CHARTER 5

ABOLITIONIST TEACHING, FREEDOM DREAMING, AND BLACK JOY

Let's begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. . . . To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible—and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people—must be prepared to "go for broke." Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen.

—JAMES BALDWIN[1]

EDUCATION CAN'T SAVE US. WE HAVE TO SAVE EDUCATION.

Abolitionist teaching is as much about tearing down old structures and ways of thinking as it is about forming new ideas, new forms of social interactions, new ways to be inclusive, new ways to discuss inequality and distribute wealth and resources, new ways to resist, new ways to agitate, new ways to maintain order and safety that abolishes prisons, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and mass incarceration, new ways to reach children trying to recover from the educational survival complex, new ways to show dark children they are loved in this world, and new ways to establish an educational system that works for everyone, especially those who are put at the edges of the classroom and society. Abolitionist teaching is teachers taking back their schools, classroom by classroom, student by student, parent by parent, and school community by school community. The work is hard and filled with struggle and setbacks, which is why Ella Baker's model of grassroots organizing rooted in creativity, imagination, healing, ingenuity, joy, and freedom dreaming is vital to the undoing of the educational survival complex and to all justice work.

Abolitionist teaching is not a teaching approach: It is a way of life, a way of seeing the world, and a way of taking action against injustice. It seeks to resist, agitate, and tear down the educational survival complex through teachers who work in solidarity with their schools' community to achieve incremental changes in their classrooms and schools for students in the present day, while simultaneously freedom dreaming and vigorously creating a vision for what schools will be when the educational survival complex is destroyed. No one teacher or parent can abolish the educational survival complex but if we work

together, we can. Currently we are tweaking the system, knowing that these adjustments are what we need for the here and now, but we are always keeping our eyes on the root causes of dark children's suffering. Ella Baker once said that the "reduction of injustice is not the same as freedom."[2] The ultimate goal of abolitionist teaching is freedom. Freedom to create your reality, where uplifting humanity is at the center of all decisions. And, yes, concessions will be made along the way, battles will be lost, and sometimes teachers, parents, and community members will feel like they are not doing enough, but the fight is fought with the indomitable spirit of an abolitionist who engages in taking small and sometimes big risks in the fight for equal rights, liberties, and citizenship for dark children, their families, and their communities—this is fighting for freedom.

There is no one way to be an abolitionist teacher. Some teachers will create a homeplace for their students while teaching them with the highest expectations; some will protest in the streets; some will fight standardized testing; some will restore justice in their classrooms; some will create justice-centered curriculums and teaching approaches; some will stand with their students to end gun violence in schools; some will fight to end the prison-industrial complex in and outside of schools; some will fight in the effort so communities can peacefully govern themselves to control their children's education, housing, healthcare, and ideas about peace, justice, and incarceration; and some will do a combination of all of these. Still, some will leave the profession mentally, physically, and spiritually depleted, looking for a way to make an impact on education outside the classroom, but *all* are working to restore humanity with their eyes on

abolishing the educational system as we know it. Abolitionist teaching is welcoming struggles, setbacks, and disagreements, because one understands the complexity of uprooting injustice but finds beauty in the struggle. Abolitionist teachers fight for children they will never meet or see, because they are visionaries. They fight for a world that has yet to be created and for children's dreams that have yet to be crushed by anti-Blackness.

TWEAKING THE SYSTEM IS NOT ENOUGH

For centuries, we have tried to tweak, adjust, and reform systems of injustice. These courageous efforts, righteous and just in their causes, are examples of the pursuit of freedom. However, we have learned from our collective freedom-building as dark folx that tugging at the system of injustice is just the first step, as White rage will counter and bring in reinforcements to maintain injustice. For example, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Texas slaveholders forced enslaved Black folx to remain in bondage for two and a half additional years. Black folx in Texas did not learn of their freedom until June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers arrived on the shores of Galveston, announcing the freeing of more than two hundred thousand enslaved Black folx in the state.

However, freedom was short-lived because the system and structures of oppressing dark people were not abolished at the root. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery unless as a punishment for a crime. This deliberate, racist loophole forced free Black folx to become slaves all over again, as they were imprisoned for petty crimes such as vagrancy or were falsely arrested. They were returned to a new form of slavery for their alleged "crimes": the prison labor system or convict leasing. The South was accustomed

to free Black labor and was not going to give that up because of a few laws or a Civil War; instead the system of slavery was able to be tweaked because its roots were still intact. Prisons sold the labor of Black men to local companies for cheap. While incarcerated and forced to work for pennies, these men also faced high fines and court fees for their petty crimes, if there was a crime at all. To pay back these "fees," prisoners were forced to work on plantations for "former" slaveholders, now known as prison holders. The bones of this unfair prisoner payment system are still in place centuries later. In 2016, over half a million people were in jail because they could not afford bail.[3] In the same year, eight hundred people died awaiting trial or serving short stints in jail for minor offenses.[4]

The work done in the fields was still done by dark bodies long after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. The debt peonage system, or debt slavery, which was created from the centuries-old, established system of slavery, forced a person with no money, such as a newly freed slave, to agree to work on a plantation as a sharecropper. The landowner provided a portion of his land to use and the materials needed to farm; in return, the sharecropper gave a percentage of his earnings from the crops to the owner. The catch was that the prices of the supplies and land usage fees were so high that the sharecropper would never be able to pay off his debt. As a result, sharecroppers were in debt year after year, and the landowners remained their masters, even with slavery abolished on the books.

Folx who fight for prison abolition, such as Angela Y. Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, understand that they are trying to tear down the prison-industrial complex while simultaneously building up radically revolutionary and sustainably empowering new systems of justice. History tells them, and us, that if we just change, adjust, or even

eradicate one piece of the oppressive hydra, such as the prison-industrial complex or educational survival complex, another piece will grow in its place. They also understand the connection between the proliferation of prisons and other institutions in our society, such as public education. Reflecting on her work, Davis said in 2005, "Prison abolitionist strategies reflect an understanding of the connections between institutions that we usually think about as disparate and disconnected. They reflect an understanding of the extent to which the overuse of imprisonment is a consequence of eroding educational opportunities, which are further diminished by using imprisonment as a false solution for poor public education."[5] An ahistorical understanding of oppression leads folx to believe that quick fixes to the system, such as more surveillance, more testing, and more punishment, will solve the issues of injustice and inequality. This way of thinking is a fallacy of justice like the achievement gap is a fallacy of educational improvement.

ACHIEVEMENT GAP (SHARECROPPING)

The achievement gap is not about White students outperforming dark students; it is about a history of injustice and oppression. It is about the "education debt" that has accumulated over time due to the educational survival complex. It is one of the fallacies of justice to know that the achievement gap is due to race and class and yet never proclaim racism and White rage as the source of the achievement gap. Calling for teaching practices that tweak the system and for more resources are fine places to start but they will never radically change the system of persistent inequality in education. Dark students and their families are sharecroppers, never able to make up the cost or close the gap because they are learning in a state of

perpetual debt with no relief in sight. But dark people still fight, hope, love, believe, and freedom-dream despite obstacles prepacked and tightly wrapped in racism, hate, and rage.

It is with this endurance that abolitionist teaching starts in the imagination of educators, but only after a deep and honest interrogation of America's antidarkness, racism, and White rage that created the educational survival complex. That imagination informs what is possible, as students and teachers are constantly told what is not possible in education, especially for dark children. New teachers walk into classrooms believing that inner-city schools cannot have a strong community, caring parents, and brilliant dark children. But my entire life is possible because dark folx freedom-dreamed. These dreams were filled with joy, resistance, love, and an unwavering imagining of what is possible when dark folx matter and live to thrive rather than survive. These freedom dreams and the places that helped them move into reality are important markers of what is possible.

BEACON HILL

There are two places in the US where I feel most alive, where my feet are on fire, my mind cannot stop racing, my soul feels whole, and my heart is filled with joy: Boston and New Orleans. To me, certain parts of these two cities embody abolitionist teaching: in New Orleans, it is Congo Square; in Boston, it is Beacon Hill. On the north side of Boston, in view of the Charles River and enclosed by Bowdoin Street, Cambridge Street, Boston Common, and Embankment Road, stands Beacon Hill. During the late 1700s through the mid-1800s, Beacon Hill was a well-established free Black community and the home of the abolitionist movement in the United States. Black and

White abolitionists and newly freed Black folx from all over the country came to Beacon Hill to live, to work, to seek refuge, or to pass through one of its several Underground Railroad stops.

The Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry, the first Black soldiers allowed to fight in the Civil War, consisted of residents from Beacon Hill and throughout the US; fathers and sons enlisted together. Black men from all corners of the country came to Boston and Beacon Hill to serve in the Fifty-Fourth, including Charles and Lewis Douglass, sons of abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts, a member of the antislavery community, appointed Robert Gould Shaw to lead the all-Black infantry. Shaw initially declined but was persuaded by his parents, wealthy, well-connected White abolitionists. The free Black men of the Fifty-Fourth fought knowing that if they were captured they would be sold into slavery, and yet they refused their wages in protest because they were paid less than White soldiers. The Fifty-Fourth famously fought the battle of Fort Wagner, a Confederate stronghold. A glorious bronze memorial to these men currently resides at the edge of Boston Common across from the State House, the starting point of Boston's Black Heritage Trail.

Lewis and Harriet Hayden, two of the most radical and militant abolitionists of their time, lived on Beacon Hill. The Haydens' home was a safe house for newly self-emancipated Black folx and contained a secret tunnel for the Underground Railroad. Lewis was a member of the city's abolitionist Vigilance Committee and a recruiter for the Fifty-Fourth. The Vigilance Committee's job was to protect slaves from being captured and returned into slavery. It was well known that Lewis Hayden kept two kegs of gunpowder by the entryway of his home because he would rather have blown up his home than let a slave-

catcher remove anyone from his property. The Haydens also provided shelter to the most famous of all enslaved runaways, Ellen and William Craft. Ellen, a biracial woman who could pass as White, and her husband, William, a Black man, were both born into slavery; however, in the winter of 1848, days before Christmas, they escaped their plantation in Macon, Georgia.

Ellen cut her hair and wrapped bandages around her face to hide her smooth skin. She wore men's trousers that she sewed herself. William was a skilled cabinetmaker who saved up enough money to pay for their travel north. The two left Macon on a train headed two hundred miles away to Savannah, Georgia. William rode in the "Negro car," while Ellen sat with the White folx pretending to be an elderly, deaf man so she would not have to talk to anyone. From Savannah, they boarded a steamboat to South Carolina, where a slaver trader offered to buy William from Ellen because William seemed so attentive to his "master." From South Carolina they went to Pennsylvania, a free state. Upon arrival in Philadelphia, they were taken in by abolitionists. Three weeks later, they moved to Beacon Hill, where William worked as a cabinetmaker and Ellen as a seamstress; they stayed with Lewis and Harriet Hayden for a time.

The Crafts became part of the abolitionist community in Boston, gave public lectures recounting their escape, and spoke out against slavery. William typically did most of the talking because women were not allowed to speak in a mixed-gender room. They lived in Boston for two years, then fled to England after slave-catchers arrived in Boston looking for them. They settled in West London, where they became public figures for the British abolitionist movement. After two decades of living overseas, the Crafts

returned to Savannah to open a school for newly freed slaves.

White abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who encouraged the Crafts to tell their amazing story of bravery, intelligence, and determination, lived a few miles from Beacon Hill in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. Garrison joined the abolitionist movement at the age of twenty-five. He published the antislavery newspaper the *Liberator,* which ran for thirty-five years and 1,820 issues. In the paper's first issue, Garrison wrote, "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. . . . I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD."[6] While jailed in Baltimore for his abolitionist work, he said, "A few White victims must be sacrificed to open the eyes of this nation."[7] Garrison also believed women should have the right to vote and was a supporter of the women's suffrage movement. He was a good friend of abolitionist Lucretia Mott, a White woman who was a powerful orator and one of the founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Mott worked side by side with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who led the women's suffrage movement. However, the movement was polluted with racism. Stanton and Anthony proclaimed that White women deserved the vote before Black women. Stanton once said, "We educated, virtuous White women are more worthy of the vote."[8] The fight for justice has to be intersectional. Stanton and Anthony were champions of women's rights but only those of White women. Mott, however, envisioned women's rights as an extension of human rights and the universal principles of liberty and equality.[9]

Beacon Hill is also home to the African Meeting House. Built in 1806, it was where abolitionists would gather to

share ideas, strategies, and give powerful, memorable speeches that would shape America forever. The African Meeting House was also a recruitment site for the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry. Funds needed to build the Meeting House were donated by Blacks and Whites. Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Maria Stewart—who in 1833 became the first American-born woman to speak to a mixed-gender and mixed-race audience and who lived on Beacon Hill with her husband—all delivered their historic speeches at the African Meeting House. Born in 1803, nineteen years before Harriet Tubman and six years after Sojourner Truth, Stewart was a pioneer of Black feminism. She published her writings in the *Liberator,* which, like her speeches, called for women's rights, committing one's self to a life of activism, and creating Black-owned businesses.

Henry "Box" Brown spoke at the 1849 New England antislavery convention held in Boston. He was given the nickname "Box" because he escaped slavery by shipping himself from Virginia to Philadelphia in a wooden box, three feet long and two feet wide. Brown stayed still for twenty-seven hours, from wagon to train to steamboat to wagon again, until he reached freedom. Brown wrote in his book *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown,* "If you have never been deprived of your liberty, as I was, you cannot realize the power of that hope of freedom, which was to me indeed, an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast."[10]

Beacon Hill was also home to the Portia School of Law, at the time the only American law school for women. Blanche Woodson Braxton graduated from Portia (1921) and went on to become the first Black woman admitted to the Massachusetts bar and later the first Black woman to

practice in a US district court. Mary Eliza Mahoney also lived on Beacon Hill and was the first Black female registered nurse. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a resident of Beacon Hill and a Black woman, was the editor and publisher of the *Woman's Era*, the journal of the New Era Club, and she organized the national conference of the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Josephine's husband was Boston's first Black municipal judge. For a time, Phillis Wheatley, the first Black woman to publish a book of poetry in the US, also resided on Beacon Hill.

So many astonishing Black and White women and men from Beacon Hill and the surrounding area of Boston dedicated their lives to antislavery work, antiracism, and women's rights. They also fought for the right to educate Black children with dignity and humanity. In the late 1700s, Black Bostonians petitioned the state legislature, arguing that it was unfair for their taxes to pay for the education of White children while the city had no public schools for Black children. In 1798, sixty members of the Black community created the African School to educate their children. When the African Meeting House opened in 1806, the African School relocated there. When White businessman Abiel Smith died, he left $4,000 for the education of Black children. Parents used that money to build the Abiel Smith School in 1835 on Beacon Hill. The conditions of the Abiel Smith School were not comparable to those at the schools White children in Boston attended, so Black parents and coconspirators kept fighting. Many Black parents withdrew their children from the school in protest. These parents were quite aware of the educational survival complex for Black children even in the 1700s and 1800s.

In 1855, after decades of activism by Black parents, the Massachusetts legislature outlawed "separate schools." The

first integrated school in Boston was the Phillips School on Beacon Hill, which at the time was considered one of the best schools in the city for White children. Once it was integrated, Elizabeth Smith, daughter of abolitionist John J. Smith, taught at the Phillips School. She is recorded as the first Black person to teach in Boston's integrated school system.

Beacon Hill is an example of what people can do when the ideas of abolitionism turn into a way of life; a way of seeing the world that does not normalize hate, White rage, and the inferior conditions for dark people; a way of life that relentlessly pursues and protects Blacks thriving. Beacon Hill also demonstrates that you do not have to be Black to be an abolitionist. Some abolitionists promoted militant action, such as Black abolitionist Nat Turner and White abolitionist John Brown. Some advocated for nonviolence, some wrote books and gave speeches that railed against slavery and injustice, some raised funds, some gave money, some taught, some fought in the war, some sued the government for equal rights under the law, some were healers, some community-organized, but all believed in the equality of Blacks and Whites and the tearing down of slavery, and believed in taking risks for those beliefs. Beacon Hill is a model for what is possible and for what abolitionist work is and can be in today's world of racism, sexism, hate, and rage. The people of Beacon Hill mattered to themselves and refused to live lives of mere survival. Their creativity, visionary thinking, boldness, collectivism, solidarity, and rebellious spirit form a vision for abolitionist teaching. We need Beacon Hills established throughout the country right now—spaces that not only protect those who are most vulnerable but also heal them. Beacon Hill's streets, buildings, and homes were filled with people who were accountable for one another's

survival, spirit, education, and dreams of one day thriving. Beacon Hill is a model for dismantling the educational survival complex because it was powered by people fighting for their children and their children's children to matter.

CONGO SQUARE

As mentioned above, there is one more place on American soil where I feel the creativity, imagination, and ingenuity of free and enslaved dark folx who created art for Black joy with the beauty, love, and sophistication of darkness: Congo Square in New Orleans. Congo Square is a plot of land on North Rampart Street between St. Ann and St. Peter streets, currently nestled inside a park named after the great jazz musician Louis Armstrong. The park is located in the oldest Black community in New Orleans, Tremé.

Before Louis Armstrong ever blew his trumpet or the first notes of jazz were composed, there was Congo Square. For more than a century starting in the mid-1700s, enslaved Africans, free Blacks, and Native Americans were allowed to gather under the French *code noir,* which permitted worship and the selling of goods by enslaved human beings, but only on the Sabbath. Before the French arrived, the land was home to the Houmas Indians. On Sundays, festivals were organized around African and Afro-Caribbean dances, drums, songs, and the trading of goods. Enslaved Africans gathered, as many as six hundred on any given Sunday, to remember, to recall, and to honor what they were told and what they were forced to forget. What was created at Congo Square was the blending of sounds from Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe to form African American cultural expressions such as jazz, scatting, and swing. The rhythmic motifs, polyrhythmic sophistication,

and complex, free-form yet structured improvisations of African music—combined with European instruments like the trumpet, bass, and snare drums—marked the sonic start of jazz. Arguably, there would be no jazz music without these incredible weekly gatherings at Congo Square.

But Congo Square is more than music; it's where personal and communal healing happened, where Black joy was found, and where resistance could be expressed in art. Social change cannot happen without art for joy and resistance. At Congo Square, enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and free Black folx shared the joy of their cultures, if only for a day. Even if they knew pain would follow on Monday morning, on Sundays they were using joy, love, and creativity as radical tools for Black expression and healing. Congo Square was a place to heal, recharge, and freedom-dream. They danced and sang together in a space cultivated by their cultures and they refused to let go. Education researcher and Black feminist Cynthia Dillard reminds us, "All too often, we have been seduced into forgetting (or have chosen to do so), given the weight and power of our memories and the often radical act of (re)membering in our present lives and work, that is (re)membering as an act of decolonization."[11] Abolitionist teaching is dependent on spaces like Congo Square to create art for resistance, art for (re)membering, art for joy, art for love, art for healing, and art for humanity.

ART

Writing, drawing, acting, painting, composing, spittin' rhymes, and/or dancing is love, joy, and resistance personified. Art provides more to communities than just visual and sonic motifs: it is one of the key ingredients to a better world. Art that inspires for a better world is rooted in intense design, research, and musings for justice filled with

new-world possibilities. Social justice movements move people because they ignite the spirit of freedom, justice, love, and joy in all who engage with the work. Art helps people remember their dreams, hopes, and desires for a new world. Art is how people connect to what has been lost and what has not happened yet. Tom Feelings, author of the book *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo,* said it best when speaking of the need for creativity by dark people:

> For four hundred years African creativity has been struggling to counter the narrow constraints of oppression, to circle it, turn it around, to seek order and meaning in the midst of chaos. My soul looks back in wonder at how African creativity has sustained us and how it still flows—seeking, searching for new ways to connect the ancient with the new, the young with the old, the unborn with the ancestors.[12]

Art education in schools is so important because, for many dark children, art is more than classes or a mode of expression; it is how dark children make sense of this unjust world and a way to sustain who they are, as they recall and (re)member in the mist of chaos what it means to thrive.

For many dark folx, art is a homeplace; art is where they find a voice that feels authentic and rooted in participatory democracy. Art can give this world hell. Art is a vital part of abolitionist teaching because it is a freeing space of creativity, which is essential to abolishing injustice. Writer and activist adrienne maree brown says, "All social justice work is science fiction. We are imagining a world free of injustice, a world that doesn't yet exist." Art first lets us see

what is possible. It is our blueprint for the world we deserve and the world we are working toward. Abolitionist teaching is built on the radical imagination of collective memories of resistance, trauma, survival, love, joy, and cultural modes of expression and practices that push and expand the fundamental ideas of democracy. Art is freedom dreams turned into action because "politics is not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world."[13] The imaginary world creates new worlds that push democracy, which means politics, schooling, healthcare, citizenship, equal rights, housing, prison, and economics are reimagined for a just world.

Freedom dreaming is a relentless task for people on the margins of society; still, they create. They refuse to be invisible. Their art makes them visible and makes clear their intentions for love, peace, liberation, and joy. South African writer and Afrofuturist Lindokuhle Nkosi proclaims that "imagining yourself in the future is not revolutionary, it's survival."[14] I would add that creating from your imagination is not revolutionary or survival; it is moving toward thriving.

FREEDOM DREAMING

Abolitionist teaching starts with freedom dreaming, dreams grounded in a critique of injustice. These dreams are not whimsical, unattainable daydreams, they are critical and imaginative dreams of collective resistance. Robin D. G. Kelley, author of the book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* argues that a requirement for liberation as one refuses victim status is an "unleashing of the mind's most creative capacities, catalyzed by participation in struggles for change."[15] He goes on to write that "any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social

and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and unfolding a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality."[16]

The educational survival complex has become so rationalized and normalized that we are forced to believe, against our common sense, that inadequate school funding is normal, that there is nothing that can be done about school shootings, that racist teachers in the classrooms are better than no teachers in the classrooms. We have come to believe that police officers in our schools physically assaulting students is standard practice, and that the only way to measure a child's knowledge is through prepackaged high-stakes state tests, the results of which undermine teachers' autotomy, de-professionalize the teaching field, and leave dark children in the crosshairs of projected inferiority. After all the billions spent in test materials and meaningful teaching hours lost to test prep, dark children are held accountable for the failures of the public school system.

Dark children are retained, deemed academically malignant, and pushed out of schools with limited tools to survive. These dire situations call for freedom dreams of love for dark children and of a love for dark people's resiliency that is not glorified but is understood as a necessity in the face of White rage and in the fight for intersectional justice, solidarity, and a creativity that disrupts ideas we think are impossible. The great education philosopher and educator Maxine Greene once said, "To commit to imagining is to commit to looking beyond the given, beyond what appears to be unchangeable. It is a way of warding off the apathy and the feelings of futility that are the greatest obstacles to any sort of learning and, surely, to education for freedom. . . . We need imagination."[17] Arguably, abolitionists' greatest tools against injustice were

their imaginations. Their imaginations fueled their resistance. Imagining being free, imagining reading, imagining marrying the love of your life, imagining your children being free, imagining life and not death, imagining seeing the world, and imagining freedom. These freedom dreams drive out apathy, and the quest for freedom becomes an internal desire necessary to preserve humanity.[18]

Freedom dreaming gives teachers a collective space to methodically tear down the educational survival complex and collectively rebuild a school system that truly loves all children and sees schools as children's homeplaces, where students are encouraged to give this world hell. This is why deep study and personal reflection on the history of the US is so important to abolitionist teaching. When an educator deeply understands why meaningful, long-term, and sustainable change is so hard to achieve in education because of all the forces antithetical to justice, love, and equity—such as racism, sexism, housing discrimination, state-sanctioned violence toward dark people, police brutality, segregation, hate-filled immigration policies, Islamophobia, school closings, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the prison-industrial complex—that is when freedom dreaming begins.

Understanding the mechanisms that reproduce structural inequality is an essential component of freedom dreaming. We cannot create a new educational system for all with a lack of understanding of what cripples our current system. Personally and collectively, freedom dreaming for intersectional social justice is what movements are made of; they start off as freedom dreams molded by resistance, self-determination, and struggle. Freedom dreaming is imagining worlds that are just, representing people's full humanity, centering people left on the edges, thriving in

solidarity with folx from different identities who have struggled together for justice, and knowing that dreams are just around the corner with the might of people power. The marketplace will attack and attempt to co-opt these freedom dreams. Dreams will not be met because we ask, and they will be masked by corporate America's obsession with greed and attaching products to dark bodies and the justice work of dark bodies. Before I lay out the "work" of abolitionist teaching in detail, I think it is important to show how the fight for freedom is co-opted by culture vultures and corporate America for profit.

WATCH OUT FOR TAKERS

Case in point: Kendall Jenner's Pepsi commercial. In April 2017, an advertisement for the soda depicted people from all walks of life—though it explicitly highlighted dark bodies, especially those who are Muslim and queer—protesting, using their art for resistance, and dancing in the streets to the uplifting ballad "Lions" by Skip Marley, grandson of Bob Marley. The song is a call for unity. Marley sings, "We are the movement, this generation." As folx take to the streets to march for freedom, Jenner watches from her upscale photo shoot. In the most dramatic and contrived way possible, Jenner removes her wig, wipes off her lipstick, and joins the crowd after a handsome dark male gives her the okay. She is then the center of attention in a sea of dark bodies, in awe of what she is witnessing. While moving through the crowd, she grabs a conveniently placed Pepsi, fist-bumps a dark man, and the sound of a can of soda opening overpowers the music. Jenner walks up to one of the police officers working at the march and hands him a Pepsi. He drinks it, and the crowd goes wild. In short, Jenner unifies the cops and the dark bodies with a can of Pepsi.

Jenner is not known for her activism or for speaking out against injustice; she and her family have made millions profiting off Black culture. This commercial is just another attempt to squeeze dark people's freedom dreams for profit and is the perfect example of how social movements and freedom dreams get co-opted and reduced to gimmicks that make the masses feel good but do not result in any real change for justice. I highlight this commercial to illustrate how seductive corporate America can be in its attempts to water down social justice and center Whiteness. This Pepsi commercial is no different from movies that depict magical White teachers who save dark children from their "troubled" school and community, or teaching practices that center Whiteness, but never address racism. Again, profiting from the narrative that dark children need Whiteness and the gimmicks of the educational survival complex.

THE WORK

Abolitionist teaching moves beyond gimmicks and quick fixes to examine the root causes of the educational survival complex, teaches from a place of love and sharp criticism of the United States of America and antidarkness abroad, and activism. Examples of abolitionist teaching can be found all over the country: in 1998, the Tucson (Arizona) Unified School District began offering Mexican American history, literature, and art classes after community activists demanded that the school district reduce the number of students being pushed out of school. Not surprisingly, the ethnic studies classes drastically increased attendance, and students who took them reported higher graduation rates and college enrollment than students who were not enrolled in ethnic studies classes. In 2010, the state of Arizona banned ethnic studies classes focused on Mexican American history because state officials and school board

members argued that the classes advocated resentment toward White people, even though the classes were open to all students and simply created "ethnic solidarity," as if ethnic solidarity were a bad thing. Students, parents, and teachers joined together in a fight to keep the classes that they knew were instrumental not only to the academic success of Chicano and Latinx students but also that taught them how beautiful their culture is and how their culture is an aspect of their lives that shows them they matter. Students in the Mexican American studies classes recited the poem "In Lak'ech: You Are My Other Me," by playwright Luis Valdez, the father of Chicano theater. The poem is based on the philosophical teachings of the ancient Mayans concerning empathy and integrity:

Si te amo y respeto,
If I love and respect you,
Me amo y respeto yo.
I love and respect myself.

This poem is an example of using students' culture to show them how they matter to themselves, their community, and the world. Ethnic studies classes can be students' homeplace. When the classes were banned, ethnic studies teachers, alumni of the program, and current students organized a grassroots movement led by youth with a participatory democracy model to fight to restore not only their classes but their humanity, because "a truthful, equitable and culturally appropriate education is understood to be a basic human right and not only a condition of Black people's individual success and collective survival. It is also fundamental to civilization and human freedom."[19] After ten years of fighting, in the summer of 2017, a federal judge ruled that banning the ethnic studies classes violated students' constitutional rights. The judge said that the ban's "enactment and enforcement were motivated by racial

animus."[20] This is what abolitionism looks like in education.

In Seattle in 2013, teachers at a local high school voted unanimously to refuse to administer the MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) test. After the teachers refused to back down, and with parents and students standing in solidarity, it was ruled that the MAP test would no longer be required in all high schools. In 2015, Seattle teachers went on strike to demand pay increases, which they deserved, but they also demanded and won thirty minutes of daily recess in all elementary schools; committees to examine equity issues across thirty schools, including investigating disciplinary measures that disproportionately affected dark children; a yearlong ban on out-of-school suspensions for elementary students; an end to using student standardized testing scores to evaluate teachers; the inclusion of teachers in decisions on the amount of standardized testing to be used; fewer students per special education teacher; and caseload limits for psychologists, occupational therapists, and other school-site specialists.

One central focus of the strike was to bring attention to the issues of equity centered on race and discipline within the district. Matt Carter, a special education teacher, addressed this issue head-on:

> I've spent my entire 14 years in Seattle working in southeast schools. When I look at the discipline numbers—the number of kids suspended and expelled—it's almost all African-American young men. Then you look at the rates up north, and if there are some, it's the few kids of color up there. It's so egregious and so obvious.
>
> We've asked for an equity team in every school. They told us it was a great idea, but they only want to do it in 6 schools out of 97 schools in the district. We absolutely said no. There are equity problems in every single school.[21]

Many parents supported the teacher strike. Naomi Wilson, a parent in the district, said, "Cost of living is definitely something that we support for teachers . . . but things like recess and reasonable testing and workloads and special education and equity—that's them fighting for us. Those are the issues we raised. So we come out strong and support their ability to bargain and fight not just for us, but for the education system. These are our kids. These are *my* kids."[22] After five days, the strike was over and teachers had received many of their demands. Of course, Seattle's schools are not now perfect beacons of equity, but teachers and parents found the power of their voices, grassroots organization, a politics of refusal, self-determination, and solidarity. At the end of the 2018 school year, the Seattle Education Association, which calls itself "the voice of Seattle public school educators," voted on a resolution calling for a moratorium on all standardized testing.[23] The efforts of Seattle's teachers are also an example of the meticulous, piece-by-piece tearing down of a system of injustice.

In 2018, there were teacher strikes in West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Arizona calling for greater pay. Teacher pay in the US is down 5 percent, while class sizes are up and the cost of living is rising steeply.[24] Economic frustrations breed resistance, movements for justice, and solidarity. With the price of food and gas steadily increasing, high student loan debt, and low teacher pay, teachers could qualify for free and reduced lunch along with their students. Though I am being facetious, these conditions are forcing many teachers into debt, especially dark teachers, whose families were never allowed to buy into the American dream. I therefore support teacher strikes; however, we need to be critical of strikes that are not centered around issues of equity and

race, because history tells us that dark people will always get the short end of the deal.

In September 2017, over 1,100 students in Denver, Colorado, walked out of school in protest of the Trump administration's decision to rescind Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). A month later, Dreamers blocked the vehicle entrance to Disneyland, chanting, "No dream! No deal!" This is the creativity and the people power needed, fueled by youth for the abolishment of injustice. United We Dream is an immigrant-youth-led national grassroots organization that Ella Baker would have been proud of. United We Dream has been organizing across the US under the vision:

> With a driving force of more than 400,000 members and an online reach of over 4,000,000 across the nation, we envision a society based on human dignity that celebrates all of our communities. We understand that, in order to achieve this vision, how we do work must be reflective of the kind of society we aim to create: multi-ethnic, interdependent, intersectional, and inter-generational, all connected and reliant upon one another to achieve the highest standards for our collective humanity and liberation.
>
> We embrace the common struggle of all people of color and stand up against racism, colonialism, colorism, and xenophobia. We stand against sexism, misogyny, and male-centered leadership while uplifting women leaders and the leadership of LGBTQ people. We work to make our spaces accessible to people of all abilities and seek to stand in solidarity and partnership with all who share our values.[25]

United We Dream's vision statement is an example of intersectional social justice and giving this world hell. This organization is freedom dreaming in real time. They understand that their humanity is entangled with everyone's humanity; the same for their citizenship. History has taught

us that as long as one dark group's citizenship is in jeopardy, every dark group's citizenship is in jeopardy. United We Dream's vision is grounded in a collective struggle for humanity for all of us, not just undocumented youth. They are refusing to be silent, knowing that one of the most powerful tools they have against injustice is their voices. Their grassroots organizing, self-determination, and quest for human rights is teaching the world what is possible in the US. They are an exemplar of abolitionist teaching.

In January 2018, a letter from a third grader, King Johnson, gave this world hell when it went viral. King wrote a letter to his White teacher in his class journal asking her to stop teaching him lies about Christopher Columbus. King informed his teacher that he could not listen when he heard lies. He ends his journal entry by asking a question that has plagued the field of education since schools were disingenuously integrated: "How can White people teach Black history?"[26] Another exemplar of giving this world hell, self-determination, and the creativity of needed change is eleven-year-old Marley Dias, who started a book drive with the goal of collecting one thousand books that focus on girls of color. Her book drive, which gained international recognition, grew out of her frustration over and refusal to be exposed to books in school about "White boys and their dogs." There is also the boldness of Corrie Davis, a parent who fought the Cobb County, Georgia, school board and won after her son, who is Black, was called a slave by his White classmate on Civil War dress-up day. The White student came to school dressed as a plantation owner (slave owner). Cobb County schools will no longer have Civil War dress-up day. There are also teachers in solidarity with their students who are

taking a knee during school events to protest police brutality and state-sanctioned violence.

A strong example of practicing a politics of refusal, visionary thinking, boldness, collectivism, and rebellion is seen with the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. After a mass shooting at their school that killed fifteen of their classmates and two school officials, these students organized and inspired school walkouts across Florida and the US to protest gun violence in schools and call for gun reform or the banning of guns altogether. The young people from Parkland also led a national school walkout in March 2018. In a memorable and roaring speech aimed at politicians, Emma Gonzalez, a high school senior who survived the shooting and became one of the leading voices against the NRA and politicians who take the NRA's money, said, "We keep telling them that if they accept this blood money, they are against the children. . . . You're either funding the killers, or you're standing with the children. The children who have no money. We don't have jobs, so we can't pay for your campaign. We would hope that you have the decent morality to support us at this point."[27] David Hogg, Emma's classmate, asked politicians, "If you can't get elected without taking money from child murderers, why are you running?"[28] The courage of these young people as they attempt to radically change gun laws in the US is the courage and freedom dreaming of abolitionists.

Before the Parkland youth made national headlines with their activism, organizations such as Black Youth Project 100 and the Dream Defenders had been fighting gun violence for years. These groups' platforms push for an end to gun violence not just in our schools but in our communities. Black Youth Project 100 is the brainchild of political scientist Dr. Cathy Cohen. The organization

focuses on developing members eighteen to thirty-five years old through a participatory democracy model that centers a Black queer feminist lens. Black Youth Project 100's "Agenda to Build Black Futures" calls for "shifts in economic policy in order to acquire the resources needed to build healthy lives, strong families, and communities."[29] Black Youth Project 100 has chapters throughout the US. Dream Defenders is a Florida-based organization, established in 2012, that declared, "In 2018, we were killed in our classrooms and on street corners. We were locked inside Florida's prisons and the keys were thrown away. We live in a state with more billionaires than almost anywhere in the country, yet, our parents and our teachers didn't have the basic resources they needed to keep us safe."[30]

As I stand with the youth of Parkland, I am reminded of how anti-Blackness works. The youth of Parkland were given a national microphone not only to discuss the loss of their classmates and their trauma but to speak out against gun violence and add to the intentionally elusive conversation on gun control in this country. Celebrities gave hefty financial contributions to support the efforts of the Parkland students' demonstration in Washington, DC, March for Our Lives, a movement to advance gun control. Dark organizations have been fighting for years on the issue of gun violence, inside and outside of schools. America's anti-Black attention span can focus on calling out and selling Black-on-Black crime for TV ratings, but it never focuses on Black folx' solutions to make their communities safe. This disparity is another reason why intersectional social justice is needed, so we can be inclusive but understand how anti-Blackness shifts the conversation and resources.

In February 2018, educators and parents from around the US organized around a national "Black Lives Matter Week

of Action in Our Schools." The freedom dreaming started in 2016 in schools around the country. Two years later, schools in Seattle, Philadelphia, Rochester, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, and DC taught children the struggle of Black people in all its beauty. The Prince George's County (Maryland) school board in 2018 passed a resolution called "Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools," which outlined how students will learn about and discuss not only the Black Lives Matter movement but how racism and discrimination function in society. The resolution states the following:

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION REGARDING BLACK LIVES

MATTER AT SCHOOL

WHEREAS, a national movement has arisen to assert that Black Lives Matter;

WHEREAS, this movement has raised awareness about injustices that exist at the intersections of race, class, and gender; including mass incarceration, police brutality, poverty, unaffordable housing, income disparity, homophobia, unjust immigration policies, gender inequality, and poor access to healthcare;

WHEREAS, in support of a national movement of teachers, parents, scholars and administrators who

have come together to proclaim a week of action, affirmation, and solidarity, to be called "Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools";

WHEREAS, the thirteen guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted during this week of action are a means of challenging the insidious legacy of institutionalized racism and oppression that has plagued the United States since its founding;

WHEREAS, the purpose of the week will be to spark an ongoing movement of critical reflection and honest conversations in school communities for people of all ages to engage with critical issues of social justice . . .[31]

The intentionality of these words demonstrates these educators' deep sense of understanding how structural inequality is reproduced and how education that does not hide the truth from students is one of the first steps of freedom dreaming and fighting for freedom. The thirteen guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted in the resolution speak to the intersectional justice of Black Lives Matter: Black families, Black villages, Black women, collective value, diversity, empathy, globalism, intergenerationalism, love engagement, queer affirmation, restorative justice, transgender affirmation, and being unapologetically Black.[32] These principles affirm inclusiveness but center those at the margins of society. The push for justice by students, parents, and community members cannot be done without solidarity and a reflectiveness of self.

Teachers from around the country are forming organizations to freedom-dream new teaching methods, classrooms, community partnerships, and school systems built with intersectional social justice at the roots of their foundations. Badass Teachers Association, New York Collective of Radical Teachers, Caucus of Working Educators, Teacher Action Group in Philadelphia and Boston, Teachers of Social Justice in Chicago, Teachers 4 Social Justice in San Francisco, Black Teacher Project, Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice, Educators' Network of Social Justice in Milwaukee, Education for Liberation Network, Association of Raza Educators in San Diego and Oakland, and Free Minds, Free People are all teacher-activist organizations that will move us forward in tearing down the educational survival complex and creating an education system thought by some to be impossible.[33]

In 2018 the Rochester City School District introduced an antiracism and cultural competency pedagogy that emphasizes building personal relationships with students and their families, called Victorious Minds Academy. One of the goals of VMA is to recognize how structural racism and White supremacy function "from classrooms, principals' offices, and the downtown headquarters."[34] VMA grew out of the work of Dr. Joy DeGruy, an expert on antiracism. Her book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* is the driving force of VMA. The district worked closely with DeGruy to develop an academy for teachers that helps them recognize the lasting impact of the historical trauma of slavery on students of color, how culturally responsive teaching recognizes that students of color may learn differently from White students but does not see that as a deficit, and the importance of building relationships with both the child and the family rather than just sharing

knowledge of and building on students' assets instead of pointing out their deficits.[35] Abolitionist teaching on a wide scale requires the willingness of teachers and school administrators to address systemic racism and its effects on dark children while loving Blackness enough to see its assets so that dark children matter.

There are many, but two abolitionist teachers I want to highlight are Jahana Hayes and Mandy Manning; both were awarded the prestigious title of National Teacher of the Year, in 2016 and 2018, respectively. Hayes left education to run for office as the state of Connecticut's first Black Democrat to serve. Hayes says she is running because, "I feel like I'm at a point in my life where I have a responsibility to speak up for my community. We need someone who will speak to what's happening in public education, what's happening on our borders, what's happening to our organized labor unions—because all these people who work every day and contribute in our community . . . feel like they're left out of the conversation."[36]

In 2018, when Manning arrived at the White House to officially be awarded National Teacher of the Year, she handed President Donald Trump a stack of letters from her students, who are refugee and immigrant children. She also staged a silent protest by wearing political pins that were highly visible to the president. One of her pins read "Trans Equality Now" and another was a rainbow-colored apple to support LGBTQ rights in education. In her application for Teacher of the Year, Manning wrote:

> In the current political climate, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric is rampant. . . . As soon as my students arrive, they are afraid they will have to leave. Most of my students come to the U.S. seeking safety, but they don't always feel safe here. This makes it hard for them to share

> and learn from others. I must help them understand current events, know their rights, and provide a safe and welcoming environment.[37]

Hayes and Manning are using their platforms to fight for intersectional justice and sound the alarm of the everyday realities dark children and their families endure, while trying to just survive.

Lastly, I want to discuss another remarkable place of freedom dreaming and abolitionist teachings outside of schools. Jackson, Mississippi, is a city pursuing freedom by building new democratic institutions that place power in the hands of the people. Through participatory democracy and a vision for economic solidarity, Jackson has become what Robin D. G. Kelley calls "America's most radical city, where a genuinely revolutionary movement is building our first cooperative commonwealth dedicated to the principles of democracy, human rights, workers' power, environmental sustainability, and socialism."[38] Black folx in Jackson and their coconspirators have embraced radical democratic traditions of abolition democracy. Kelley writes:

> This radical democratic tradition cannot be traced to the founding fathers or the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. Instead, it is manifest in the struggles of the dispossessed to overturn the Eurocentric, elitist, patriarchal, and dehumanizing structures of racial capitalism and its liberal underpinnings. It is manifest in the struggle to restore the "commons" to the commonwealth, which has been at the heart of radical abolitionism—or what Du Bois called the Abolition Democracy.[39]

Jackson's vision is a vision of freedom, a vision of giving this country's government hell, a vision that will not be won without struggle. Chokwe Lumumba, a lawyer and

freedom fighter, was elected mayor of Jackson in 2013. Lumumba was the leader of the New Afrikan People's Organization and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. Lumumba moved to Jackson from Detroit in 1971 with the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PGRNA), "a movement for Black self-determination that envisioned the South as the site for establishing an independent Black nation."[40] PGRNA bought land in Jackson, established cooperative farms, and freedom-dreamed a new vision of democracy grounded in the ideas of abolition democracy. Their vision is the foundation of Jackson's racial vision today. A year after being elected mayor, Chokwe Lumumba died, but his ideas did not. His son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, ran for mayor and won in 2017. Of course, White rage is raging. The state government is trying to take local control away from the Black city council by introducing legislation that would relinquish control of the city's airport and commerce from the mayor's office and city council. The state also reallocated funds from the city's 1 percent sales tax aimed at infrastructure stability.[41] There will always be setbacks, missteps, pushback, and losses in the fight for justice. Whiteness is resisting too. Whiteness will counterpunch and try to knock you out because Whiteness is consumed by its self-interest. However, activism, no matter how big or how small, grounded in the teachings and dreams of abolitionist and participatory democracy, will win.

The ideas of Jackson, VMA, the New York Collective of Radical Teachers, the Dream Defenders, "Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Our Schools," the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Marley Dias, King Johnson, the community that fought for the Tucson Unified School District's ethnic studies classes, United We Dream, and all the parents, teachers, students, artists, and

activists—their struggles make freedom dreaming possible and abolitionist teaching a reality.

SOLIDARITY

On June 27, 2015, Bree Newsome strapped on her climbing gear, climbed a flagpole over South Carolina's State House, and removed its Confederate flag. It seemed liked a spontaneous act of rebellion, but it was calculated, well timed, and done in solidarity with others so that a Black woman would be the one who took down the flag. Nine days before Newsome's climb, White supremacist Dylann Roof entered the oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, affectionately called Mother Emanuel, sat with churchgoers during Bible study, then shot and killed nine people while yelling racial epithets at his victims. Days later, it was revealed that Roof had posted hateful, racist, and anti-Semitic messages online, including a picture of himself holding a handgun and a Confederate flag.

Newsome's removal of the Confederate flag was not just about protesting the flag and the hate and racism it incites. It was also about the victims and the survivors of the church shooting and racial injustice everywhere. As Newsome scaled the flagpole, authorities waited below to arrest her. However, they also had another plan to get her down: to tase the pole with their taser gun, which could have killed Newsome. Her coconspirator, James Tyson, a White man, also waited at the bottom, tightly hugging the pole so that if they tased the pole, they would tase him too. The two had met just days before they took down the flag. Both Newsome and Tyson were from Charlotte, North Carolina; both were seasoned activists; and both had been arrested during separate civil disobedience acts in Raleigh at an event called Moral Monday. Their paths crossed at a

meeting in Charlotte at which local activists were planning to take down a Confederate flag. Newsome volunteered to climb a flagpole at South Carolina's State House, but she was not an experienced climber. She had to train. Newsome, Tyson, and another activist practiced climbing poles around Charlotte leading up to the South Carolina flag removal. The day of the removal, Newsome and Tyson waited in an IHOP parking lot in the wee hours of the morning for the signal to scale the pole. In an interview after the event, Tyson said, "We did have some support from deep-pocketed allies who bought the climbing gear and promised to cover bail."[42] At 6:15 a.m., they got the go-ahead text.

Newsome and Tyson made history that day and showed the world what is possible. These two strangers put their lives on the line for each other; they were willing to risk it all to symbolically remove racism. Beyond the symbolism of their efforts is an example of solidarity, trust, and the deliberate centering of a Black woman to be the face of justice. Tyson was more than her ally; he was her coconspirator.

COCONSPIRATORS, NOT ALLIES

In many intersectional social justice groups, the language is shifting from needing allies to coconspirators. Ally-ship is working toward something that is mutually beneficial and supportive to all parties involved. Allies do not have to love dark people, question their privilege, decenter their voice, build meaningful relationships with folx working in the struggle, take risks, or be in solidarity with others. They just have to show up and mark the box present; thus, ally-ship is performative or self-glorifying. This type of ally-ship still centers Whiteness in dark spaces. Too often, though not always, our allies are eager White folx who

have not questioned their Whiteness, White supremacy, White emotions of guilt and shame, the craving for admiration, or the structures that maintain White power. Also, how can allies work from the mindset of mutuality if they are the dominant group? I have personally witnessed allies take over the conversation and make the meeting about their singular issue; they act as an authority on a community they have never lived in, and they stop freedom dreams because they are not interested in tearing down systems that benefit them and their loved ones but not the rest of us. They also do not know how to work their privilege for dark lives.

Tyson put his body on the line for Newsome understanding that his White skin and his gender were her protection. He knew the chances of the police killing a White man on camera in broad daylight would be far less than those of killing a Black woman by herself. His Whiteness was her protection. Tyson was not an ally; he was a coconspirator who understood how Whiteness works in our society. He was willing to use his intersections of privilege, leverage his power, and support Newsome to stand in solidarity and confront anti-Blackness. A coconspirator functions as a verb, not a noun. Coconspirators can also be men who understand their privilege and work to challenge and undo patriarchy.

The backbone of abolitionist teaching is solidarity with courageous coconspirators. Coconspirators work toward and understand the following, according to Allies for Change, a network of educators and activists committed to sustained "life-giving ally relationship":

- Understanding where we stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression, and unlearning the habits and practices that protect

those systems, which is lifelong work for all of us, without exception
- Authentic relationships of solidarity and mutuality, which are not possible when we try to avoid or transcend power imbalances
- Honestly acknowledging and confronting those imbalances to create authentic relationships
- Social change work is always rooted in collaboration, humility, and accountability
- The interior journey into silence, mediation, inner wisdom, and deep joy is inextricably linked to the outer work of social change[43]

These steps are the internal work that needs to happen before the outside work can start. One cannot enter freedom-dreaming spaces holding on to dark people's nightmares. We cannot have conversations about racism without talking about Whiteness. The time-consuming and serious critique and reflection of one's sociocultural heritage—which includes identities related to race, ethnicity, family structure, sexuality, class, abilities, and religion—taken side by side with a critical analysis of racism, sexism, White supremacy, and Whiteness is the groundwork of coconspirators. It also presents time to challenge what you think about your own educational experiences and resources in relation to the issues your students and their communities face. It is time to reflect on your educational history that either enabled or prevented you from achieving. How do resources such as your family, school structure, curriculum, materials, school funding, and community support help you thrive in education? This type of deep personal reflection is a must before taking up space in spaces that are trying to build, heal, and tear down all at

the same time while never forgetting that joy is central to the work of freedom.

Whitney Dow, creator of the Whiteness Project, captured the work best when he said, "Until you can recognize that you are living a racialized life and you're having racialized experiences every moment of every day, you can't actually engage people of other races around the idea of justice."[44] When speaking about White guilt, Dow adds, "I could do something inside and that would change things. It kind of eliminated guilt for me. It made me feel incredibly empowered and really enriched my world." Dow is describing the inner work that is needed when you are White and fighting for justice in solidarity with dark folx. Molly Tansey, coauthor of *Teaching While White* and a former student of mine, says that early on in her teaching career she was "driven by the self-satisfaction" of making it visible to her peers that she was not racist.[45] But the real work for Molly began when she started having conversations acknowledging her White privilege with other White people; when she began to name Whiteness and its privileges with her White friends, family members, and colleagues. This is the work of challenging Whiteness in your community so you can challenge it at school. The work is not a onetime conversation; it is who you must become in and outside the classroom.

BLACK JOY

The hashtags #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackBoyJoy, #BlackGirlsRock, #CareFreeBlackKids, #BlackManJoy, and #BlackJoyProject are not just social media gimmicks or trends; they are what is needed for resistance, freedom, healing, and joy. Joy is crucial for social change; joy is crucial for teaching. Finding joy in the midst of pain and trauma is the fight to be fully human. A revolutionary spirit

that embraces joy, self-care, and love is moving toward wholeness. Acknowledging joy is to make yourself aware of your humanity, creativity, self-determination, power, and ability to love abundantly. Freedom dreams are brought to life through joy and love of dark people's light. Joy makes the quest for justice sustainable. Black feminist Brittney Cooper writes that joy "is critical in reinvigorating our capacity for a new vision. When we lack joy, we have diminished capacity for self-love and self-valuing and for empathy. If political struggle is exercise for the soul, joy is the endorphin rush such struggles bring."[46] We cannot freedom-dream without joy.

Abolitionists loved; abolitionists found joy in some of the most hideous conditions; abolitionists formed communities from the love and joy of people in search of their full humanity. Joy provides a type of nourishment that is needed to be dark and fully alive in White spaces, such as schools. Abolitionist teaching is not just about tearing down and building up but also about the joy necessary to be in solidarity with others, knowing that your struggle for freedom is constant but that there is beauty in the camaraderie of creating a just world.

There is joy and then there is Black joy. Both are necessary for justice; however, Black joy is often misunderstood. Black joy is to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells you that you are disposable and that you do not matter. Black joy is a celebration of taking back your identity as a person of color and signaling to the world that your darkness is what makes you strong and beautiful. Black joy is finding your homeplace and creating homeplaces for others. Black joy is understanding and recognizing that as a dark person you come with grit and zest because you come from survivors who pushed their bodies and minds to the limits for you to one day thrive.

Abolitionist teaching is not sustainable without joy. Dark students have to enter the classroom knowing that their full selves are celebrated. Not just their culture, language, sexuality, or current circumstances but their entire selves, past, present, and future. Their ancestors, their family members, their friends, their religion, their music, their dress, their language, the ways they express their gender and sexuality, and their communities must all be embraced and loved. Schools must support the fullness of dark life as a way to justice. Abolitionist teaching is searching for spaces of understanding and affirming. Abolitionists dreamed in full color of what life would be without oppression. Black joy makes that world manageable for dark people; it is how we cope. It is how we love. Black joy is not wishful thinking; it is a love for those who made it possible for you to stand tall and believe in tomorrow, because you have a blueprint of resistance, love, and strength in your DNA. Abolitionist teaching harnesses Black joy because it is Black joy. There are no grit lab tests for Black joy, and Black joy is infectious.

Teachers who understand Black joy enter the classroom knowing that dark students knowing their history, falling in love with their history, and finding their voice are more important than grades. Good grades do not equal joy. Black joy is knowing that you are more than your trauma while understanding that healing from trauma is a process.

White folx can also embrace Black joy by helping, advocating for, and wanting Black folx to win. Recognizing and acknowledging White privilege is cute, but what does it mean without action? Dismantling White privilege is giving something up so Black folx can win. If folx with privilege are not using their privilege to demand justice and advocate for dark folx and all their identities, then they are complicit in White rage or male rage and thus are

condoning injustice, violence, and the educational survival complex. By winning, I mean White folx ensuring that people of color are being paid equally or more than their White peers. White teachers demanding that schools hire more teachers of color. Silencing your White voice so dark folx' voices can be heard. White folx bringing dark folx in on all decision-making and dark folx having equal or more weight, and not just on issues about injustice or education but on issues that impact all of us, regardless of the color of our skin. White folx embracing Black joy is loving seeing dark people win, thrive, honor their history, and be fully human.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a word used in the field of education to scare educators into spirit-murdering dark children. Educators are held accountable for their students' academic achievements by mandated federal policies attached to school funding. Federal standard-based accountability intensified in 2001 with the passage of No Child Left Behind. In essence, NCLB was a federal surveillance system that monitored student achievement, accreditation of teacher-preparation programs, and teacher licensure. NCLB's oversight was framed as a way of "protecting the public from educational malpractice, or, more ambitiously, of ensuring that high standards are met."[47] Monitoring students' achievement on a federal level opened up the floodgates for corporate money to enter education. While companies were profiting from the narrative that they were protecting the public, we stopped protecting dark students' potential, if we ever had. And we stopped being accountable for the pain, hurt, trauma, and wrongdoings, if we ever had been. Abolitionist teaching asks us to be accountable for the pain we have caused others, to restore

justice, and call into question our liberal politics. The great Audre Lorde said, "The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us."[48] Abolitionist teaching asks us to question the piece of the oppressor that lives in all of us.

As educators, we need to think of accountability beyond testing and academic achievement, and in terms of human suffering. How do we hold teachers accountable for injustices in their classrooms that they themselves have caused? How do we hold men accountable for restoring justice due to the harm of patriarchy? How do we hold a country accountable for restoring justice after putting children in cages and causing irreversible levels of toxic stress? Abolitionist teachers have to hold themselves and their colleagues to a level of accountability that focuses on justice, love, healing, and restoring humanity. Educators, and especially those with privilege, must be responsible for making sure dark children and their families win.

Abolitionist teaching is asking a lot of all teachers, but any good pedagogy should. Any pedagogy that does not interrogate and challenge Whiteness is inadequate, especially since more than 80 percent of the teaching force is White. Any pedagogy that does not help teachers contextualize students' realities is inadequate because no student is solely responsible for their reality. And any pedagogy that does not challenge injustice is useless because survival is not the goal. Abolitionist teaching asks a lot because the work is too important not to. Our schools and our teaching practices do not need to be reimagined; they need to be torn down and replaced with our freedom dreams rooted in participatory democracy and intersectional justice.