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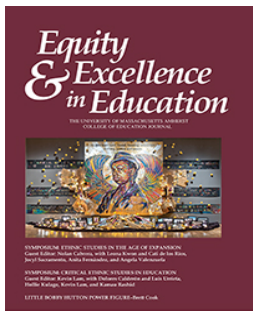
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# Beyond the Politics of Inclusion

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## EDITORIAL

# Beyond the Politics of Inclusion

Short news cycles have become the norm in U.S. media production and consumption. These cycles have a way of dictating public discourse and shaping how formal political leaders frame or construct arguments for change. In this current political climate, critical scholars, activists, and organizers are left to navigate difficult terrain. It is particularly difficult when political systems of representation, interpersonal violence, material inequities, increased measures of surveillance, media bias, historical amnesia, and state-sanctioned violence and rhetoric are historically rooted in ideologies of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Such publicly-ingrained historicity begs the question: What bends political will toward transformative change?

Over the summer of 2019, Democratic presidential candidates organized campaign rallies and public forums and participated in nationally televised debates. Among the various issues and policies that candidates addressed were questions about policing, reparations, and economic justice and restructuring. While the candidates' responses and recommendations fell short of the necessary visioning and measures to generate paradigm shifts and alternatives to existing institutions and structures, the visible dialogue was due, in large part, to ground-level organizing by Black Lives Matter activists and The Movement for Black Lives policy platform (see [www.policy.m4bl.org](http://www.policy.m4bl.org)). The robust, multi-dimensional activism was cultivated during the start of the decade and has resulted in a political climate where formal political leaders and institutions are being pressured to reckon with the violence done to Black lives as well as the socioeconomic injustices that low-income and communities of color face (Garza & Perez, 2017). Consequently, national stages and media platforms are not immune to the subversive efforts of activists and community organizers. Chants of “Fire Pantaleo” at the Detroit Democratic Presidential Debate remind us that the officer responsible for the death of Eric Garner was on paid “desk duty” for five years, and annual remembrances of Black people murdered by way of state-sanctioned violence serve as counternarratives that defy mainstream discourse and neoliberal media production.

In other recent news, the back-to-back mass shootings at El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, are a stark reminder of how gun violence breeds generational trauma and how the general public can often overlook what is at the root of such tragedies. Similar to public perceptions of gun violence in low-income communities of color, shootings are often depicted as individual heinous crimes, detaching it from rooted patterns of violence that can be traced back to systemic racism and pervasive toxic masculinity. To be clear, this point is not an attempt to directly link these mass shootings with the type of violence that sometimes happens in distressed communities and is put on display for deficit-based consumption. What we are highlighting is an approximation of root causes of violence that are often dismissed, contorted, or simply ignored. In the case of El Paso and Dayton, when political leaders contribute to harmful discourse that conflates people with disabilities with people who subscribe to explicit doctrines of white nationalism, their unwillingness to address how such ideology is preserved and integrated into our social order becomes evident. Despite mainstream conservative efforts to disassociate individual acts of violence from rhetoric and policies, a comprehensive understanding of white supremacy recognizes how it blurs notions of U.S. citizenship, border protections, American exceptionalism, American democracy, and gender norms (Cohen, 2011; Grande, 2004/2015; Melamed, 2011). It might not take the form of an individual mass shooting, but white supremacist ideology is at the core of many institutions that have accumulated power both domestically and globally. This gives credence to those willing to defend it. The most recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid in Mississippi is another example of such blurred lines that works in tandem with a divisive model-minority narrative that is becoming normalized across various social institutions

We are on the heels of contemporary radical social movements. The twenty-first century activism we are witnessing challenges public consciousness to consider the depths of modern-day violence and inequities. It also urges us to re-imagine our physical and social environments. Leonardo (2004) asserts, “Dreaming spurs people to act, if by dreaming we mean a sincere search for alternatives and not the evasion of reality” (p. 15). By recognizing the U.S. nation-state inherently relies on the parallel façades of democracy and meritocracy to diffuse people power, we can begin to embark on a political project that rejects solutions through historically corrupt and oppressive systems of representation, and, instead, one that embraces collective—though, at times, incommensurable (Tuck & Yang, 2012)—visions to confront our past, present, and future.

In line with this twenty-first century activism, the calls for the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló by the people of the Puerto Rican diaspora is another example emblematic of a long-term, sustained grassroots effort to re-ignite conversations about the island’s political sovereignty. The legacies of American colonialism and assimilation lie beneath the surface of legislation and discourse around *La Junta*, federal assistance, and pro-statehood, which are tied to the platform and scandals of Rosselló’s administration (Morales, 2019). The widespread protests were not only a repudiation of the governor’s misogyny and homophobia, but a challenge to dominant structures and institutions at the behest of the U.S. empire. On the surface, these Puerto Rican activist efforts may seem disconnected from the aforementioned events but, in actuality, they are entwined in a broader counter-hegemonic political project that renounces oppressive ideologies. We recognize the significance of these efforts and, thus, want to bring to light the connection to educational projects featured in this issue of *Equity & Excellence in Education*.

## Symposia: ethnic studies and education

In this double issue, we are thrilled to include two symposia on Ethnic Studies and education. I (Joel) am actively involved in the Ethnic Studies movement taking place in western Massachusetts. Over the past three years, I have offered research and programmatic support to a growing Ethnic Studies program in a local school district where students, teachers, and leadership face challenges around administrative decision-making, professional development, and teacher diversity. In the years to come, youth and educators who are deeply entrenched in the development of the program will be looking toward ways to strengthen its partnerships with community leaders/organizations, families, and local universities/colleges. They will also explore ways to build resilient pipelines grounded in critical teacher education programs. The implications are many at the local and state level. I (Korina) was privileged to participate in the early Ethnic Studies movement in northern California when only a handful of schools offered courses in African American Studies, Chicana/o or Mexican American Studies, and Filipina/o American Studies (Jocson, 2008). Formally educated in Ethnic Studies both at the University of California at Berkeley and San Francisco State University, where the Third World Liberation Front and student protests demanded for the creation of what would be to initiate Ethnic Studies programs, I was able to work directly with scholars, educators, and activists who were integral in the process. Still, it was a rare occasion to see schools with Ethnic Studies curricular offerings at the turn of the twenty-first century. Today, that is changing as a result of continued struggles to better serve students in K-12 education. Both of us are delighted to be in this present time of transformation. We invite you—the reader—to read the symposium introductions first as the guest editors contextualize the coming-together of the papers.

The first symposium is guest edited by **Nolan Cabrera** who draws our attention to the proliferation of Ethnic Studies in K-12 education. Cabrera’s introduction to the symposium notes the growing efforts across three states and the challenges that have emerged. The symposium, “Ethnic Studies in an Age of Expansion,” comprises four articles focused on curriculum, professional development, and educational reform in California, Arizona, and Texas, respectively. **Leona Kwon and Cati de los Ríos** examine youth civics in “See, Click, Fix’: Civic Interrogation and Digital Tools in a Ninth-Grade Ethnic Studies Course.” **Jocyl Sacramento** discusses teachers’ work in “Critical Collective Consciousness: Ethnic Studies Teachers and Professional Development.” **Anita Fernández** provides a purview of the Xicanx Institute for Teaching

and Organizing (XITO) in “Decolonizing Professional Development: A Re-humanizing Approach.” **Angela Valenzuela** pens the contradictions of educational reform and continued fight for Ethnic Studies in “The Struggle to Decolonize Official Knowledge in Texas’ State Curriculum: Side-Stepping the Colonial Matrix of Power.”

The second symposium is guest edited by **Kevin Lam** who accentuates the importance of comparative Ethnic Studies in education. Lam’s introduction reminds us of the historical roots of Ethnic Studies and the need to revisit colonialism, genocide, and U.S. imperialism in these contemporary times. The symposium, “Critical Ethnic Studies in Education,” also comprises four articles representing four area studies. **Dolores Calderón and Luis Urrieta** offer insightful analyses in “Studying in Relation: Critical Latinx Indigenities and Education.” **Hollie Kulago** illustrates two examples of engaging settler critical consciousness in “The Business of Futurity: Indigenous Teacher Education and Settler Colonialism.” **Kevin Lam** discusses gang violence in relation to imperialism and racialization in “Asian American Youth Violence as Genocide: A Critical Appraisal and Pedagogical Significance.” Lastly, **Kamau Rashid** explores liberatory philosophies of education in “Beyond the Fetters of Colonialism: Du Bois, Nkrumah, and a Pan-African Critical Theory.” Collectively, all the authors included here point to the ways education can serve as a means toward social transformation.

The articles in the two symposia engage with the possibilities as well as the contradictions and limitations of the growing Ethnic Studies movement in K-12 settings, teacher education, and higher education. Despite their differing entry points into the conversation, the scholars in the symposia are fundamentally inviting the reader to reflect on the role that Ethnic Studies can play within the broader counter-hegemonic political project described above. We are in a time that demands urgent organizing efforts to directly challenge oppressive structures and disrupt business-as-usual (#shutit-down). It demands action and treating *social justice* and *inclusion* as more than buzzwords. Ethnic Studies builds on critical praxis (Freire, 1970/2000) and the radical feminist vision of the Combahee River Collective (1977/2013), which called for a Black Feminist framework to address interlocking systems of oppression. We echo this radical vision as the struggle for Ethnic Studies continues.

Indeed, Ethnic Studies is about social movement-building and fostering conditions for transformative change. It is already taking place both inside and outside of schools. Building on student activist movements of the 1960s, Ethnic Studies represents a call for education that is liberatory and links various Third World and U.S.-based struggles with overarching systems of oppression and white supremacy (Elia et al., 2016; Márquez & Rana, 2015; Pulido, 2006). Alongside the recent proliferation of Ethnic Studies in mainstream education reform discourse during the 2010s, practitioners and scholars have been engaging in vigorous reflection and dialogue around the future of the field. There seems to be a level of general consensus among Ethnic Studies proponents around the causes of educational inequity and the detrimental effects of the existing school system for minoritized student populations. In addition, as we have noticed in the scholarship, there are differences within approaches to practice and research. Unpacking these conversations reveals the ideological underpinnings of educators and policymakers in their vision and in the development of K-12 Ethnic Studies programs. Similar to other fields, there are tensions that suggest a highly contested educational movement. Elia and colleagues (2016) synthesize these tensions as “a field of political-intellectual struggle with dynamic, multiple, and radically divergent focal points” (p. 4) that also steer toward an emerging critical Ethnic Studies project. It is a project that rejects the neoliberal multicultural co-optation of Ethnic Studies and offers a critique of coalition politics within the tradition of Ethnic Studies.

Although the tensions cannot be easily reconciled, educators and researchers alike should be wary of any major detachment of the K-12 Ethnic Studies movement from its historical roots because it paves the way for neoliberal descriptions of such programs to focus on nation-building and global citizenship. What is usually absent from such a detachment is a resistance movement to narratives of American exceptionalism and global forms of imperialism, white supremacy, and neoliberal capitalism. That is, just learning about difference for the sake of embracing difference is significantly different from learning about “power and *production* of difference” (Kelley, 2016). In the context of the U.S., a pluralist rhetoric deradicalizes an analysis of the production of ethnic identities and correlates it with a “European immigrant success model” (San Juan, 1991, p. 468). State-sanctioned efforts to forge an American

identity with the ideology of normative pluralism is at the heart of neoliberal multiculturalism. Caronan (2015) pinpoints Puerto Rico and the Philippines as case studies to demonstrate how neoliberal multiculturalism erases imperialist (and colonial) causes of difference and institutionalizes an ideology of “benevolent assimilation.” U.S. nation-building is contingent on hegemonic knowledge production and the banner of democratic pluralism, which upholds a hegemonic understanding of American exceptionalism. For Third World peoples living in the U.S., migration patterns are not by chance, but instead forged by a socio-historical process of exploitation and violence. Modern-day U.S. military interventions are disguised as a moral responsibility to democratize other regions of the world and delegitimizes counter-hegemonic narratives and movements to reject U.S. imperial policies abroad (Caronan, 2015). Under this logic, historical narratives about the anti-colonial efforts of political activists like Oscar Lopez and Lolita Lebron, for example, are deemed illogical or too radical for the democratic majority. Thus, in the near future, as schools begin to comply with state or district mandates with Ethnic Studies curricula, educators and researchers with a social justice agenda should remain vigilant and attentive to larger social movements. This is, in part, what the two symposia on Ethnic Studies and education emphasize moving forward.

As much as we are excited about the future of Ethnic Studies, we also want to keep in mind the ways in which the politics of inclusion are being taken up and often seeded in the inclusion of Ethnic Studies in K-12 education. We see this playing out with approaches to integrate the curriculum, improve professional development, or recognize communities to reflect difference. Ethnic Studies is more than just politics of representation, or a simple embracing of difference; it is about a re-structuring of social conditions and the dismantling of colonialist formations that have shaped the what, the who, and the various possible ways knowledge is produced. A prime example is California Assembly Bill 331, which proposes the authorization of local educational agencies to require a full-year Ethnic Studies course for high school students with aims to make it into a graduate requirement. The bill is pending after criticism centered on politics of inclusion; the bill will be revisited in 2020. Despite the controversy and delay, there is overwhelming on-the-ground support among students, teachers, and community advocates for #ethnicstudiesnow, and a strong social media presence of #iamethnicstudies across school districts and university campuses. Again, what bends political will toward transformative change, toward alternative futures?

## Related articles and educational projects

In this issue, we also feature five articles from the journal’s general submissions. Two of the articles are authored by graduate students, which we have set out as part of the journal’s aims to highlight works by emerging scholars. This editorial is in line with such aims. In theorizing alternative futures, **Josué López** asserts the role of political theory in “(Re)Imagining Education for the Immortal Child: Why Theory in Education for Social Justice?” Lopez points to temporality and communality in relation to social justice praxis. Theory in our work is, without a doubt, a requisite for change. In “Hope in the Wobbles: Negotiations into, Out of, and between Critical Dispositions,” **Aaron Guggenheim** examines the affordances of participating in a place-based practicum and how university partners engage in the child-driven creation of fictive superhero worlds at an afterschool club. The study illuminates the value of critical literacy as an analytical framework especially in wobbling along a spectrum of equity-oriented practice.

Similarly, in “Negotiating Discourses of Curriculum and Time: Tensions of Humanizing and Dehumanizing Discourses in an Urban Elementary School,” **Laura Taylor** explores the conflicting discourses mobilized by teachers and students in their pedagogical interactions. The author distinguishes between curriculum as tailored versus standardized and as present-oriented versus future-oriented. In light of the difference, the analysis makes visible the challenges and possibilities of teachers and students co-constructing humanizing pedagogies while suggesting the need to attend to its temporal dimensions.

In “Teaching for Equity and Deeper Learning: How Does Professional Learning Transfer to Teachers’ Practice and Influence Students’ Experiences?,” **Meg Riordan, Emily Klein, and Catherine Gaynor** discuss how two urban schools help teachers create equitable spaces for students,

and the structures and experiences supporting teacher learning. Implications include (1) paying attention to systemic issues in professional development, (2) prioritizing teacher ownership, and (3) engaging students in the process of professional learning for equity within research and policy.

Lastly, **Camille Wilson, Margaret Hanna, and Michelle Li** anchor this issue with “Imagining and Enacting Liberatory Pedagogical Praxis in a Politically Divisive Era.” The authors refer to U.S. political shifts and changing federal policies in education as catalysts for the social and cultural exclusion of vulnerable children of color. They suggest how teacher educators and in-service teachers can use media sources that reveal how children experience and navigate increasingly xenophobic and polarizing political climates as critical texts. In some ways, this type of media-based practice is happening in many classrooms within the current Ethnic Studies movement and should be supported as teachers become insistent on theorizing and acting on transformative change.

To complement media-based practice, we have included in past issues and continue to champion the visual work of artists who offer the public compelling ways of reimagining futures. San Francisco Bay Area-based artist **Brett Cook** presents “Little Bobby Hutton Power Image” both in the collective process of making and also as publicly installed at *Life is Living* in Oakland, CA. Such educational projects enable scholars, educators, artists, and activists alike to come together and re-make the world through art. We are grateful to Brett Cook for the opportunity to extend conversations about art, culture, and ecology with our readership. The image of Little Bobby Hutton also serves as cover art for the printed version of this issue.

## In future issues

It is a pleasure to be in the forefront of critical scholarship. There is much more to come as we prepare other journal content. Soon, we will feature symposia with a focus on “queeruptions” and queer of color critique, the changing terrain of suburban schools and communities, and educational pathways serving Indigenous, immigrant, and low-income students, among others. The political is educational, and the educational political. Ethnic Studies and other projects included in this issue provide us with some examples. In presenting this double issue, we want to acknowledge the guest editors and contributors for their work. We take pride in creating space for timely dialogue in *Equity & Excellence in Education*, and we are grateful to our readers for their critical engagement of these works.

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