

Community Education and Critical Race Praxis: The Power of Voice

By Cassandra L. McKay

In a society, which ostensibly promotes homogeneity, it is easy to consider adult education simply in terms of skills and activities (Ferdman, 1990). Yet adult education around the world (e.g., Brazil, Cuba, Nigeria, Ghana, and Guinea- Bissau) has been venues for consciousness raising aimed at human liberation (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Moreover, beyond the formal classroom and closer to home, African American community education may provide adults a space to counter the master narrative, recover silenced consciousness and “facilitate their ability to articulate what they do and think about in order to provide a foundation for autonomous action” (Fasheh, 1990 p. 26).

Within the field of education, the master narrative is affiliated with the process of assimilation which is imposed upon learners of color, requiring conformity to the status quo and silencing a diversity of knowledge and opinion. The master narrative is conveyed via stereotypes, communiqué, and ideology which objectify persons of color as inherently weak, devoid of power and voice, and incapable of positively contributing to

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the larger society (Aguirre, 2005). African American community education can act as a vehicle by which to interrogate these master narratives. Further, this type of adult education empowers learners to gain skills to assess the social and political contradictions and injustices of society, and assert action in addressing those contradictions and injustices. Education ceases to be solely for individual advancement, but “it becomes an interactive process that is constantly redefined and renegotiated, as the individual transacts with the socioculturally fluid surroundings” (Ferdman, 1990 p.187). Once new ways of seeing the world are learned and acted upon, it is from this adult population that emerge resistance to and transformation of societal structures (Welton, 1987 as cited in Mayo, 1999).

This type of educational experience mirrors Paulo Freire’s work with Brazilian disenfranchised poor. Freire’s work not only encouraged adults to acquire knowledge and skills in order to navigate a growing literate world but he also encouraged a type of community education that was situated in the societal concerns of the learner’s community. Moreover, resolutions for these concerns were located within the same community. Utilizing a critical pedagogical model, Freire encouraged:

- social action by the learner against those oppressive elements that impact the civil liberation of people,
- the learner to question the status quo, and
- employment of the learner’s voice in articulating reflection and liberatory social action. (Freire, 2000)

Critical pedagogy is an instructional approach to teaching that employs a theoretical framework by which social injustices (e.g., discriminatory practices based on class, or race or gender or privilege—indeed any systematic form of oppression) are critiqued. Subsequently, the learner’s life experiences and new uncovered knowledge are engaged in order to generate individual and societal transformation. The model mandates that the instructor take risks to address the unjust dominant themes and practices within society via reflective and action-oriented instruction. This type of pedagogy encourages the learner to critique obstructions to the learner’s full participation in society (e.g. labor exploitation, economic stratification, and social marginalization), and encourages critical collective action, through the engagement of the learner’s experiential knowledge and social agency.

Critical pedagogy, however, falls flat in addressing racially oppressive practices due to its shortsightedness on the intersectionality of race and class. In response to this shortsightedness, Critical Race Theory emerged to address specific social, political, educational, and economic concerns of race (Ladson-Billings, 1997).

When critical pedagogy and critical race theory (CRT) act in concert, adult education gives stage to the voice of the learner. CRT challenges governance based on the interpretive structure of socially constructed reality that is disconnected from the individual’s reality. Therefore, CRT encourages a method of naming one’s reality, by use of storytelling and counternarratives. Counternarratives act as a tool

to: (1) challenge the perceived wisdom of subscribers of a dominant culture by providing a context to understand and transform an established belief system; and (2) open new windows into the reality of marginalized citizens by showing them the possibilities beyond where they live, and the shared aims of their struggle.

Moreover, the use of “voice” in education research is critical; conveying personal thoughts, feelings, desires and politics. It engages the reader to infer his or her own interpretations to the data (Dei, 2005). It is the interaction between voice of the participant and the interpretation of the reader that mirrors an exercise in critical pedagogy and celebrates the storytelling and counternarratives of Critical Race Theory.

This article will address the use of voice in educational theory by first portraying a playlet of an ongoing intellectual conversation among scholars, and then connect this dialogue to the exploration of the African American learner’s silenced consciousness. Later I give stage to African American adult learners as they embrace their own counternarratives via their experience in an Afrocentric community education course.

Counterstory

Imagine a small after-hours coffee shop swarming with critical educators, some living, some deceased. Amidst the call for drink orders, a conversation is brewing in the corner of the shop about how critical pedagogy and critical race theory work in concert to create a platform for liberatory praxis. I have taken artistic license to add inflections and improvisations, as well as insert myself into the conversation in order to create an allegorical display of their work. The voices of Herbert Marcuse, Ira Shor, William Schubert, Mari Matsuda, bell hooks, Michael Apple, Cornel West, Carter G. Woodson, Tara Yosso, W.E.B. DuBois, Tommie Shelby, Barbara Ransby, William Watkins, Derrick Bell, Diane Ravitch, David Stovall, and Richard Delgado resound in the background. Let’s listen in.

William Schubert: One of the consequences of schooling is that it can disconnect students from the freedom to learn. Rigid lesson plans sometimes have a tendency to straitjacket the learning experience for the teacher as well as the student. The spontaneity of learning is halted and subjects are artificially separated, their purpose and interdependence lost. Similar to an assembly line, students are disconnected from themselves and their own experience.

Herbert Marcuse: But every semester, it never ceases to amaze me that people have been socialized to police themselves against their own freedom, and they don’t even notice their servitude!

William Schubert: Herbert, I wonder if students automatically disengage because teachers have not recognized them as experts and they are seen as merely vessels to be filled. The student’s own life journey or curriculum is not taken into account of the learning process.

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Ira Shor: When pedagogy is not situated in the actual conditions of each group of students, there is a tendency for this type of disconnect. Positivist pedagogy, as Herbert implied encourages students to police themselves against their own freedom. They are trained to conform and assimilate to a grand schema, alienating themselves in the process.

William Watkins: Let's not forget the philosophical underpinnings of American education. For the masses it is accomodationist at best, particularly for students of color. Education for the masses still performs the role of stratification and social control. What exists now is a comprador Black Middle Class that has benefited from what Booker T. Washington promoted as a platform of uplift via the subordination of ideas to the White public opinion. I for one am not an advocate of critical race theory yet I resolve that this section of the Middle Class is firmly entrenched in the politics and economic benefits of interest convergence.

Diane Ravitch: I am quite amazed at how these types of conversations always revolve around some offering of situational learning with a slant toward multiculturalism and diversity. Although it is important to highlight diversity, an over-emphasis moves the nation toward more stratification, seemingly what you say that you are against. We should work toward a more uniformed and standardized curriculum.

Derrick Bell: Diane, surely you don't believe that standardized curriculum is created for unification of the masses. Formal schooling was founded on the need for stratification of workers. Failing to situate learning in the conditions of learners of color simply ignores inequities and perpetuates the learners' alienation from the educational process.

Diane Ravitch: But Derrick, my friend, standardization of curriculum does promote equitable probability for success. Legislation has made it so that all learners who are willing to learn have an opportunity to achieve in this global economy.

Michael Apple: You know it is ironic that legislation to supposedly eradicate racism seems to continue to perpetuate it. Schooling for any age is one of the most pervasive means of social control and constraining certain persons (e.g., people of color and women) in places of subordination. If we as critical educators do not seek to dismantle the hidden message that continues to promote a homogenous society, and not embrace the complexities of our actual heterogeneous one, we are aiding the neo-liberal rhetoric of inclusion and blanching out our differences at the same time.

Carter G. Woodson: My dear friends, all of your analyses are compelling. Let me interject something for those more on the ground. I assert that "if the highly educated Negro, or the African American as you say would forget most of the untried theories taught him in school, if he could see through the propaganda which has been instilled into his mind under the pretext of education, if he would fall in love with his own people and begin to sacrifice for their own uplift, if the highly

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educated Negro would do these things, he could solve some of the problems now confronting the Negro race” (Woodson, 1998 p.44).

W. E. B. DuBois: But Woodson, the “Negro” that you speak of suffers from a double consciousness, bound by the view others have of him, and inhibited from seeing himself as capable of the feat to which you speak.

Richard Delgado: Pardon me, Dr. DuBois, but you yourself have mystified this notion of double consciousness, as the propensity of excluded people to see the world in terms of two perspectives at the same time—that of the majority race, according to which they are demonized, despised, and reviled—and their own in which they are normal or fully human.

W. E. B. DuBois: Richard, you are correct. Double consciousness does create an entombment of sorts for those who are segregated, hindered and silenced because of their racial caste. However, it is only when the entombed realize the reasoning by which they are imprisoned, not because of their inferiority but because of their potential threat to the security of economic control of labor, income and ideas, that their double consciousness becomes a gift and not a curse.

Mari Matsuda: Other factors of gender, class, and sexuality, also intensify this threat. Attaining multiple consciousnesses enables the outsider to see defects in the prevailing order before one immersed in that system could. So in this sense the lens of the outsider, or the entombed as you have said is broader than those in the dominant groups, and if the excluded is heard their view would most likely challenge the dominant consciousness.

Barbara Ransby: I’d like to pause here for a moment, only until now have I heard anything suggestive of a feminist perspective, and I wonder why? If we are talking about revolution we must employ an ideological tenet around which Black feminists have organized. What is paramount “is the notion that race, class, gender, and sexuality are codependent variables that cannot readily be separated and ranked in scholarship, in political practice or in lived experience” (Ransby, 2000 p.1218). A citizen’s degree of access to the commonwealth, and economic exploitation is “intimately related to, and inseparable from, the fight against racism, sexism, and heterosexism” (Ibid, p.1219), which is a critical component to any radical political agenda.

bell hooks: Well said Barbara, if we are talking about revolution we must be inclusive of all voices. *(pause)* I want to revisit this experience of multiple consciousness and the denial of its influence. I remember when I entered an integrated school, my excitement for learning was squashed by the demands to conform to a sterilized form of education, and devoid of any connection to the way I lived or behaved.

Cornel West: I agree with my sister bell, to some degree integration of the races did not provide equal access to education for all students. It provided merely an up close and personal look of what the dominant culture had.

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William Watkins: And without disrupting the social order, Black education was and still is a central political weapon by which Blacks are introduced and inducted into America's social organization.

David Stovall: I know that some of you take issue with critical race theory.

Barbara Ransby: It really is too nebulous to be a theory.

William Watkins: In fact it smells like a new form of anti-communism!

David Stovall: Well I disagree. CRT is a lens, a strategy if you will, by which race and hidden racism is named and the social order interrogated. Just with any theory it is a perspective by which a phenomenon is investigated. It is not the hysterical communiqué of anti-communism, it is an analytical frame grounded in multidisciplinary perspectives, with the purpose of centralizing race, challenging dominant and ahistorical ideology, recognizing experiential knowledge of people of color as strength, and advancing inroads for social justice.

Tara Yosso: Exactly, and a critical tenet of CRT is its use of stories and counter-stories. These tools provide a context by which to convey, understand and transform established oppressive belief systems. Just as an antidote must use a portion of the poison it will eradicate, CRT uses the social construction of race as the tool by which racism is addressed, revealing shared aims of struggle and expanding possibilities for social change.

Cornel West: Tara, people's stories are instrumental for any work toward social justice, and storytelling requires engaged reflection and a connection to self and others. But unfortunately there is a pervasive spiritual impoverishment growing. A breakdown of family and neighborhood bonds have led to this "social deracination and cultural denudement" (West, 2001 p.6) of State dwellers. I am finding that my students are like rootless, dangling people with little link to the supportive networks, the very social *stories* that would help them sustain some sense of purpose.

A young scholar interjects nervously while searching her notes for support.

Scholar: Excuse me, are you speaking of self-alienation?

In the spirit of critical pedagogy, these educators seem poised to welcome a newcomer to the circle for further dialogue.

Scholar: I mean, you have mentioned the use of counternarratives and the coping mechanisms of oppressed people used for survival, but a reconciliation to self and corporality seems necessary to combat this cultural deracination. As a member of an often excluded people, African Americans, I am more vulnerable to further exploitation because of my estrangement from my history. Believe me, I am neither essentializing nor glorifying Black culture. I understand that fundamentally Black culture, like any culture, is fluid and subjective. I also understand that not all who are considered Black in America self-identify as culturally Black. However, since I

choose to self-identify as culturally Black, if I do not explore and reclaim my own cultural capital, what tools will I use to dismantle an oppressive system that hides the tools in the first place? And what would be the point of dismantling everything that I know to be so, if I have been convinced that I desperately need the system that has already been created and do not have the tools to function without it?

Cornel West: Young scholar, perhaps the capital that you are seeking is self love and love for others; both move toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community. Similarly, perhaps in your comment you are referring to a nihilistic threat seemingly forever crouched within the African American community. This struggle against loss of hope and absence of meaning cannot be overcome by arguments or analyses but is tamed by love and care. I am not being facetious in speaking of love, but it is a last attempt to generate a sense of agency among a downtrodden people. Nihilism is a disease of the soul, similar to alcoholism and drug addiction. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth- an affirmation fueled by the concern of others.

Tommie Shelby: And you know, "part of remedy for this self-alienation is to be found in the strategies of spreading accurate information about Black history and cultural forms; using various forms of cultural expression to resist and subvert antiblack racism; and engaging in the relentless critique of the doctrine and practice of racial domination. Black people can also bond together to collectively combat their racial oppression. Indeed, the need to overcome the self-contempt produced by antiblack racism is an important justification for Black solidarity. Given the widespread internalization of anti-Black race prejudice, it becomes necessary for Black people to be a significant, if not the primary, force behind their liberation from racial subordination" (Shelby, 2005 p.179).

Scholar: So are you saying that a love for self must first begin with self-knowledge from a historical and contemporary context? If so, this type of reflection may then encourage resistance in one's political community against ahistorical propaganda, later promoting a society organized according to democratic values of fairness, justice and compassion?

Cornell West: You are a visionary, I like that. Sit down so that we can help you tease your thoughts out a bit.

The critical educators offer a seat to the young scholar and continue the conversation into the wee hours of the night.

Community Education and the Exploration of Silenced Consciousness

As heard in this counterstory, affirmation and assertion of voice and the notion

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of love for self and others is critical in furthering any collective effort toward social justice. The very success of community education within an African American setting is based on how these elements are engaged, and the strengths and wisdom of the learners are affirmed and utilized (Keeling, 1993).

As group members begin to voice and share in common experiences, a cultural tapestry is created. Kharem (2006) asserts that “culture gives people group identification and builds on shared experiences, creating a collective personality. It represents the values that are created by the group out of shared knowledge as a methodical set of ideas into a single coherent affirmation” (p. 14). Yet often in educational settings, the lack of acknowledgement of these cultural strengths coupled with an air of superiority from the instructor or community program obfuscates the power of the community and its members. When banking instructional approaches are utilized, learner’s voices, culture and consciousnesses are silenced and dismissed. And historically, for the African American learner to be silenced in the educational setting is all too common.

Part of the African American experience represents a people who have been denied a useful past. As colonization occurred, many languages and traditions were lost or repressed. A critical view of African American history seeks to recover repressed memory and subjugated knowledge, and then to explore the influence of such repression on the life of the present (Kincheloe, 1993). Africa is too broad a continent to simply self-identity; therefore, African American identity must entail more than a connection to place. It is the politicization of this identity, which fortifies its location. W.E.B. DuBois (1984) attests to an African American identity in this manner:

the actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this [African American] group vary with the ancestors that they have in common and many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and in the South Seas. It is a unity that draws me to Africa. (p. 117)

African American culture may then be described as the total of implements, attainments and activities (music, art, religion, traditions, language and story), as well as the common struggle and resistance against colonization and subjugation of descendants of the African Diaspora throughout the world.

Race is socially constructed for the purpose of ranking and dominating (Apple, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1997) so “African American identity” originates from a fictional ideology. This fact does not negate the idea of African Americans as a people, but it does locate the notion of African American identity within an American historical mythology (Shelby, 2005).

Influenced by the work of Franz Fanon, Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan (1985) affirms that American history is deformed by absences and denials of the contributions of African Americans. Therefore the entire national American identity is incomplete

and fragmented. This fragmented identity lends itself to an impaired and repressed capacity for intelligence, competence and informed action of the American citizen.

The politicization of the African American identity is one remedy in addressing this fragmentation. Shelby (2005) advocates for the creation of a non-separatist political solidarity formed not only based on a thin or even thick notion of African American identity, but through the struggle of (1) improving conditions for those individuals oppressed on account of their race; (2) receiving relief from the burdens of racial inequality and ghetto poverty; and (3) and encouraging greater political participation in our multicultural polity.

In the US, to consider oneself as African American also may invoke an experience of “double consciousness.” As multi-faceted as African American identity is, so is the meaning of the term double consciousness. Pathologically, it is described as the surrender of self-definition and responsibility (Hilliard, 1995); “a sense of divided loyalty of the African American citizen: of wanting to belong and to love one’s country, and wanting to be proud of it, but always being somewhat a stranger about one’s own experience here” (Benjamin, 1991, as cited in Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 81).

bell hooks(1994) relays her experience with double consciousness as an African American student at a prestigious university:

...[we] were made to feel that we were there not to learn but to prove that we were equal of Whites. We were there to prove this by showing how well we could become clones of our peers. As we constantly confronted biases, an undercurrent of stress diminished our learning experience. (p. 5)

On the other hand, double consciousness is also described as the propensity of excluded people to see the world in terms of two perspectives at the same time—that of the majority race, according to which they are demonized, despised, and reviled, and their own in which they are normal or more human. Moreover, an expanded notion of multiple consciousnesses enables the outsider to see defects in the prevailing order before one immersed in that system would or could (Delgado, 1995). From this perspective double or multiple consciousnesses is experienced by the individual as a “sixth sense” or a critical lens by which to view oneself and the world, and the leverage to respond accordingly.

The method of social control seeks to obfuscate this “sixth sense”: to separate the learner from the community that would foster a sense of strength outside of the dominant culture. It is this act of detachment that must be addressed in critical pedagogy before any type of solidarity will occur.

As the history of race construction and colonization are omitted or misrepresented by the official channels of power (Giroux, 2003), Critical Race Theory must challenge the historical amnesia that feeds neoliberalism’s ahistorical claim to power. Furthermore, “the struggle against racial injustice cannot be separated from larger questions about what kind of culture and society are emerging under the imperatives of neoliberalism, what kind of history it ignores, and what alternatives might point to a substantive democratic future” (p. 207).

Giving Voice to the Counternarrative

Community education is perceived to be more inclusive and tolerant to difference, power and inequality than more formalized educational settings (Sedgemore, 2007). Therefore, within a more equitable space, learners are afforded the privilege to explore and embrace their own consciousness and counternarratives. As this is an experiential process, I introduce you to a community education course now in session to further exemplify this concept.

In this course, the African American adult learners have been given the opportunity to deconstruct, and co-develop new narratives for themselves by exploration of their repressed memories, silenced consciousness and cloaked histories. Mrs. Nyem,¹ a 72-year-old retired social worker, is facilitating the discussion:

On June 1, 1921, in Tulsa Oklahoma, a business district of Black owned businesses was bombed. It is estimated that 1,500 to 3,000 Blacks were murdered that day. Six hundred businesses, thirty of which occupied one block, were all demolished. This business district was established by freed union soldiers who moved west after the Civil War. The community was segregated and totally self-sufficient. All the children were educated to read and write, and banks were known to lend funds to their White neighbors. A participant interjects, Ah that's why they were bombed, the Blacks were too uppity!

The room is filled with thirteen elders, aged 61-80, who are enrolled in the Senior Advocacy Leadership Training (SALT) program, a social action group facilitated in an African American community of a Large American city. The SALT program was first offered in 2002 for elders ranging in age from 61-80 years old. The program developer and instructor, Mrs. Nyem felt that until individuals understood their own lives within a historical context, they would be incapable of fully participating in a democratic society. The SALT program emphasizes the study of African American history and the development of leadership skills. Mrs. Nyem, the founder of the SALT program, strives to develop influencers of community culture, who articulate and advocate for the needs of others, by their sheer commitment of time and effort to community affairs. Without feeling affirmed in their identities based on knowledge of their own heritage, Mrs. Nyem felt that she was witnessing individuals' inability to advocate for self or others. Mrs. Nyem was not content with facilitating a course so that participants could learn interesting facts but do nothing with the knowledge. She hoped that through critical pedagogy these participants would become more active in their communities, addressing issues that concerned them and generations to come.

Mrs. Nyem promotes education as consciousness raising because she has found that,

...there is no [adult education] programs regarding [African American] heritage, because if you talk about your heritage you will eventually talk about yourself.. you see in every psychology course there is a connection of learning who you are. The first task, if the learning is authentic is knowledge of self. So if you don't

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know who you are or your heritage ... a lot of people know about heritage but they seek it in the soil of slavery, they don't really know.

Derrick Bell (1987) iterates a dangerous truth that African Americans “cannot purge self-hate without nurturing black pride through teaching designed to show that the racism of Whites, rather than the deficiencies of Blacks, causes our lowly position in this society” (p. 229). Reminiscent to Bell's healing sessions in *And We Are Not Saved* (1987); the course seeks to uncover hidden facts concerning the strengths and wealth of the African American community. Mr. Dan, one of the African American participants adds to the discussion about Black Wall Street:

I heard stories from my mother about the Black Wall Street that they had their own banks and everything. They were all millionaires. The dollar circulated 36-100 times; sometimes taking a year before leaving the community during that year...Whites would borrow money from this community with no intention of paying it back. [The Whites] got angry and went down and bombed them, set them on fire and just burned them all out. A lot of Blacks don't know about this story because we are too dumb to know history about ourselves. Our mandate is to teach our children about our history.

Religion, often considered an opiate of the masses is deconstructed during the evening's session. Rev. Halbert, a faithful participant explains how an oppressive notion of Christianity has diverted many others from the path of true Christianity. He stated that Christianity is not a White man's religion but one of truth and inclusion. Rev. Halbert further dissected the myth that Black folks were cursed to become slaves by asserting:

Noah looked down through time and saw that Ham would be a great Nation and he said that Ham's descendants would be servant to Shem and Japheth. Now let me give you the fulfillment of that so that you don't think being Black is a curse. A curse is when you don't know Jesus Christ and you haven't gotten forgiven of your sins that is a curse...Israel was made captive in the land of Canaan that is the first part of that prophecy, the other part of that prophecy is that the Syrians took Israel into slavery, so who do you think that the Israelites took into slavery, the Canaanites! The Canaanites became slaves to slaves, Amen; ya'll following me, so don't ever think that because we are Black we are descendants of Ham and were meant to be a slave that is not the truth!

While many participants profess to be Christians, Mrs. Nyem professes faith in Islam. Despite differences in their spiritual ideology, Mrs. Nyem does not challenge the participants' faith but incorporates the strength of their conviction into class discussions. Dei (2005) asserts that education for resistance should be about “repairing the human spirit and soul” (p. 284). This notion of repairing a damaged soul defies an assimilationist education, which seeks to disconnect the learner from a spiritual, psychological, and emotional sense of self and collective. Mrs. Nyem's pedagogical stance aligns with Dei as she reminds the SALT participants, “We are a spiritually minded people, God made us creative, able to make something out of nothing, we should never forget that”.

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These African American elders have experienced overt and covert racism within their childhood and early adult classrooms, many of whom are only two generations removed from slavery. The notion of ownership of self emerges from the discussion. Mrs. Son poses a question to the group, “Are you free?” implying an individual’s ownership of self. Critiquing apathy currently found in the African American community, she asserts:

If they could do all those things that they did back there and they had to hide to read, the opportunity that we have now to do the things that we should be doing that we are not doing. That is having our own stuff. We as a race of colored people we should have our own resources... I could bake cakes and pies so I could have had a business. And the people of color that did and do have businesses, some of them are going out of business. I would like in our community we would have our own business. Instead we will go to other businesses where they will follow us around.

With a platform by which to question the master narrative, these African American elders have given themselves permission to revive silenced consciousnesses and embrace their own counternarrative. Their fight against a consumer mentality and blind acceptance of dominant rule evokes their agency to encourage social change.

Mrs. Ari, a veteran participant shares her commitment to social change. She seeks to influence the community culture by proselytizing her counternarratives to the unconverted:

I share what I learn at church I am out on the street corners, I am talking to these guys who stand out around on these corners and try to get them to see that there is a better way [and ask] Do you really know who you are... I get their attention right away... I start telling them who they are, what I have learned about the background of the Black people.

The voices of Cornell West and Carter G. Woodson resound in this exchange as the members of SALT assist in re-establishing roots and linkages of the young and elderly within their community as well as affirm themselves as Black people.

Conclusion

As portrayed in the opening playlet amongst scholars, the learner’s voice (i.e., storytelling and counternarratives) is critical to any movement of resistance. The use of critical pedagogy and critical race theory gives learners permission to embrace their counternarratives. Moreover, educational movements for resistance must start with reconstructing the internal narrative of the oppressed (Freire, 2000; Horton & Freire, 1990; Horton et al., 1998; Clark & Brown, 1996), before there can be substantial social action.

As highlighted within the SALT community education program, knowledge of African American heritage and questioning the powers that would obfuscate this knowledge is a prerequisite to social action. Through their storytelling, the SALT participants

embark on small gradations of social action, in hopes of raising the consciousness of their listeners. Furthermore, acknowledging the power of voice, counternarratives can deconstruct demoralizing learned curriculum and reconstruct a curriculum that gives utterance to silenced consciousnesses.

Note

¹ Pseudonyms have replaced the actual names of participants, places and organizations to protect their identity.

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