I feel like white people they could just like, they think they can build themselves up so easily. Like and just be there even though they could be on the same level as a Black person. A Black person has to fight harder. Because of like the society and this economy. How they view Black men, women, and all that. So, we have to fight harder even to be in the same position as white people. Even though they had to do so little. But they still in a higher position.

Researcher: Okay. So, really connecting all back to history? Do you think that there will ever be a point where Black people don't have to keep fighting?

Raheem: I feel like that's just a part of what we have to do. ‘Cause that's like thinking is racism ever gonna end. I don't think racism is ever gonna end, ‘cause people gone always have their mindset and like pass that down. So that's, I think we gonna continue to have to fight harder.

Here, the oral literacy of Raheem—captured in an interview, an opportunity for him to engage in a storying of his life—directly unearths the idea that within a slave society, the degradation of Black people is historically embedded. The degradation unearthed by Raheem is one that reveals itself in the ways he believes Black people will have to always fight harder than whites just to be at the same level of them. The slave society restrictions continue in the fact that even when this fighting happens, Black people cannot just “build themselves up so easily.” Raheem puts himself in conversation with many scholars and theorists who have articulated that Black people cannot be expected to be at parity with whites in a nation where they spent 400 years as chattel slaves, property (See Robinson, 2001). Moreover, there have been many calls for reparations (Balfour, 2003; Coates, 2014; Feagin, 2010; Westley, 1998) for Black people to attempt to resolve this monetary wealth gap Raheem addresses. Thus, we come to understand antiblackness’ endemic nature through the ways it is embedded within the economic design of the U.S. The nation is built on a permanent gap in wealth, directly along racial lines, which contributes to an enduring Black degradation. For example, Massey and Denton (1993) have explained the ways whiteness has worked to shape U.S. communities through outlining the construction of the “Black ghetto,” which was not created by happenstance, but as result of a series of deliberate decisions made by white Americans to “deny blacks access to urban housing markets and to reinforce their spatial segregation” (p. 179).

Raheem’s reliance on the Black past allows him to make meaning of a quality education in ways that do not disappear America’s antiblackness from the equation. Instead, the Black past or his reliance on living Black history centers antiblackness and white supremacy in ways that allow his narrative to reject neoliberal multicultural ideals of social mobility that

are rooted in colorblindness. Raheem’s words in this data excerpt, which are informed by his literacy life, demonstrate uplift in that he is not defeated by such narrative, but rather fueled to “fight harder.” The significance of this excerpt regarding antiblackness as embedded historical regime is that not only do we get an understanding that antiblackness has always been present and that it always will be, but we also get an understanding that Black people will have to keep fighting as time progresses (contrary to ideals of neoliberal multiculturalism and post-racialism). As outlined previously, neoliberal multiculturalism images a picture that overtime racial minorities have to fight less and if they fail in society it is solely due to an individual’s fault. Raheem’s historical literacy, storying the past with the present, rejects any such narrative.

“...eradicating groups of people.”

All of the interviews I conducted with each participant were either informed by discussions and activities that took place during BE or the interviews informed the discussions and activities of BE. In other words, while distinct data methods, the literacy artifacts and the interviews (which captured the oral literacies of students) were interconnected. During one of our earlier after-school sessions,



Figure 1: Calvin’s Concept of Racism

before we unpacked the language of antiblackness, I invited all of the students to draw racism—without any other instructions being provided. Without prompting, all of the students drew images

depicting anti-Black racism, particularly racial violence enacted against Black people. Given this, during the second semi-structured interviews (Semi 2), I made it a point to ask the students directly about their understandings of racial violence. Unlike all of the other students, Calvin's drawing did not depict explicit images of anti-Black violence, but through his interview it was clear his understanding of violence in antiblackness were present (see Figure 1). On his visual, he drew a member of the Ku Klux Klan, accompanied by the words "wypeople" (read white people) and "Nigga bye."

While speaking with Calvin during his Semi 2, in reference to this literacy artifact, I stated: "Obviously you didn't do like a burning cross or like a lynching but we know KKK represents violence, so yea just talk to me more about this and your understanding of racism." The following is the dialogue that followed:

Calvin: So, I chose the KKK as like a symbol of violence because they were a violent group, they acted out of hate through violence on Black communities in the South and so it connects to racism, because they for one were racists; and also like, they were driving Black people out of their homes and building crosses – I mean burning crosses in their front lawns and stuff and just harassing them and basically just – racism is harassing Black people, so that's why I drew that.

Researcher: Mhm and then what words do you have?

Calvin: Oh, I put "nigga bye" and "wypeople." And I don't know why I put "nigga bye," but I can tell you why I put "wypeople"

Researcher: Okay, why?

Calvin: So, I put white people because um they just are like, they founded racism, they

continue to perpetuate it, they don't want to get rid of it, they benefit from it, and they want to ignore it, they do a lot of stuff with racism. They deny it – that it's a thing and they think that it's a such thing as reverse racism, which is just prejudice so, that's why I put that right there because they're just, just look at over the course of history. They just a violent group of people that are just mad about something; about being white maybe. And then just like over the course of history, they just been known for like eradicating groups of people, like aborigines in Australia or sub groups in Asia and stuff like that and like colonizing them and colonizing those certain parts of the world like Africa, India, and South America, America and stuff all because they just white and they just mad cause they are white.

This excerpt of Calvin's Semi 2 is significant to the larger theme of antiblackness as an embedded historical regime in that he provides an in-depth, historical uncovering of violence enacted against Black people, which serves as the foundation for Black degradation in the U.S. Through his assertion that white people "were a violent group" and that "they acted out of hate through violence on Black communities," he pinpoints both the physical and emotional state of whiteness that worked to fuel the foundation of antiblackness: the hatred by whites of Blacks facilitated the violence enacted against Blacks. Furthermore, Calvin's statement that "racism is harassing Black people" is in alignment with the purposes of this paper regarding utilizing Black literacies to teach and learn through antiblackness, in that when thinking of racism, Black youth do not think of broad enactments of racism, but rather specific anti-Black enactments that detail the harassment of the Black body and/or mind. Educators must be attuned to these realities of Black-specific racism. Calvin's data example

unearths the ideas put forth in the literature, which outlined the ways white settler colonialism has disrupted Black life and how the legacies of colonial dispossession have been concretized throughout the world. Moreover, Calvin's excerpt illustrates how in the U.S., the legacy of such colonialism has been antiblackness.

Through his literacies — both the drawing coupled with his words which tell the story of local and global colonialism — Calvin is able to use his understanding of whiteness and the world to explicate his specific grappling with antiblackness in the continental U.S. The eradication of people he discusses is not a recent phenomenon, they are a part of our global histories. However, Calvin's reliance on such past knowledge is what allows him to make sense of his place in the world in the present moment. The strength of his display of literacy, is that his knowing does not leave him in a state of despair, but rather it really gives him meaning in knowing how Black people—and other people of color—have persisted and continue to persist despite such histories of eradication. Thus, the concept of living Black history becomes very important as a frame in that without such reliance on history, Calvin may not have had the capacity to make sense of his current social location in the U.S. as a Black boy in such dynamic ways. In line with CREE, we see Black literacies highlighted here in that Calvin is provided with the space to name racial violence on his own terms. For example, I assumed that he would draw more contemporary notions of racial violence, but the fact that he drew an image representing a KKK member, gives us insights into his Black literacies in that it is clear he sees racial violence as a continuum. The orality of his articulation of the ways white people have eradicated groups of people and the image of the KKK, a white supremacist organization, allows him to engage in a historical mapping of sorts to make meaning of his life by grappling with the ways

violence has been enacted against Black life and the lives of those similarly situated.

The uplifting or transformative aspect of Calvin's literacies is that he displays an understanding that while all these bad things happen to Black people as result of a legacy of violence, he does not turn inward to see this as a deficit of being Black. On the contrary, he sees this as a white problem, denoted by him explaining that "they just mad cause they are white." Herein lies the beauty and power of Black literacies demonstrated by Calvin: Black literacies allow Black youth to reject socially constructed ideals of inferiority projected onto them by an anti-Black society and actually expose the structures which work to position Blackness as inferior. We learn from Calvin that white violence and supremacy as forms of social control and subordination are at the root of the ways Black youth understand antiblackness.

"Hands up don't shoot!!"

In Rochelle's Concept of Racism literacy artifact, she brings us fully into contemporary understandings of anti-Black racism through the juxtaposition of a burning cross and the #BlackLivesMatter rallying cry "Hand's Up Don't Shoot." Her visual literacy clearly demonstrates how the violence against Black people,

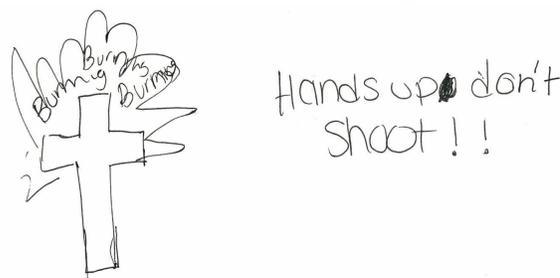


Figure 2: Rochelle's Concept of Racism Artifact

core component of antiblackness, has persisted well beyond the days of chattel slavery.

The juxtaposition of these two examples of anti-Black racism reveal that burning crosses have never

stopped burning, but instead have taken new forms. Rochelle simply and concisely depicts the continuity of antiblackness by demonstrating how it can and will take on new iterations over time, however, as an embedded regime it will not be discontinued. Through this literacy artifact, which involved her thinking of racism and then visually depicting these thoughts, Rochelle was able to present two different yet interrelated symbols of anti-Black violence at once (see Figure 2). Rochelle demonstrated that current anti-Black violence cannot be separated from historical notions of such violence, which clearly represents the theme of antiblackness as an embedded historical regime. Through her literacy, as with the other students in this study, there is a clear thread of the ways Black history quite literally lives within her. In the context of #BlackLivesMatter, due to a bombardment of hyper-visible deaths, one could easily disassociate our contemporary time period with the time periods of pre-emancipation (slavery) and immediate post-emancipation (reconstruction). However, Rochelle’s literacy life aligns directly with BlackCrit and CREE in that she utilizes her Black expressivities to dismantle the dominant texts (or discourses) of neoliberal multiculturalism, which could lead one to think that the routine killing of unarmed Black citizens that propel people to chant “Hands up don’t shoot” is only occurring because these individual Black people were responsible for their own deaths; because they were the problem. However, given that Black literacies are centered on a radical love of Blackness and run counter to Black suffering (Johnson et al., 2017), Rochelle is able to understand the continuum of antiblackness as not an individual Black problem resulting in a lack of morality, but rather as an American problem that has existed prior to her time, and that will continue well after her time.

Authoring Life Counter to Antiblackness

“AmeriKKKa.”

On the day after the 2016 Presidential Election, November 9, 2017, an excerpt from my Researcher Reflection Journal read,

I needed to see the kids and how today and really every day after will play out. This is a moment. I was waiting at the front desk talking to a social worker at the school who I know and a student (Sasha) came up to me and said, “We really need to meet today, this is just too much.”

The comment “this is just too much” stems from sentiments of fear, surprise, and confusion many people across America were feeling in the wake of the election. People of color, in particular, associated Trump (and still do) with whiteness and white supremacy; he is seen as counter to the livelihoods of marginalized peoples. Huber (2016) suggested that the racism seen in the campaigning of Trump “is a response to changing U.S. demographics that are shifting from a predominately white, to an inevitably non-white population” (p. 216). After the election, the students had tons of things that they wanted to discuss. One way they captured their thoughts down was through a literacy artifact I refer to as 2016 Presidential Election, where I asked them to communicate, in

I just have to accept the fact
that he's going to be
the next president.
No I'm not happy, but
it's life.

AmeriKKKa



Figure 3: Anita’s 2016 Presidential Election Artifact

whatever way they felt best, their feelings toward the election. Anita’s response is captured in Figure 3.

Throughout my review of literature, I explained the ways literacy has been used historically by Blacks, specifically during slavery, to write passes to freedom or to generally extend themselves beyond mere bodily existences. I situate Anita's response within this realm of writing oneself outside of the confines of particular structures, particularly the confines of antiblackness. I do not see this as her disappearing antiblackness from her lived realities, but on the contrary, using her literacies to inhabit a blackened consciousness (Sharpe, 2016) that allows her to compose (write or create) herself in a way that does not allow the current socio-political climate to be defeating. Thus, her literacy usage uplifts her in that she is able to find meaning for her life and her role in this country through this election. While responding to the election, Anita precisely used President Donald Trump to represent a structure or rather a platform that can function as a seat of white supremacy and thus inflict antiblackness. This inflicting of antiblackness is revealed through her writing AmeriKKKa, the three K's representing the Ku Klux Klan, an organization that enacted enormous amounts of material and psychic violence against Black people (Chalmers, 1987; McVeigh, 2009; Trelease, 1971).

If antiblackness is a wall, Anita's literacy formation allows her to confront the wall, to grapple with the reality of it by making herself aware of the ways it becomes embedded within institutions and positions of power (e.g. the U.S. presidency). She resists a revisionist history that disappears whites from a history of racial dominance through her direct linking of the KKK to America. Anita sees the KKK and America as synonymous. As a result, neoliberal multiculturalism for her becomes a clear fallacy in that race has everything to do with her lived experiences in a country birthed in settler colonialism and antiblackness. Anita's connection should also be understood as centering a specific Black history, the violence the KKK committed

against Black people and communities, and how she is able to use this as a lens to understand the election. This literacy artifact captures the theme of authoring life counter to antiblackness in the sense that, for Anita, Donald Trump is not the sole embodiment of anti-Black racism, but is just one embodiment. When Anita says "but it's life," she is moving her conception of antiblackness well beyond the doings of Donald Trump, to expressing that racism in the U.S. is a fact of life at-large. In other words, antiblackness would still be present even if another person was elected. Anita is now able to use her literacies to set her sights on a structural critique of antiblackness opposed to a critique of one individual.

"Don't let them brainwash you."

All students completed a life history interview (Life History) with me prior to the commencement of BE, in order for me to enter the project with an understanding of how the students' individual life stories were connected to larger social structures (e.g. antiblackness) (Hubbard, 2000). While speaking with Khalif during his Life History, he revealed that his understandings of the ways race has worked to organize America and the world inform his social existence:

Khalif: So let's go back. Let's go back like really far back. Like let's go back to Atlantic slave trade. Let's go back to Portuguese. Let's go back to Portuguese uh and Dutchmen you know. I forgot the word. Conquistadors?

Researcher: Conquistadors

Khalif: Come over to Africa, getting slaves taking them over. No, not getting slaves but getting actual people and turning them into slaves. You know? But let's talk about how white people wasn't the first people actually to come to America. How Africans was the first ones to come to America. How we was

the ones to actually create rice and then give it to Asians. You know? Let's go back. Like why are you telling me these things? What is it in me, deep down inside that makes me special? I shouldn't just look at my skin color and say 'well I'm cute you know well. You know?' A lot of girls say I'm handsome. You know? I want to know deep down, my roots. Why am I special? What makes me different from you? Why do your people hate mine? And why do my people hate yours? And how can we overcome this barrier of hate. You know? What do I need to contribute? So, I took it all the way back. I researched. I studied. I researched and I read and I listened to audio tapes. You know. And I came up with the like the concept of I am a King, I am smart, I am brilliant. I do have potential. But at the same time, I do have a racial barrier over my head. I do have a lot of hate and discrimination in front of me. You know? I do have a lot of obstacles that I must first accomplish to then move ahead and help out my uh my parents my race to actually tell them that you know like when you watch these old TV shows and everything. I mean well when you watch the modern movies. And you watch the Chinese movies, and the slave movies and everything. Like these guys wasn't white. They're actors. Like it was us who did this first. You know. It was us who created it. Don't let them brainwash you. And you, and have them thinking that you are less than you actually are. You are special. Like you are beautiful. You know what I'm saying?

The oral literacy of Khalif captured in this interview, which was articulated more in the form of a story, demonstrates the relevance of living Black history in seeking to understand Black literacies. Khalif makes it clear that his understandings of the ways race and

racism play out in relation to his Black body cannot be understood without first tapping into the Black past, particularly through his centering of the Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, he extends this Black past to conceptualizing Black people as "actual people" before they were even designated as slaves, allowing him to understand the full history that proceeded Black life in the U.S. In Khalif's historical mapping, his literate practice of storying informed by his lived Black experience empowers him to look "deep down inside" and eventually caused him to come to the conclusion, "I am a King, I am smart, I am brilliant." For Khalif, his connection to history is what propels him forward. Educators of Black youth must reject neoliberal multiculturalism and colorblind ideologies that seek to sever Black students and their communities from past traumas that directly frame how they make sense of their current and future selves.

BlackCrit is useful here as a lens to make sense of Khalif's narrative regarding brainwashing, because he pinpoints particular ways in which antiblackness has become embedded within the psyche of the American citizen, to the extent that we are all oriented to being anti-Black. According to Khalif, in an anti-Black context it is easy to become brainwashed, thus we should do our best to understand and resist the ways this takes place overtime. Khalif's storying works to disrupt the ways antiblackness gets misrecognized, and more so, how Black youth may internalize antiblackness since they may not recognize their adoption of such an ideology due to its diffuse nature. It is evident how he authors life counter to antiblackness through his rejection of dominant narratives of history and telling us what he knows. When he stated, "I researched. I studied. I researched and I read and I listened to audio tapes," we get an understanding of how turning to history (opposed to turning away from history) can serve as a powerful compass to creating life counter to anti-Black narratives that

attempt to obliterate Black history. The transformative aspect of Khalif's Black literacy is how he reveals that when one is conscious about the ways white supremacy and antiblackness work to create erasure of Black people (e.g. "TV shows and everything"), Black people can discover the truth, which can then lead them to turn to a fierce loving of Blackness; and in turn, author a life that runs counter to antiblackness. It is understood from Khalif that a major key to authoring oneself counter to antiblackness is to not allow "them to brainwash you."

"Ghetto, Loud, Lazy vs. Intelligent, Hard-working, Dedicated"

Central to our collective explorations of Blackness and antiblackness throughout BE were our collective explorations of identity. One literacy artifact produced to represent this exploration was the Body Map. Through our continuous reflections on identity, we were able to stitch together the ways that anti-Black racism has worked to frame our existence; a framing that largely works to ignore what Black youth have to say for themselves, and how they define who they are. In Sonia's Body Map, we see this disconnect as she juxtaposes her understanding of self with the way she perceives society as having portrayed her Black identity.

On the outside of her Body Map, Sonia listed: Ghetto, Loud, Lazy, Avg Philly Girl, Dumb, and Goofy. On the inside of her Body Map, how she views herself, she listed: Intelligent, Hard-Working, Dedicated, Beautiful, Funny, Baddie (read attractive), Fortunate, Mother, and Strong. Society's perception of Sonia causes her to exist in continual conflict with the world; she is viewed entirely negatively in contrast to the positive ways in which she positions herself. However, Sonia decenters her perceptions of how society view her by rejecting the

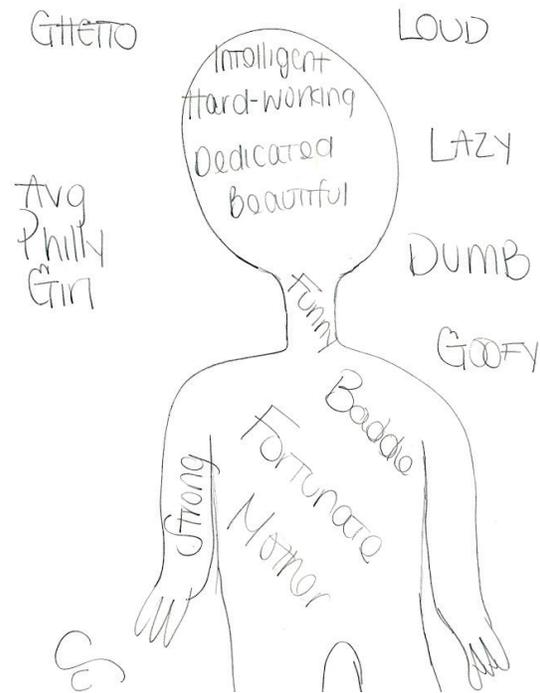


Figure 4. Sonia's Body Map

idea that she, as a Black youth, is a problem. Sonia engages in a precise authoring of self that counters antiblackness. Sonia's body mapping as a literacy artifact is in direct conversation with the literacies of the participants in Wissman's (2007) study referenced in the literature review, in that she used this mapping to grapple with the sociopolitical landscape in which her Black girl body exists. This struggling led Sonia to conceptualize herself in ways that rejected the silencing of her voice and the silencing of her capacities as a human being; she used this mapping to author herself outside of dominant discourses of antiblackness. The Body Map of Sonia (see Figure 4) represents critical literacy as outlined by Freire and Macedo (1987) in that it served as a vehicle for her to check and criticize the history of her being (how the world has socially constructed her) against the history she has actually lived (what she knows about herself to be true). In essence, as a navigational practice guided by her literacy formations (what she did with words and images), Sonia was able to carve out space on her Body Map in a way that allows her to sustain and

care for herself and potentially sustain and care for other Black girls (Butler, 2018).

In alignment with CREE, the centering of Sonia's literacies revealed through this mapping exercise demonstrate how the lived experiences of Black urban youth can represent literacy stories, or narratives, about place, struggle, and identity (Kinloch, 2010). Sonia's rejection of the anti-Black narratives projected onto her body adhered to the ideas put forth in CREE that explicate the ways Black literacies can serve as a vehicle to dismantle dominant texts and discourses. Through this dismantling, Sonia's mapping of words onto her body like "Intelligent" and "Beautiful," revealed how her words or the texts of her life can aid in humanizing uplift and transformation.

"Black people is life."

During my Exit Interview (Exit) with every student we engaged in a conversation on the meaning of Black Excellence, since this is what they decided to name our research collaborative. During the interview, I asked each student: "So if you had to define Black Excellence in your own words, what is it?" The following data excerpt is the conversation that followed after asking Toni this question:

Toni: Being Black.

Researcher: So you're saying that just being Black is excellent already?

Toni: Yea, 'cause I feel like, just because our skin color, we are pushed back. But then again, it makes some people work even harder just because of their skin color. Some people are jealous of Black people. Some people try to look like Black people. Even though we were made fun of back in the day, it's just like Black people is the trend.

Researcher: Black people are the what?

Toni: The trend

Researcher: The trend? Oh okay.

Toni: Black people is life. When I study at night, I study Black people. I love Black people.

Under this theme authoring life counter to antiblackness, Toni asserts that although Black people may not be viewed as excellent, they are. This axiom that she puts forth allows her to refuse anti-Black ideals that dare to question the excellence of Blackness. As evidence, she mentions that "some people try to look like Black people" despite how Black features and culture have been and continue to be positioned as a source of comedy. Blackness and Black people being a "trend" and something to be made fun of, exposes the disposability of Blackness in a different way from physical violence: American society can pick up and play with Blackness when it wants to and the moment it is done playing can toss Blackness back on the shelf or dispose of it altogether. The significance of Toni's literacy enactment here is that she demonstrates a prime countering to antiblackness through proclaiming that there has never been a time when Blackness was not excellent. When I asked what Black Excellence means and she responded "being Black," she was refusing to entertain the ways Blackness has been negatively positioned in America, creating her own ideological space of Blackness that escapes anti-Black ideologies. Additionally, Toni's voice embodied the theme through her stance that Black life must have nothing to do with how non-Blacks view and imagine Black people.

A key strategy to authoring oneself counter to antiblackness is rejecting and/or outright ignoring imaginings of Black people that do not stem from Black people. Toni's excerpt from her Exit embodies the ways Black literacies work to uplift both Black

individuals and communities. Her clear articulation that Black Excellence is simply “being Black,” runs directly counter to the logics of antiblackness that frame Blackness as outside the realms of excellence (and humanity). Like the Black literacies of the other participants, Toni utilizes Black histories of joy and pain to make sense of her revelations regarding Black people. While brief, she engages in a historical mapping that begins with Black people being discriminated against based on their skin color to Black people now being a trend. Her capturing of such a history is what led her to the conclusion that despite the ways Black people have been historically and currently positioned, “Black people is life.” Her articulation that equates Black people with life makes perfect sense when considering how CREE conceptualizes Black literacies as rooted in a radical love of Blackness. Through Toni’s oral literacy, we understand that regardless of the ways that antiblackness oppresses Black people, they will always be life, Black people will always be love.

Limitations

All of the students presented in this paper decided to participate in this research because they were interested in issues of Black racial-justice and creating community with their peers to explore such issues via a variety of language and literacy modalities. When thinking about how my findings represent the larger terrain of Black urban youth literacies, a limitation is that the literacies of my participants may not be fully representative of all Black youth. Given that the U.S. is a nation structured around antiblackness, all Black youth experience and witness antiblackness, but they may not all have the interest or knowledge to articulate their theorizations of antiblackness in the ways the students have done here. For example, Toni and Khalif explicitly mentioned researching or studying Black people and history. The average Black high school student may not be engaged in such self-guided explorations of Blackness. My recruitment

privileged Black youth who both had an interest and experience in these self-guided immersions into studies of Blackness. While the student sample may not be fully representative of all Black youth, I do believe the students and the overall study provide insights into some of the ways the literacies of Black urban youth function to counter antiblackness. Moreover, this study demonstrates the importance of educators and researchers co-creating Black-centric spaces with students, whether formally or informally, that can provide a platform for them to tap into such theorizations of resistance to antiblackness that may not be possible without such a space.

Conclusion

Guided by the interlacing of my theoretical frameworks and literatures, I was able to unearth the usefulness of Black literacies in countering antiblackness, specifically in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism. In particular, the literacies of the Black urban youth, which were captured via a variety of modalities (e.g. drawings and oral storying via interview data), provided insights into the structure of antiblackness via students’ detailing how antiblackness has concretized as a historical embedded regime. Moreover, their Black literacies went beyond simply pinpointing the structural operation of antiblackness to outlining the ways they author life within an anti-Black context, yet a life that is counter to such social context. Neoliberal multiculturalism (and connected ideas of colorblindness and post-racial America) is connected to a legacy of ahistorical ideologies that conceptualize progress as movement forward that blatantly ignores historical systems and structures of oppression. Given the emphasis on individual responsibility under neoliberal multicultural imaginings, antiblackness is understood as a regime of the past that has no impact on the lives of Black people; a simple neoliberal logic being that slavery

was hundreds of years ago and we recently had a Black president, so there are no barriers for Black people in society. Unfortunately, such pervasive logics seek to obliterate the Black past that is crucial in understanding the ways society dis/engages Black people currently. The Black girls and boys whose literacies I presented in this paper reject any such notion that the Black past has nothing to do with their everyday lived realities. Through their critical understanding of the ways antiblackness has become embedded and influences the ways they move through society, we gain insights into how such critical engagements with literacy uplift and transform their lives. Through being conscious of the ways antiblackness functions, the youth become empowered to reject socially constructed anti-Black ideals projected onto their minds and bodies. Instead of adopting and internalizing unfounded anti-Black logics, the students can arrive at more humanizing interpretations of themselves and Black people largely, always knowing that “Black people is life.”

In discussing theoretical and methodological dilemmas in critical approaches to language research, Souto-Manning (2013) highlighted the importance of research looking closely and listening carefully “in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of participants in their own terms rather than superimposing our own perspectives of what is problematic and needs to be transformed” (p. 201). The research I present here embodies a study in critical language and literacy, but not

simply because I, as the researcher, say it is, but as a result of the “person-centered” exploration of participants deeming what is “problematic and oppressive,” which Souto-Manning (2013, p. 204) noted must be more central to critical language researchers. Tuning into the ways Black youth counter antiblackness through their literacies in an anti-Black context is the key to understanding how to teach and learn through antiblackness. Researchers and educators must come to see the literacies of Black youth as roadmaps and blueprints to social justice, positioning Black youth as deeply literate. The work done in this project was an effort to reverse the way schools in the U.S. actively de-center, dislocate, and make Black children into nonpersons (Asante, 1991). Establishing a “third space” inside their high school (Gutierrez, 2008), that was organized to be Decidedly Black (Warren, 2017), provided the time and environs necessary for my participants to engage in a meta-analysis of their many encounters with antiblackness. This physical meeting place became a sanctuary—an oasis of safety and revitalization—found to be vitally important for them to counter the ways antiblackness has been rendered invisible by neoliberal multiculturalism. Despite the precarity of Black life due to the many ways antiblackness is sustained in U.S. social institutions like public schools, this research establishes the brilliance of Black youth to center their literacies as a source of resistance against the permanent presence of antiblackness. They do this through strategic, purposeful engagements with literacy.

References

- Adjei, P. B., & Gill, J. K. (2013). What has Barack Obama's election victory got to do with race? A closer look at post-racial rhetoric and its implication for antiracism education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 134-153.
- Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Alvermann, D. E., Young, J. P., Green, C., & Wisenbaker, J. M. (1999). Adolescents' perceptions and negotiations of literacy practices in after-school read and talk clubs. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 221-264.
- Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Asante, M. K. (1991). The Afrocentric idea in education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 60(2), 170-180.
- Babbie, E. (1995). *The practice of social research* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Baldrige, B. J. (2014). Relocating the deficit: Reimagining Black youth in neoliberal times. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(3), 440-472.
- Balfour, L. (2003). Unreconstructed democracy: WEB Du Bois and the case for reparations. *American Political Science Review*, 97(1), 33-44.
- Barrett, L. (1995). African-American slave narratives: Literacy, the body, authority. *American Literary History*, 7(3), 415-442.
- Barton, D., Ivanic, R., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., & Tusting, K. (2012). *Literacy, lives and learning*. London: Routledge.
- Bausch, L. S. (2014). *Boys will be boys?: Bridging the great gendered literacy divide*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Bishop, J. M. (2017). Mapping violence, naming life: A history of anti-Black oppression in the higher education system. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(8), 711-727.
- Blackmon, D. A. (2009). *Slavery by another name: The re-enslavement of black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Brownell, C., and Coles, J. A. (2016). 'Coloring' within the lines: Implications for practicing colorblindness. In J. Diem (Ed.), *The social and cultural foundations of education: A reader* (pp. 260-279). San Diego, CA: Cognella Academic Publishing.
- Butler, T. T. (2018). Black girl cartography: Black girlhood and place-making in education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 42(1), 28-45.
- Camangian, P. R. (2013). Seeing through lies: Teaching ideological literacy as a corrective lens. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(1), 119-134.

- Camangian, P. (2010). Starting with self: Teaching autoethnography to foster critically caring literacies. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 45(2), 179-204.
- Camitta, M. (1993). Vernacular writing: Varieties of literacy among Philadelphia high school students. In B. V. Street (Ed.), *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy* (pp. 228-246). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chalmers, D. M. (1987). *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Coates, T. N. (2014). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*, 313(5), 54-71.
- Coates, T. N. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.
- Coles, J. A., & Powell, T. (2019). A BlackCrit analysis on black urban youth and suspension disproportionality as anti-black symbolic violence. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 1-21.
- Collins, J., & Blot, R. (2003). *Literacy and literacies: Texts, power, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cornelius, J. (1983). "We slipped and learned to read": Slave accounts of the literacy process, 1830-1865. *Phylon*, 44(3), 171-186.
- Dancy, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Earl Davis, J. (2018). Historically white universities and plantation politics: Anti-Blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 176-195.
- Davis, D. B. (1999). *The problem of slavery in the age of revolution, 1770-1823*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Day, I. (2015). Being or nothingness: Indigeneity, antiblackness, and settler colonial critique. *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 1(2), 102-121.
- Dei, G. J. S. (2017). *Reframing Blackness and Black solidarities through anti-colonial and decolonial prisms*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Dumas, M. J. (2014). 'Losing an arm': Schooling as a site of black suffering. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17(1), 1-29.
- Dumas, M. J. (2016a). Against the dark: Antiblackness in education policy and discourse. *Theory Into Practice*, 55(1), 11-19.
- Dumas, M.J. (2016b). Shutting Ish Down: Black lives matter as a challenge to the field of education. *Division B Newsletter: Black Lives Matter*. Washington, DC: AERA.
- Dumas, M. J., & Nelson, J. D. (2016). (Re) Imagining Black boyhood: Toward a critical framework for educational research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(1), 27-47.
- Dumas, M. J., & ross, K. M. (2016). "Be real black for me": Imagining BlackCrit in education. *Urban Education*, 51(4), 415-442.
- Duncan, G. A. (2002). Beyond love: A critical race ethnography of the schooling of adolescent Black males. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 131-143.

- Duncan, G. A. (2005). Critical race ethnography in education: Narrative, inequality and the problem of epistemology. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 93-114.
- Epstein, R., Blake, J. J., & Gonzalez, T. (2017). *Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood*. Washington, DC: Georgetown Law Center.
- Esposito, L., & Finley, L. L. (2009). Barack Obama, racial progress, and the future of race relations in the United States. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 33(3), 164-175.
- Everett, S. (2016). "I just started writing": Toward addressing invisibility, silence, and mortality among academically high-achieving Black male secondary students. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 65(1), 316-331.
- Feagin, J. R. (2010). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fogel, R. W., & Engerman, S. L. (1995). *Time on the cross: The economics of American Negro slavery*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company.
- Fortin, J. (2018, July 4). 'Access to literacy' is not a constitutional right, judge in Detroit rules. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/04/education/detroit-public-schools-education.html>
- Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2011). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniv. ed.). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.
- Garcia, A., Mirra, N., Morrell, E., Martinez, A., & Scorza, D. A. (2015). The council of youth research: Critical literacy and civic agency in the digital age. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 31(2), 151-167.
- Garza, A. (2016). A herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In J. Hobson (Ed.), *Are all the women still white? Rethinking race, expanding feminisms* (pp. 23 - 28). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ginwright, S., Noguera, P., & Cammarota, J. (2006). *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Giroux, H. A. (2003). Spectacles of race and pedagogies of denial: Anti-black racist pedagogy under the reign of neoliberalism. *Communication Education*, 52(3-4), 191-211.
- Greig, A. D., Taylor, J., & MacKay, T. (2012). *Doing research with children: A practical guide*. London: Sage.
- Gutiérrez, K. D. (2008). Developing a sociocritical literacy in the third space. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(2), 148-164.
- Haddix, M., & Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2012). Cultivating digital and popular literacies as empowering and emancipatory acts among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(3), 189-192.
- Halpern, R., & Dal Lago, E. (2008). *Slavery and emancipation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707-1791.

- Hartman, S. V. (1997). *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hartman, S. (2007). *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route*. New York, NY: Farrar, Staus, and Giroux.
- Held, A. (2018, April 19). *Men arrested at Philadelphia Starbucks speak out; Police commissioner apologizes*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/19/603917872/they-can-t-be-here-for-us-men-arrested-at-philadelphia-starbucks-speak-out>
- Hill, M. L. (2017). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Hubbard, G. (2000). The usefulness of in depth life history interviews for exploring the role of social structure and human agency in youth transitions. *Sociological Research Online*, 4(4), 1-12.
- Huber, L. P. (2016). Make America Great again: Donald Trump, racist nativism and the virulent adherence to white supremacy amid US demographic change. *Charleston Law Review*, 10, 215-249.
- Johnson, L. L., Jackson, J., Stovall, D. O., & Baszile, D. T. (2017). "Loving Blackness to death": (Re) Imagining ELA classrooms in a time of racial chaos. *English Journal*, 106(4), 60-66.
- Kinloch, V. (2010). *Harlem on our minds: Place, race, and the literacies of urban youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Kinloch, V. (Ed.). (2011). *Urban literacies: Critical perspectives on language, learning, and community*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Kinloch, V., & San Pedro, T. (2014). The space between listening and storying: Foundations for projects in humanization. In D. Paris & M. Winn (Eds.), *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities* (pp. 21-42). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kirkland, D. E. (2011). Listening to echoes: Teaching young black men literacy and the distraction of ELA standards. *Language Arts*, 88(5), 373-380.
- Kirkland, D. E. (2013). *A search past silence: The literacy of young Black men*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Kirkland, D. E. (2017). "Beyond the dream": Critical perspectives on Black textual expressivities... between the world and me. *English Journal*, 106(4), 14-18.
- Kruger, D. (1988). *An introduction to phenomenological psychology* (2nd ed.). Cape Town, South Africa: Juta.
- Labaree, D. F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(1), 39-81.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing & conducting ethnographic research: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

- Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- López, I. F. H. (2010). Post-racial racism: Racial stratification and mass incarceration in the age of Obama. *California Law Review*, 98(3), 1023-1074.
- Loury, G. C. (1998, March 1). *An American tragedy: The legacy of slavery lingers in our cities' ghettos*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/an-american-tragedy-the-legacy-of-slavery-lingers-in-our-cities-ghettos/>
- Love, B. L. (2008). *Don't judge a book by its cover: An ethnography about achievement, rap music, sexuality & race* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies Dissertations.
- Love, B. L., & Tosolt, B. (2010). Reality or rhetoric? Barack Obama and post-racial America. *Race, Gender & Class*, 17(3/4), 19-37.
- McArthur, S. A. (2016). Black girls and critical media literacy for social activism. *English Education*, 48(4), 462-479.
- Mahiri, J., & Sablo, S. (1996). Writing for their lives: The non-school literacy of California's urban African American youth. *Journal of Negro Education*, 65(2) 164-180.
- Mahiri, J. (2004). *What they don't learn in school: Literacy in the lives of urban youth*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Marable, M. (2006). *Living Black history: How reimagining the African-American past can remake America's racial future*. New York, NY: Civitas Books.
- Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mayorga, E., & Picower, B. (2018). Active solidarity: Centering the demands and vision of the Black Lives Matter movement in teacher education. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 212-230.
- McCormick, J. (2000). Aesthetic safety zones: Surveillance and sanctuary in poetry by young women. In L. Weis & M. Fine (Eds.), *Construction sites: Excavating race, class, and gender among urban youth* (pp. 180-195). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- McVeigh, R. (2009). *The rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-wing movements and national politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2012). But what is urban education? *Urban Education*, 47(3), 556-561.
- Moje, E. B. (1996). "I teach students, not subjects": Teacher-student relationships as contexts for secondary literacy. *Reading research quarterly*, 31(2), 172-195.
- Morrell, E. (2015). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Morrill, A., & Tuck, E., & the Super Futures Haunt Collective. (2016). Before dispossession, or surviving it. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 12(1), 1-20.
- Moten, F. (2013). Blackness and nothingness (mysticism in the flesh). *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 112(4), 737-780.
- Muhammad, G. E. (2012). Creating spaces for Black adolescent girls to “write it out!” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(3), 203-211
- National Review Symposium. (2010, June 16). *Great Black hope?* Retrieved from <https://www.nationalreview.com/2008/11/great-black-hope-nro-symposium/>
- Paris, D. (2011). ‘A friend who understand fully’: Notes on humanizing research in a multiethnic youth community. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(2), 137-149.
- Paris, D., & Winn, M. T. (Eds.). (2013). *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Parker, L. (2017). Schools and the no-prison phenomenon: Anti-Blackness and secondary policing in the Black Lives Matter era. *Journal of Educational Controversy*, 12(1), 1-24.
- Parks, G. & Hughey, M. (Eds.) (2011). *The Obamas and a (post) racial America?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Patel, L. (2019). Fugitive practices: Learning in a settler colony. *Educational Studies*, 1-9.
- Rawley, J. A., & Behrendt, S. D. (2005). *The transatlantic slave trade: a history*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Reidy, J. P. (1997). “Worse than slavery”: Parchman Farm and the ordeal of Jim Crow justice. *The Journal of Negro History*, 82(2), 263-265.
- Reilly, K. (2016, November 16). *Sanctuary campus: Students protest Donald Trump's policies*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4574088/sanctuary-campus-donald-trump-immigration-student-protest/>
- Robinson, R. (2001). *The debt: What America owes to blacks*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Rogers, R., & Mosley, M. (2006). Racial literacy in a second grade classroom: Critical race theory, whiteness studies, and literacy research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(4), 462- 495.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schultheis, E. (2016, November 13). *President-elect Trump says how many immigrants he'll deport*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/president-elect-trump-says-how-many-immigrants-hell-deport/>
- Schwandt, T. A. (1997). *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sexton, J. (2008). *Amalgamation schemes: Antiblackness and the critique of multiracialism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Skerrett, A., & Bomer, R. (2011). Borderzones in adolescents’ literacy practices: Connecting out-of-school literacies to the reading curriculum. *Urban Education*, 46(6), 1256-1279.

- Smith, A. (2012). Indigeneity, settler colonialism, white supremacy. In D. Martinez HoSang, O. LaBennett, & L. Pulido (Eds.), *Racial formation in the twenty-first century* (pp. 66-90). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Smith, W. L., & Brown, A. L. (2014). Beyond post-racial narratives: Barack Obama and the (re) shaping of racial memory in US schools and society. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17(2), 153-175.
- Souto-Manning, M. (2010). Challenging ethnocentric literacy practices: (Re) positioning home literacies in a Head Start classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 45(2), 150-178.
- Souto-Manning, M. (2013). Critical for whom? Theoretical and methodological dilemmas in critical approaches to language research. In D. Paris & M. Winn (Eds.), *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*, (pp. 201-22). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Spivey, D. (1978). *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Stevens, M. (2018, April 15). Starbucks C.E.O. apologizes after arrests of 2 Black men. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/15/us/starbucks-philadelphia-black-men-arrest.html>
- Street, B. (2003). What's "new" in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2), 77-91.
- Sung, K. K. (2018). Raciolinguistic ideology of antiblackness: Bilingual education, tracking, and the multiracial imaginary in urban schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 31(8), 667-683.
- Thornton, J. K. (1991). African dimensions of the Stono rebellion. *The American Historical Review*, 96(4), 1101-1113.
- Tongco, M. D. C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and Applications*, 5, 147-158.
- Trelease, A. W. (1971). *White terror: The Ku Klux Klan conspiracy and southern reconstruction*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Urban Youth Collaborative. (2017, January 10). *No sanctuaries*. Retrieved from <http://www.urbandyouthcollaborative.org/721/no-sanctuaries/>
- Vaught, S. E. (2011). *Racism, public schooling, and the entrenchment of white supremacy: A critical race ethnography*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Warren, C. A. (2017). *Urban preparation: Young Black men moving from Chicago's South Side to success in higher education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Watson, V. W. (2016). I don't want to say bad things about Detroit": Examining adolescent literacy as literary presence. *Michigan Reading Journal*, 49(1), 57-62.
- Westley, R. (1998). Many billions gone: Is it time to reconsider the case for Black reparations. *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 19(1/12), 429-476.
- Wilderson III, F. B. (2010). *Red, white & black: Cinema and the structure of US antagonisms*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Williams, H. A. (2009). *Self-taught: African American education in slavery and freedom*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wingfield, A. H., & Feagin, J. (2012). The racial dialectic: President Barack Obama and the White racial frame. *Qualitative Sociology*, 35(2), 143-162.
- Winn, M. T. (2010). 'Betwixt and between': literacy, liminality, and the ceiling of Black girls. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13(4), 425-447.
- Winn, M. T., & Ubiles, J. R. (2011). Worthy witnessing: Collaborative research in urban classrooms. In A. Ball & C. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 295-308). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Wissman, K. K. (2007). "Making a way": Young women using literacy and language to resist the politics of silencing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(4), 340-349.
- Wun, C. (2016). Against captivity: Black girls and school discipline policies in the afterlife of slavery. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 171-196.
- Zirkel, S., & Johnson, T. (2016). Mirror, mirror on the wall: A critical examination of the conceptualization of the study of Black racial identity in education. *Educational Researcher*, 45(5), 301-311.