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Introduction: School-to-Prison Pipeline Special Issue

Ahmad Washington
University of Louisville, ahmad.washington@louisville.edu

Malik Henfield
University of San Francisco, mshenfield@usfca.edu

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Introduction

Ahmad R. Washington & Malik S. Henfield

This special issue of *Taboo* was occasioned by several widely publicized, gut-wrenching incidents of physical violence unleashed against Black K-12 students that were video recorded and circulated on social media. In Columbia, South Carolina, a young Black girl was physical assaulted by a brutish and overzealous police officer (aka school resource officer or SRO) in her high school classroom, ostensibly for not responding expeditiously to a directive to leave the classroom. This young girl was aggressively grabbed and yanked from her chair, and violently slammed to the floor in front of her classmates before being detained and arrested. On social media and various news outlets, onlookers shamelessly suggested that the police officer's malfeasant behavior was logical and justified. When physical aggression towards Black students is publicly condoned and encouraged, it should come as no surprise that schools across the country double-down on punitive practices such as investing considerable financial resources to employ more police officers, officers whose actions have been found to have a disproportionate and adverse impact on students of color (ACLU, 2017).

This doubling-down on punitive disciplinary action, which is particularly common in urban schools with predominantly Black and Brown students (ACLU, 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Morris, 2016), engenders a school climate where antipathy and psychological, emotional, and physical disregard are com-

Ahmad R. Washington is an assistant professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. Malik S. Henfield is a professor and associate dean in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, California. Their e-mail addresses are ahmad.washington@louisville.edu & mshenfield@usfca.edu

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monplace. Several educators and researchers contend these draconian zero-tolerance behavioral policies are anchored to an Anglonormative logic rooted in ideologies of White supremacy and anti-Blackness that criminalize the behaviors and cultural aesthetic (e.g., sagging pants) some students of color perform and embody (Ferguson, 2001; Heitzeg, 2009; Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014). Some of the constitutive elements of this Anglonormative logic are: the tendency to idealize and incentivize student competition; the reification of cultural definitions of academic success where academic failure becomes racially-coded shorthand for intellectual and/or moral inferiority (e.g., low character, grit and determination, poor work ethic); a dominant discourse of neutrality and objectivity that assumes academic success is an individual and merit-based accomplishment (e.g., meritocracy); a Eurocentric curriculum that romanticizes and valorizes conquest and domination that assigns oppressed groups to a role of perpetual subjugation; a persistent reliance on culturally-biased, standardized aptitude and psychological tests to inform academic decision-making; systematically relegating Black and Brown students to vocational or military academic tracks; and using the Anglonormative logic to coerce Black and Brown students into abandoning and dishonoring the cultural practices and cultural wealth inherent to their communities of origin (Chandler, 2009; Ford, Wright, Washington, & Henfield, 2016; King, 2006, 1991; Perry, 2003; Yosso, 2005).

In other words, the school-to-prison pipeline and the predominant banking concept of education (Freire, 1996) are predictable byproducts of a pervasive and dehumanizing racial ideology. This racial ideology seeks to subdue students' liberatory imaginations through a discourse of pathology (e.g., "at-riskness") that deems Black and Brown children ineducable and disposable because their presumed flaws are considered insurmountable and, thus, too costly to address (Dumas, 2016; Lewis, 2010; Ruglis, 2011; Sojoyner, 2013).

While the aforementioned stories of gross physical and discursive violence certainly inspired us to propose this special issue, they were not the sole precursors of this work. More than anything, the decision to assemble this group of critical-thinking, burgeoning scholars was impelled by the desire to construct a project of noncompliance; a project that aptly reflects the spirit of critical pedagogy for which Freire was world renowned; a project that was an unflinching compilation of writings that mirrors the courageous spirit that countless Black and Brown students are embodying, in this exact moment, as they engage in acts of resistance to combat the discursive 'othering' that foregrounds and informs school pushout. These manuscripts are diverse in scope. As editors, we were very intentional in articulating our interest in provocative writings that examined the intersections of education and society, and payed special attention to what acclaimed sociologist and Black feminist intellectual Collins (2002) describes as the matrix of domination.

We solicited contributions from scholar activists who were uninterested in composing pieces that contributed to the "normalization" of the "established order..." or that conveyed, even in the slightest way, an overly deterministic

belief that the school-to-prison pipeline is “something untouchable, a fate or destiny that offers only one choice: accommodation” (Freire, 1985, p. 39-40). We wholeheartedly believe this compilation of manuscripts accomplishes this objective. Whether it is incorporating literature from Critical Race Theory, Lat-Crit Theory, Afro-Pessimism, Black Studies, Higher Ed Leadership, or the utilization of quantitative (e.g., meta-analysis) or qualitative (e.g., counternarratives) methodologies, the pieces in this special issue possess breadth, depth, diversity, range, and intellectual curiosity. Most importantly, these manuscripts reflect our deep and abiding love for Black and Brown students and our very heartfelt aspiration to immediately halt the institutional practices that attempt to suffocate Black and Brown children’s zeal for learning and circumscribe their social and political possibilities.

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