

Exclusion and Extraction

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Situating Spirit Murdering in Community Colleges

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Abstract

Black, Indigenous, and other students of color (BIPOC) are selecting to attend community colleges more than any other post-secondary school setting. However as the author argues, community colleges have, since their inception, served as exclusionary spaces for labor extraction that murders the spirits of BIPOC students. This article explores spirit murdering at a mid-sized urban community college in Chicago. The author presents historical and contemporary narratives of community colleges as sites of extraction and exclusion. The article ends with a call for community college policymakers and practitioners to engage in a more liberatory hidden curriculum, creating and maintaining more co-conspiring relationships and a more community-driven ecosystem of teaching and learning.

Keywords: community college research, spirit murdering, hidden curriculum, equity

Introduction

Joliet Junior College (JJC) is located roughly 40 miles southwest of Chicago and is known to be the first community college in the United States. Joliet Junior College started as an exclusively white institution but has seen a shift in racial demographics over the past 120 years. In the fall of 2019, JJC enrolled over 14,000 students. Of those, 55 percent were white, 29 percent were Latinx Hispanic, 10 percent Black, and three percent Asian (Joliet Junior College, 2020).

In 1981 the JJC Police Department was established, and in 2003 they were authorized to become a “fully armed police agency” (Joliet

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Junior College, 2019). The department's website boasts a staff of 15 police officers, campus safety officers, a Bike/ATV unit, and a Special Weapons and Tactical (SWAT) Team (Joliet Junior College, 2019). During a training in 2019, then police chief Pete Comanda urged other officers to hang a Black officer from a tree (Fabbre, 2020). According to a memo written by campus administration, Comanda was given a written warning and placed on a performance improvement plan for "racially-based statements that are in conflict with the college's position on diversity, equity, and inclusion" (Fabbre, 2020).

Students at the community college organized in response to the decision not to fire Comanda. They spoke out publicly, drawing into question the campus's commitment to students of color. Several student organizations spoke out during a Board of Trustees meeting. One student said, "We all want to be safe here and right now we don't feel that" (Joliet Junior College Board of Trustees, 2020, p. 2). A board member followed the students saying, "I don't want this overt incident to be seen as an isolated occurrence but more so an indication of the more systemic problem that we are facing" (Joliet Junior College Board of Trustees, 2020, p. 4).

The statements from that evening tell a story of pain, fear, but also one of illumination. They highlight the structures of oppression existent on the college's campus that go beyond one racist cop. The actions of the police commander, and other forms of overt racism, were explicit in their harm. The words were clearly bound to a history of policing and racial violence. In this case, the harm was related to physical violence.

The systemic problem mentioned by the Board member refers to a different type of violence. This harm is to the spirit, the source of Black people's power stored in the memories of their souls (Dubois, 1904). Black students, and other students of color, enter community colleges with aspirations of access and opportunity but may be confronted with spiritual assaults that not only prevent their academic success, but also murder their agency, their histories, and their humanity. Patricia Williams (1987) termed these "deeply painful and assaultive" (p. 129) crimes of racism "spirit-murdering" (p. 129).

This article seeks to explore spirit murdering in community colleges. I interweave Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the work of Black feminist scholars that have studied the intersections of violence and healing (Collins, 1991; hooks, 2014; Love, 2014, 2016; Williams, 1987), (re)conceptualizations of the hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1980; Givens, 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013; Kanpol, 1988; Patel, 2019), scholarship documenting implicit forms racism within community colleges (Baber et al., 2019; García-Louis, et al., 2020; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2019; Williams & Nichols, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2021), and my own experiences as a community

college administrator to present a historical and contemporary narrative that situates community colleges as sites of spirit murdering and more specifically, as sites of exclusion and extraction. I also use these analyses to present an alternative, an intervention, to spirit murdering in community colleges.

Understanding how racialized harm exists and is reproduced in community colleges may help community college practitioners and researchers, or at least those of us committed to building and sustaining more liberatory community college spaces, to better name and dismantle the harmful conditions that oppress Black students, and others that have been historically excluded from schools of higher education in concept and practice. More than ever, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) are selecting community colleges as their post-secondary homes (Ma & Boum, 2016). However, as this article details, these students' experiences and educational outcomes tell a story of spirit murdering through racialized exclusion and extraction. As a justice-centered, Black, administrator at a community college, this subject is both personal and political to me. The articulations of spirit murdering are analyses of my own lived experiences in schools, analyses that I hope can support other community colleges in creating less harmful conditions for their students.

After framing the inquiry, I detail spirit murdering in community colleges through a historical and contemporary narrative that documents their creation and maintenance. Both contextualizations of spirit murdering seek to illuminate how community colleges have functioned through exclusion and extraction. I end this article by returning to history, documenting moments where spirit murdering was resisted and how we might use those moments as roadmaps to create and maintain more liberatory community colleges.

Throughout the article, I will use the terms Black and *BIPOC* (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) for differing, and synergetic reasons. Black people deserve specific attention at points throughout the article as our experiences are bound in a history erased and one tied to our continued enslavement. At times the experiences of Black people in higher education are not the same as other people of color. I also use BIPOC to be more inclusive of the oppressive experiences of other non-white people in the U.S. that do connect to the experiences of Black people. I use the term BIPOC "to highlight the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black. . . people have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all people of color within a U.S. context" (The BIPOC Project, nd).

Critical Race Theory, Spirit Murdering, and the Hidden Curriculum

Critical Race Theorists remind us that racism is endemic to the structures of U.S. society (Crenshaw, et al., 1995). From this perspective, racism is permanent in all structures, including the ones that create and maintain schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Patricia Williams (1987), the mother of early articulations of spirit-murdering, writes,

Blacks were . . . outlawed from the hopeful, loving expectations that being treated as a whole, rather than three-fifths of a human being can bring. When every resource of a wealthy nation is put to such destructive ends, it will take more than a few generations to mop up the mess. (p. 138)

Williams draws our attention to the context of endemic racism in the U.S., a condition of slavery that continues today. The very explicit realities of lynchings, de jure segregation, and the racial hatred deeply engrained in the U.S. historical context have transformed into implicit practices and policies that exist in contemporary contexts. Much of the racism present in the world today may not be so overt, although this has changed over the past four years with the rise in hate crimes and supremacist organizations (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020).

Schools exist in this implicit milieu, functioning to reproduce (or dismantle) the conditions of the world outside of them. Community colleges, and other institutions of higher education, may play a larger role in the maintenance of a racist world than they appear. Their missions of access and opportunity might be better articulated as mechanisms of exclusion and extraction. Critical Race Theory is an important analytic to both highlight the endemic structures of racism that exist in community colleges and the seemingly progressive practices within them that murder students' spirits.

Williams (1987) reminds us that "blacks are conditioned from infancy to see in themselves only what others who despise them see" (p. 141). In the United States, Black people spend most of our developmental lives in schools. What happens when the very places designed to educate us do something different? What happens when these spaces intentionally harm some of us? Bettina Love (2016) writes about this "race-centered violence" (p. 3) stating,

Spirit murdering within a school context is the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism . . . Black children in schools are humiliated, reduced, and destroyed by visceral and explicit attacks . . . or are systemically and institutionally ejected from schools for being Black. (p. 3)

Williams (1987) and Love (2014, 2016) offer useful conceptualizations of spirit murdering that I will expand. Here, I extend this framework, previously applied in the legal field and k-12 spaces, into community colleges. For those that continue on to community college or return to them as non-traditional students, the “personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries” (Love, 2014, p. 302) that existed in high school may continue.

I also borrow from scholarship on the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1970; Anyon, 1980), a reproductive force that is more implicit than explicit. The hidden curriculum in schools, “serves to reinforce basic rules” (Apple, 1980, p. 29) that “contribute to the development in . . . children. . . and . . . thereby help to reproduce this system” (Anyon, 1980, p. 90). In the case of this article, the hidden curriculum offers a framing that illuminates the ways that schools reinforce social norms and reproduce oppression (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Semper & Blasco, 2018). I use analyses of the hidden curriculum to demonstrate the implicit conditions that reproduce racism, murdering the spirits of students at community colleges. More recently, scholars (Givens, 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013; Kanpol, 1988; Patel, 2019) have reconceptualized the hidden curriculum as a mechanism of liberation, of a dismantling of the conditions that murder students’ spirits. Here, I use the hidden curriculum to highlight the possibilities of community colleges. This dialect of the hidden curriculum unveils the hidden structures, policies, and practices that exist, and can exist, in community colleges that stand in opposition to the oppressive structures and practices that murder students’ spirits.

Scholars have begun to document the experiences of students of color in community colleges. Their findings indicate that these students are funneled into low-wage earning career degree and certificate pathways (Georgetown University Center of Education and the Workforce, 2019), experience microaggressions (Garcia-Louis, Saenz, & Guida, 2020; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2019; Williams & Nichols, 2012) and racelighting (Wood & Harris, 2021), do not see their communities and families reflected in the curriculum (Piland & Silva, 2006), and are required to navigate complex processes that create barriers to their academic success (Bailey, et al., 2015; Holzer & Baum, 2017, White & Dache, 2020).

These experiences are bound by implicit acts of racism that have lasting impacts on the spirits of students of color in higher education settings. They negatively impact their sense of belonging (Harris & Wood, 2013; Hussain & Jones, 2019; Wood & Harris, 2013), agency (Shumaker & Wood, 2016; Wood et al., 2013), retention (Acevedo-Gill & Zerquera, 2016; Mertes, 2013; Zamani, 2002), and goal completion (Kirkman, 2018; Edman & Brazil, 2009; Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). Furthermore, these acts are prohibitive to students of color

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who may hold other forms of capital and wealth deemed of no value in institutions of higher education (Yosso, 2005).

This article adds to the existing empirical scholarship related to racialized oppression and resistance in community colleges (Baber et al., 2019; Garcia-Louis, et al., 2020; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2019; Williams & Nichols, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2021). I use the frameworks of Critical Race Theory, hidden curriculum, and spirit murdering as an analytical lens to both historicize and contemporize spirit murdering in community colleges. In the next section, I return to JJC, the first community college in the U.S. I do so to better critique the perceptions of community colleges as spaces of access and opportunity. As the historical narrative presents, community colleges were created as exclusionary spaces of extraction.

Community Colleges: Spaces of Exclusion and Extraction

In 1891, William Rainey Harper took on the Presidency of the University of Chicago before the school opened its doors in 1892. Almost immediately Harper sought to divide the campus, separating the first two years of undergraduate studies from graduate studies, what he viewed as the true vocation of the university. During a speech in 1894, Harper said, “the time will come when the work of the freshman and sophomore years will be carried on away from the university grounds” (Boyer, 2010, p. 107). Harper believed that if the University of Chicago was to reach elite status, the first two years of college belonged elsewhere.

To be clear, Harper’s call for the first two years of undergraduate studies to take place elsewhere was not an aspiration to increase the university’s access to students who otherwise would not enroll. I interpret this as an exclusionary act. Harper’s move to segregate the freshman and sophomore years away from the University of Chicago had long-lasting implications for Black students and other students of color. These students faced double obstacles, one from the extraction and exploitation of their spirits for labor and the other from the oppressive forces of racism that permeate community colleges

Harper’s conceptualizations set the stage for the creation of community colleges as seen in the creation of JJC. In 1893 Stanley Brown, Principal of Joliet High School answered Harper’s call. At the time Joliet was a “key manufacturing center. . . . Limestone quarrying. . . steel mills and a large chemical plant” (Wood, 1987, p. 13). Factory owners needed trained workers, not to run the companies, but to keep them running. The state of Illinois was also struggling with a k-12 teacher shortage, a profession at the time, required no post-secondary schooling. What started as a six-year high school, eventually became Joliet Junior College. In 1902,¹ Joliet Junior College was established as the world’s first public junior college (Wood, 1987).

At the same time, Harper, with the continued support of wealthy financiers like Rockefeller and Marshall Fields, continued to bring resources to the University of Chicago. He hired over 100 new faculty, built new departments, and fundraised to construct, as he called it, “the superstructure erected in the rough” (the University of Chicago, nd). This sits in contradiction to the structures being built and maintained at JJC.

In 1902, JJC opened with two vocational programs for high school graduates (Wood, 1987). One in elementary school teaching and the other was intended to “prepare [students] for employment in some of the local industries” (Wood, 1987, p. 31). Unlike the University of Chicago, the faculty at JJC were not required to have any post-secondary education (Wood, 1987, p. 37). As a result, the education provided led some students to transfer to four-year universities, while most graduates of JJC entered straight into the local workforce.

Many of the vocational jobs available in teaching and local manufacturing did not, at the time, require any post-secondary education. Industry—corporations and businesses seeking private monetary gains within a manufactured competitive marketplace—needed employees who could follow the rules, perform basic tasks and keep the owners’ profits up (Beach, 2011; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Wood, 1987). The education model expanded to other industries. Joliet Junior College created partnerships with hospitals to train students in nursing, they also established a two-year electricians program that led directly to work and built new relationships with businesses to provide clerical workers. The college provided industry with trained workers to fill their jobs free of cost. This school model gained the interest of others. By 1929, there were 92 junior colleges across the U.S. All of them replicated the JJC model (Wood, 1987, p. 42).

As industry moved from low-skill to technologically-skilled jobs community colleges, still called junior colleges at the time, were able to garnish federal, state, and local funding to train workers (Wood, 1987). By 1965 JJC had nearly 3000 students and like years before the college continued to develop new terminal programs in collaboration with industry. Between 1955 and 1965, they created new certificates in business, merchandising, secretarial, home economics, cooperative office economics, data processing, automatic technology, drafting, electricity, mechanical and machine technology, printing, and woodshop (Wood, 1987).

Community colleges have always maintained a close relationship with businesses and corporations. I view and analyze these relationships as ones of extraction, where peoples’ labor was and is used for capital accumulation. Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel (1991) remind us that “the junior college was never intended, despite the high aspirations of its students, to provide anything more than a terminal education for

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most of those who entered it” (p. 205). The vocationization of community colleges has had curricular and pedagogical implications (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1999).

Community colleges were not intended to be places of epistemological curiosity (Freire, 1970), critical thinking, and/or agency to study and transform the world like the University of Chicago. And until students began to demand so, community colleges failed to reflect students’ communities and cultures in the curriculum. Students attending these spaces were subject to a curriculum and teaching bound in white interests that prepared them to follow rules, be compliant, and be efficient (Anyon, 1980; Biondi, 2012; Brint & Karabel, 1991; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1999). As the racial and ethnic demographics of JJC shifted in the 1960s the conditions of learning did not. Like other community colleges, the curriculum continued to be framed through western epistemologies, teachers and school administrators were almost exclusively white, and there was a continued emphasis on supporting industry (Biondi, 2012; Brint & Karabel, 1989).

The history of community colleges illuminates a socially constructed mapping of spirit murdering. Unfortunately, community colleges continue to function in a context of policies and practices that stress outcomes based on private capital gains and market-based outcomes (Baber et al., 2019). While they are open-access, community colleges are not open-opportunity. As detailed in the creation of them, community colleges were never intended to increase social mobility nor end the permanence of racism in the U.S. They, through extraction and exploitation, used students as the means to keep the U.S. capitalistic economy moving, an element that continues today.

Spirit Murdering in the 21st-Century Community College

As of 2016, there were over 1,500 community colleges in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). BIPOC students elect to attend community colleges more than any other post-secondary institution (Ma & Baum, 2016). While community colleges are more diverse than they were one hundred years ago they continue to fail at responding to and sustaining, students’ cultures and complex identities (Abreu, et al., 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017; Yosso, 2005). The curriculum still excludes the contributions of BIPOC cultures (Rendón, 1993; McNairy, 1996), policies negatively impact and harm BIPOC students (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009), and BIPOC students continue to have lower graduation and transfer rates than their white counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Harold Washington College (HWC) is located in the heart of downtown

Chicago and serves as one of seven community colleges in the city. Opened in 1962 as Loop College (City Colleges of Chicago, 2021a) and later renamed after the city's first Black mayor, HWC has always been a minority-serving institution (Harold Washington College, 2020). A majority of the roughly 12,000 students attending HWC come from working-class neighborhoods in the city (Harold Washington College, 2020). They come to Harold Washington College with hopes and aspirations to build a better future for themselves and their families yet BIPOC students and students from low-income families to graduate, nor persist, at the rate of their white peers (Harold Washington College, 2020).

As a former middle school teacher turned college administrator I often see my old students, all of whom were Black, making their way through the HWC entrance. Unfortunately, not one of these former students has graduated or completed their degree. My former students are not alone in their experiences. Data from the college's 2020 Equity Plan show that Black and Latinx students at HWC have lower graduation and transfer rates than their white peers (Harold Washington College, 2020). While many factors lead to degree completion, I credit this pushing out (Morris, 2016) to the spirit murdering that they, and other students, go through.

Students, faculty, and staff at the 11-story vertical HWC campus are greeted by security guards and closed gates. They are required to show identification to enter through the secured turnstiles. No one enters without proving they belong. These mechanisms, of surveillance and distrust, serve as a reminder to students that they may not be as welcomed as the promotional materials make it seem. If students can make it beyond the electronic gates they must navigate a complex system of individualization, competition, and white supremacy that murders their spirits. In the nearly six years that I have held an administrative appointment at HWC, I have come to intimately know how spirit-murdering functions, is manifested, and how it's maintained. Below are a few, of the many examples of its functioning at HWC. While these examples are specific to HWC, I hope readers can contextualize the meaning-making in their own spaces. The conditions of exclusion and extraction, as mechanisms of spirit murdering, exist in other community colleges as well.

- ◆ Students often enter into, and navigate through, learning experiences that are void of their cultures, communities, and families. Classes rarely challenge students to investigate their lives and experiences in the world. Spirit murdering in community colleges is the absence of learning contextualized to your experience and culture. Courses specific to students' cultures and communities (e.g., Chicago history, Latino/a American Studies, Black studies) may not be completely absent, but they are often

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filled quickly and not offered widely. Research has shown that the curriculum in higher education broadly serves as a mechanism to reproduce whiteness and often excludes the contributions from communities of color (Cabrera et al., 2017).

◆ There is a program at HWC, leading to employment as a bank teller, that places students on a point system. They lose points for tasks like not keeping a shirt and tie on and for not keeping their hair cut. Locs and braids are not permitted. While the other programs at HWC may not be as excessive in their surveillance and control of students' bodies, they continue to implicitly send students signals that may equate success to whiteness. This hyper policing of the body turns students from subjects to objects (Freire, 1970) and has long-lasting impacts on how students view themselves, their families, and their communities.

◆ Most new students are required to take a placement test. Students receive messages that read “not there yet” if their scores place them in pre-college credit hours (called developmental education at HWC). Students, through systems of standardized testing, are excluded from participating in some academic paths. These standardized tests are exclusionary mechanisms within HWC and at other community colleges. I recall a conversation with a new student, who was placed into pre-credit Math courses whose full-time job was at a tax agency where they had to apply mathematics regularly. Placement tests murder students' intellectual agency—the confidence that they held before attending the college—and exclude them from full participation in the college.

◆ A Black student from HWC, participating in an apprenticeship program with an international insurance company was told to straighten their natural hairstyle. What is more painful is that the statement was from another Black woman. This exemplifies the horizontal spirit murdering that takes place in community colleges. Fanon (1963) reminds us that “the colonized subject will first train. . . aggressiveness . . . against his [sic] people” (p. 15). In this case, the spirit murdering comes from a horizontal source. Hurt people hurt people. Spirit murdering can be reproduced at the hands of other murdered spirits.

◆ Two years ago a group of my colleagues and I toured our building looking for the implicit messages being sent to students. Once we got past the security desk and gates, we ventured through the first-floor corridor, home to a resource center and large performance space. As we entered the student resource

center we could not find one positive message being sent to our students. Nearly all of the messaging present was directing students where to go, or more specifically where not to go. “Do not enter”, “must start in room 101”, and “have your ID ready” are a few examples of what we found. Signs indicating where not to go and what not to do send implicit and explicit messages to students that they do not belong. Deficit messages, while implicit, murder the spirits of students. They take aim at epistemologies deemed of no value.

◆ Most classrooms at HWC are equipped with desks often situated in rows towards a podium at the front of the class. Teachers stand and students sit. Teachers ask and students respond. This pedagogy evokes what Freire (1970) calls “banking methods.” Students are viewed as empty vessels, only to be filled with the knowledge deemed appropriate by those in power. Banking methods kill the spirit. They strip it of its curiosity, deem the knowledge in it useless, and replace it with disjointed bits of objects.

◆ Students that fall below a grade point average of 2.0 receive a Satisfactory Academic Progress Warning. The warning can turn into a hold on their account, preventing them from taking future courses. To remove the hold students must file an appeal. Some students are denied the appeal, leaving them with no options to reach their goals. In this case, students are blamed for their academic performance, with little to no analysis put on the structures and processes that harm students during their academic pursuits. While they claim to be open access, there are implicit mechanisms and interactions in community colleges that push students out and murder their spirits (Luna & Revilla, 2013; Morris, 2016).

◆ Some days I wear Jordan sneakers, jeans, and a t-shirt that happens to show my tattoos to work. When I do so, I receive harmful and microaggressive comments from my colleagues. “Oh, did they change the dress code”, “that fits you so much better,” and “what do your tattoos say?” are a few of the oppressive, offensive, and racist comments I receive as a younger, Black, long-loc-having person. Spirit murdering at community colleges harms all members of the community. Staff, faculty, and administrators of color also exist in conditions of exclusion. We feel like we do not belong.

Community colleges continue to function as spaces of exclusion and extraction like their predecessors. The conditions detailed above are a

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few, of the many ways, that spirit murdering functions at my community college. However, these conditions are not isolated to HWC. The conditions of exclusion and extraction, as mechanisms of spirit murdering, exist in other community colleges as well.

I encourage readers to consider how the characteristics I describe above are reflected in their colleges, classrooms, and pedagogical interactions with students. By better understanding the implicit structures and practices of harm in our colleges we can better understand and, more importantly, create the systems and conditions that challenge exclusion and extraction. With no intervention community colleges, through their structures and practices of harm, will continue to murder the spirits of BIPOC students.

When classrooms and colleges move to respond to and dismantle, the spiritual pain reproduced within them, conditions for healing may also be created. As we heal our spirits begin to dream again. As we heal we can imagine and actualize the conditions that can transform the world for ourselves and others. As we heal we protect other spirits from being murdered.

Healing the Wounds of Spirit Murdering Through Praxis

While community colleges may be viewed as sites of spirit murdering they also hold a long history of resistance. The stories of people within community colleges that have imagined and actualized more humanizing conditions are valuable. They provide reflexive examples as to how we might resist and one day dismantle systems of exclusion and extraction that harm all students, particularly BIPOC students in community colleges.

In 1911, Crane Junior College was founded as the first campus of the City Colleges of Chicago. Over time, Black students, primarily, organized to dismantle the school's implicit racist structures. After the great depression, Crane was forced to close and was re-opened as Theodore Herzl in 1933 (City Colleges of Chicago, 2021). As historian Martha Biondi puts it, "By the late 1960s, this public institution . . . had a majority Black student body but a largely white faculty, curriculum, and administration" (Biondi, 2012, p. 102). Standish Willis, a Black student at Herzl started the Black Student Union in 1964 (The History Makers, 2003) as a space where Black students could organize against the exclusion they were experiencing. They created their own newspaper, organized protests, started a "communi-versity" to promote Black history, and eventually organized to have the school renamed to honor Malcolm X in 1969 (Biondi, 2012).

At the same time, President Charles Hurst, one of the first Black

community college presidents, was appointed to office in 1969. Hurst sought to break the conditions of exclusion and extraction at then Herzl. He posted signs that read “Black Excellence” on every classroom door at the college, supported the students in naming the school after Malcolm X, gave awards out to the Black Panther Party, replaced Columbus Day with a celebration of Nat Turner, and often urged students to “not forget their roots” (Biondi, 2012, p. 110) and to “choose careers that would benefit their communities” (Biondi, 2012, p. 110).

City Colleges of Chicago has a long history of activism, mostly led and initiated by students. However, Chicago was not the only place of resistance. Student organizing in New York led to a more culturally relevant curriculum, more Black faculty, and eventually open admissions at all CUNY schools (Biondi, 2012). On the west coast, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton started the first chapter of the Black Panther Party at Merritt Community College in 1961 (Murch, 2010). And in 1969, student-led protests at San Francisco State College led to a number of ethnic studies programs at the community college and across the U.S. (Umemoto, 1989).

All of these historical examples, while only a few of the many forms of resistance that have taken place at community colleges, present historical narratives of resistance to spirit murdering. They also illuminate the dual purpose of the hidden curriculum. Like I mentioned earlier, I use analyses of the hidden curriculum to demonstrate the implicit ways that schools and spaces within them can be used as a mechanism of liberation. Students at Herzl, and later Malcolm X, had to evoke a hidden curriculum, a curriculum beneath the normal currents of operation at the college.

These students created spaces that were resistant to the structures of educational inequity and white supremacy. They demanded a more equitable and just college experience and ultimately created the conditions of teaching and learning that were not bound in exclusion and extraction. Black students could feel safe, and where they organized and healed their wounded spirits. They created a space to reflect and act, what Freire (1970) calls praxis. These praxes evoke a hidden curriculum that has always existed in community colleges.

Today, some community college students, faculty, staff, and administration engage in implicit (and explicit) practices that seek to rupture the oppressive structures that bound them. Student clubs, like Black students unions, continue to serve as safe spaces for students to organize around issues that limit their success. Faculty evoke hidden curricula that create learning spaces rooted in love, compassion, and the investigation of students’ lives, cultures, and communities. Policies are being created and removed to reverse the long histories of racism implicit in them. There is a current in the contemporary community college

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landscape that is calling for racial equity in community colleges, a structural dismantling of anti-Black systems that exclude and exploit BIPOC students (Baber, et al., 2019; Bensimon, 2018; McNair, et al., 2020).

Freire (1970) reminds us that “only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible” (p. 90). While we may not be able to dismantle spirit murdering in all community colleges (just yet), we can carve out spaces within them that abolish the conditions for spirit murdering. Here the hidden curriculum represents a humanizing curriculum. One that supports the healing of the wounded spirit. In our quest to abolish the situations that create spirit murdering we may be restoring the humanity in ourselves and each other, recognizing our power to create change.

The implicit harm caused by community colleges has life-long impacts on our spirits, on how students see themselves and each other. Abolishing this harm might start by attending to the safety of all members of the campus community, using methods outside of ones bound in exclusion and extraction. Relationships rooted in co-conspiracy (Love, 2019) might be one step towards this goal. Co-conspiring relationships are symbiotic connections developed and maintained through inextricable boundedness between people. When we see our relationships through the concept of *what happens to you happens to me* we may be able to better interrogate and dismantle power and oppression in our interactions with ourselves and each other.

Furthermore, community colleges may be able to challenge their relationship to capital by being more attentive to the needs of people and the communities in which they come from. In this situation schools still function as pathways to careers, but can do so by positioning students through their power and their communities as spaces of transformation. As colleges plan and implement new initiatives they should consider how they contribute to the well-being of the community, not an individual. “Making it” in this sense does not lead to an escape of one’s community but a return. In this situation, colleges function to build a new labor force to provide people with the skill sets they, and their communities, need and a more humanizing, collaborative, and just world.

Conclusion

Black, Indigenous, and other students of color enter into community colleges with hopes and aspirations for the future. Often hidden under missions and visions of access and opportunity, these students are entering into places of exclusion and extraction. Many students at community colleges across the U.S. are navigating through anti-Black

conditions that implicitly harm them. As this paper has argued community colleges murder the spirits of BIPOC students through their policies and practices. They exclude and exploit them. However, this exclusion and exploitation is not passively accepted. Students have, and always will, resist the murdering of their spirits.

By situating community colleges within a historical context of exclusion and extraction we may better articulate the structures and processes of racism that implicitly prevent BIPOC students from being successful. This paper built on emergent community college scholarship that situates educational outcome inequities in harmful systems and structures present in schools and the world, not students and their families (Baber et al., 2019; Garcia-Louis, et al., 2020; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2019; Williams & Nichols, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2021). I used frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Black feminist thought, and the hidden curriculum as an analytic to present a historical and contemporary narrative that, I hope, illuminates the context of spirit murdering within community colleges.

As I argue in this article, community colleges are spaces of exclusion and extraction. From their conceptualization as a method to remove the burden of the freshman and sophomore years from elite universities to their continued use of racialized systems of tracking, community colleges exclude BIPOC students from full participation. The learning experiences that these students go through at community colleges can exclude their lives, their histories, and their neighborhoods. This exclusion murders the spirit, it snatches the souls of these students who do not see themselves reflected in their experiences. Community colleges have always had a strong relationship with industry. They started as spaces to fill low-wage, low-skill jobs and continue to do so. The community college, because of its' close tie to industry, produces good workers. Workers that will follow the rules, comply with orders, and contribute the wealth of a few. I argue that the implicit harm caused by this relationship positions students as objects of extraction; in particular BIPOC students. Students are valued for their labor, not for their humanity. Community colleges are spaces of extraction, that murder the spirits of Black students.

While community colleges may be spaces of spirit murdering they are also sites of possibility. Throughout history students, faculty, staff, and administration of color in community colleges have made attempts to fracture the oppressive conditions that bound them. These examples illuminate an emancipatory function of the hidden curriculum. While the hidden curriculum is often used as a framework to identify the ways in which oppression is reproduced in schools I, in building off of the work of other scholars, use the hidden curriculum as a framework to better illuminate and analyze the actions of resistance that seek to remake

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community colleges. This hidden curriculum is one bound to building a more just community college and world. At times this hidden curriculum becomes explicit, but it is important to know that it is created within hidden spaces and within fugitive domains.

If schools are ever going to reach the rose-colored goals of their missions, which often include statements of equity and inclusion (fewer contain statements of racial equity and their histories of anti-Blackness) they must interrogate the spiritual assaults that students (and staff and faculty) experience on their campus. Whether the offensive mechanisms, what Chester Pierce (1970) defined as “the small, continuous bombardments of micro-aggression. . . to blacks” (p. 282), comes through the interactions between students and teachers, the curriculum, the assessment, the deficit ideologies, or the concepts of safety and security BIPOC students are harmed.

I hope that community college students, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can use the analyses and insights provided here in their own spaces, making sense and use of them in ways that they deem appropriate and necessary. The narratives presented here are not meant to be replicated but rather, contextualized in ways that are useful to the unique situations and conditions that other community colleges are situated within in.

Racism, whether overt acts of physical violence or the hidden acts described and analyzed throughout this paper have longed plagued the well-being of Black people in the U.S. Our spirits, however, can heal from the pain of racialized oppression. When community college policymakers and practitioners analyze and dismantle the interactions with ourselves and each other that contribute to spirit murdering we may be able to, in the same breath, actualize the educational conditions that all students deserve.

I am hopeful that readers of this paper will respond to my calls to action, considering the contexts and interactions necessary to continuously work to dismantle oppression in all forms in their spaces of teaching and learning. With attention, analysis, and action we can transform the conditions of all school spaces, including community colleges, into ones that better respond to students’ experiences. While I have no faith in the structures of community colleges to transform on their own, I do have hope for this structural transformation led by the people themselves. Whether teachers, staff, faculty, administration, or students, we all play a role in recognizing and dismantling the conditions that allow for spirit murdering.

We can transform the historical memories of our past that, in their contemporary forms, continue to harm BIPOC students in community colleges. Not forgetting them, but healing from them. Not reproducing

them, but dismantling them and creating processes to better address them when they resurface. We have the capacities to create change however, we must engage in the deep, painful, work of that change over time with others. Together we can create the conditions for more equitable and just community colleges, where we are free to move through them without pain.

Note

¹Some believe that the school opened in 1901. I use 1902 as the date provided by Wood (1987)

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