
Guest editorial: Moving beyond antiblackness: from critical race theory to BlackCrit

Guest editorial

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During the last 40 years, critical race theory (CRT) has grown beyond the field of critical legal studies to expand its reach toward educational studies with [Ladson-Billings and Tate's \(1995\)](#) the IV's seminal work, "Toward a critical race theory of education." Since then, CRT has proliferated into more group-specific articulations – such as AsianCrit ([Museus and Iftikar, 2013](#); [An, 2016](#)), LatCrit ([Solorzano and Bernal, 2001](#); [Solorzano and Yosso, 2001](#); [Díaz, 2023](#)), DisCrit ([Annamma et al., 2018](#); [Annamma et al., 2013](#)) and TribalCrit ([Martinez-Cola, 2020](#); [Sabzalian et al., 2021](#)) – to more explicitly address the racial(ized) concerns of Asian-American and Pacific Islanders, LatinX peoples, disabled persons of color and Indigenous peoples, respectively. These articulations of CRT were, in part, created in response to the fact that most CRT work engaged with race through a narrow Black/white binary approach. However, even though many CRT works addressed racism against Black folx, none of them specifically articulated a detailed Black critical theory (BlackCrit) until Michael Dumas and kihana miraya ross' (2016) work, "Be Real Black for Me" Imagining BlackCrit. Dumas' and ross' (2016) work articulated a BlackCrit for the first time, unpacking antiblack racism and centering Black joy.

This special issue sought to expand upon the ways in which folx understand and engage with BlackCrit by extending BlackCrit through Afrofuturims ([Toliver, 2023](#)); interrogating education policy through a BlackCrit lens ([Robinson and Bell, 2023](#)); applying BlackCrit to understand antiblackness in public housing that containing lead poison ([Neuwirth and Bell, 2023](#)); operationalizing BlackCrit in radical abolition studies ([Turner, 2023](#)); theorizing how BlackCrit can inform understandings of Black preservice teacher experiences ([Robinson and Jones, 2023](#)); and using BlackCrit to create a comprehensive critical love literature review of pro-Black pedagogy ([Starks and Terry, 2023](#)). These works contribute to BlackCrit as a growing field by furthering the ways in which BlackCrit is activated to understand, conceptualize, create, frame and explain the broad spectrum of Black experiences, from dealing with racism to centering Black beauty and possibility.

The contributors to this special issue sought to disrupt antiblack racism – which is understood as any action that seeks to undermine, other or dehumanize Black folx at individual or structural levels ([Bell and Sealey-Ruiz, 2023](#)) – and celebrate Black practices, personhoods and possibilities. The contributors' work help us to broaden the frame for how we take up BlackCrit as a theory for cogitating about antiblack racism and highlighting how Black joy – in the past, present and future – is created, experienced and perpetuated in its infinite manifestations. [Dumas and ross \(2016\)](#) informed us that "BlackCrit should create space for Black liberatory fantasy, and resist a revisionist history that supports dangerous majoritarian stories that disappear Whites from a history of racial dominance" (p. 431); and indeed the authors in this special issue honor [Dumas and ross \(2016\)](#) by focusing on Black love and possibility and by detailing how antiblackness is created and sustained through multicultural policies designed to support everyone. In their papers, the contributors to this special issue highlight how BlackCrit can be taken up to deepen how we operationalize it for future generations.

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us to consider knowledge production that can do justice to the complex joy and struggle of” Black folx in educational contexts” (Zaino and Bell, 2023, n.p.). For instance, Stephanie Toliver contributes a conceptual article, “It will take nations of billions to obstruct our dreams: Extending BlackCrit through Afrofuturism,” that reveals how three Black middle school girls made inherent connections within and across Afrofuturism and BlackCrit:

Both Avenae’J and Terrah’s [participants] Afrofuturist narratives present a deep connection to BlackCrit. Specifically, they conceptualize the endemic nature of antiblackness, challenge myths of meritocracy, and dispel the fables of multiculturalism pervading the United States.

The middle school girls’ Afrofuturist narratives and the subsequent analysis suggest a natural bond between the theoretical ideals of BlackCrit and Afrofuturism. Toliver and her students evince how Afrofuturism allows for “new ways to explore black being against its positioning as abject and subhuman” and for new descriptions of “black subversion as well as new otherworldly possibilities for black life” (Maynard, 2018, p. 34):

It is essential to dream and construct otherwise worlds free of antiblackness, but because we do not currently reside in a utopic, antiracist world, we must not forget the tether, the realities from which we dream. The girls’ tacit narrative theorizing and Public Enemy’s album suggests the need to consider both aspects of Black life—the antiblackness that pervades our existence and the dreams we seek despite violence and trauma.

Toliver juxtaposes the dreaming of worlds beyond antiblackness with the realities of the racist, oppression-based world in which we currently reside. In doing so, she furthers “theorizations of BlackCrit to include a deeper focus on the framing idea of Black liberatory fantasy via Afrofuturism.”

Next, we have Robert Robinson and Jordan Bell’s, “Freedom dreaming beyond education policy: A BlackCrit Analysis of ESEA and ESSA,” where they analyze book-end education policies, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Their paper frames Kelley’s (2002) concept of Freedom Dreams as a BlackCrit framework for interrogating the implications of Black educational liberation projects. They also operationalize BlackCrit to analyze education policy and unpack its inherent antiblackness:

One way antiblackness was experienced in the implementation of ESEA came from the racial divide existing between mostly white female educators (Aronson and Meyers, 2022) and their Black students. Many white educators displayed an “inability to relate to children who are ‘different’—whether due to lack of knowledge and experience or to negative feelings and attitudes...[thus serving as] a major barrier to the achievement of equal educational opportunities” (Buchanan, 1972, p. 2).

Moreover, the authors outline how Black folx have fashioned Freedom Dreams in response to education policy to gain insight into what components future pro-Black educational policy might include. Robinson and Bell provide examples that demonstrate the possibility of operating within and beyond the constraints of education policies to improve Black well-being.

Contributing to the field of pedagogical love as praxis, Starks and Terry (2023) provide an extensive Black pedagogical love literature review in, “love praxis as pro-Black pedagogy: A literature synthesis of empirical research in K-12 education.” They employ BlackCrit and critical love as conceptual frameworks “to describe the strategies educators used as pro-Black pedagogies of resistance.” Their comprehensive synthesis of the literature was anchored by their desire to discover:

1. How are critical love theories operationalized? What educator practices do researchers identify as material manifestations of critical love? and
2. How and to what extent do critical love praxis

address anti-Blackness, neoliberal multiculturalism, and ahistorical approaches to social transformation as defined by BlackCrit theory?

Their inquiry unveiled that “Educators used critical love praxis to address anti-Blackness, neoliberal multiculturalism, and ahistoricism by cultivating and supporting the co-creation of homeplace for Black students in K-12 education.”

Building upon the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, Mariam Kaba and other abolitionists, Kia Turner and colleagues extend BlackCrit into the field of abolition studies with “Towards black abolition theory within radical abolition studies: upending practices, structures, and epistemes of domination in education and beyond.” Turner and colleagues raise awareness to the idea that when abolitionist work is:

Decontextualized from abolition’s history, this work to abolish harmful practices, processes, and institutions can leave modernity’s colonial epistemes of domination (e.g., antiblackness, anti-indigeneity, patriarchy, gendered racial capitalism, etc.) that fuel these systems unaddressed.

In response, they introduce the field of radical abolition studies, a field of study designed to “ameliorate progenitors of differentiation at their onto-epistemic roots as we build towards a new future free of violence, inequality, and hyper-exploitation.” Their work advances BlackCrit by using it as a framework to develop radical abolition studies.

Robert Robinson and Stephanie Jones use narrative analysis (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 1996) and Black feminist frameworks (Edwards and Baszile, 2016) to interrogate two Black preservice teachers’ experiences with antiblackness in their preservice teacher education programs and with their host teachers. They draw upon Cox and Jean-François’ (2022) work to methodologically develop the concept of breath and breathing. They:

Examine breath not only as a literal, physiological function that helps to bring oxygen into our bodies and blood, but also as a metaphor [...] which allows us to exhale/expel that which our bodies can no longer carry. We consider our methods and theoretical frameworks operating as the breath does: a codependent, reciprocal relationship that makes room for thriving.

Through their methodological approach, they unveil themes of abandonment and antiblackness, as well as fugitive practices, in the Black preservice teacher narratives. Their work invites readers to think about how BlackCrit can inform understandings of preservice teacher education programs and preservice teacher placement with host schools.

In our final work, Lorenz Neuwirth and Jordan Bell take up BlackCrit to expose the latent antiblackness in New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA) response to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) related to excessive lead exposure. They draw attention to the negative impacts of lead poisoning in Black communities, and the state’s failure to provide an adequate response. Then, they detail NYCHA’s longstanding inability to properly address lead abatement and its adverse consequences on Black NYCHA residents:

Over the last three years, there has been more public advocacy and exposure of the scandals that have continued to take place in NYCHA for the last five decades with a consistent and systematic failure to conduct proper lead testing for leaded hazards.

Neuwirth and Bell close by providing concrete steps to address current and future lead abatement issues in public housing and framing lead poisoning as an underrecognized ACE.

Taken together, these six articles comprising the special issue on BlackCrit serve to uniquely contribute to growing the BlackCrit body of literature as an interdisciplinary modern framework for disrupting antiblackness and contributing to Beautiful Black futurities. These articles collectively gesture toward a future world that exists beyond the constructs of antiblackness and whiteness. These works exemplify logic that centers the dignity, humanity

and futurity of Black folx within and outside of educational contexts. The authors' contributions help display what a world that starts with Blackness and its infinite, beautiful manifestations and help us dream and take action toward creating worlds we desire.

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