



Teaching About Black Lives...Everywhere

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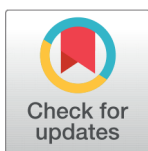
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher L Busey

I am Dr. Chris Busey, a former tenured-associate professor at the University of Florida. In my former role, my aim was to build a body of research that explored critical perspectives towards Black Life and racial equity. This scholarship was bolstered by a number of critical theories such as Black radicalism and Critical Race Theory to name a few. I now currently utilize my years of experience as a researcher and educator to drive critical equity through the global sport, soccer, and to encourage organizations to speak beyond platitudes when addressing racial inequity in the sport. I am husband to an amazing wife and father to two amazing daughters.

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INTRODUCTION

If we are to truly realize a vision of a more democratic society, then teaching about Black life and, in particular, Black Lives Matter should not constitute a radical act but rather a moral imperative for social studies educators. Furthermore, when we say [and teach] Black Lives Matter, the Black Diaspora reminds us “to articulate and transcend nation-state boundaries” (Paschel, 2017, p. 28).

THE RESEARCH

I have always had an interest in studying the Black Diaspora in the Americas. Scholars have argued for decades that Blackness across the Americas warrants greater attention in

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scholarly and public discourses especially considering that approximately 90-95 percent of enslaved Africans were kidnapped and transported from their native lands in Africa to present-day Latin America and the Caribbean. Although this is a known fact, research shows that the Black Diaspora to, in, and from Latin America and the Caribbean receives little coverage in social studies curriculum.

The goal of my research has been to articulate aspects of the Black Diaspora and more specifically how Black life is negotiated, contested, and oftentimes considered expendable both in the United States and across the hemisphere. While there are times in which I focus solely on the United States, in a Black diasporic ethos I endeavor to extend these narratives across U.S. borders with a particular focus on Latin America and the Caribbean. This has resulted in a three-pronged goal for social studies educators which includes the following:

- 1) underscoring the absence of Black Latinxs/as/os and Black Latin America from global and U.S. K-12 historical narratives (Busey & Cruz, 2015, 2017);
- 2) examining how discourses of race and racial formation in Latin America and the Caribbean are presented in curriculum (Busey, 2019); and
- 3) working with elementary and secondary teachers to pedagogically contextualize transnational Blackness and antiblackness in Latin America as well as counter discourses of erasure in curriculum (Adams & Busey, 2017; Busey, 2020; Busey & Milligan, 2020).

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

To be clear, although the narratives about U.S. Black Latinxs/as/os and Black Latin America that I introduce in my scholarship might be novel to social studies education research outlets, my work has built on traditions of Black Diaspora scholarship in education proposed by Black women scholars such as Joyce King (1992), Cynthia Dillard (2016), and Nilma Gomes (2017). My research also adds to a large and continually growing base of literature out of Latin America and the Caribbean on the presence of Afro-descendants in compulsory educational curricula. Finally, my research complements the work done by scholars in the field of Afro-Latinx/Black Latinx Studies, which has both an academic and public reach.

Similar to this work, my research has found several concepts of import to consider as we begin to think further about teaching Black life and the current Movement for Black Lives across the Americas.

First, my research found that knowledge about race and racial formation is obsolete in global curricula, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. Textbook narratives and curricular standards either downplay or omit discussions about the transatlantic slave trade to the Americas, the institution of slavery, and subsequent anti-Black colonial logics that became and still are woven into the political, economic, and social fabric of Latin American societies. Thus, unless educators and students intentionally work to cultivate critical knowledge development or draw from prior knowledge to inform classroom discussions, state-backed curricular resources will continue to perpetuate discourses about Latin America and the Caribbean that 1) dilute the ongoing role of slavery in shaping racial formation, 2) erase Blackness through homogenous projections of the region as mixed-race, and 3)



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nullify the significance of racial hierarchies and hegemony that continue to oppress Black Latin Americans.

Second and relatedly, my research has demonstrated the absence of agentic narratives that demonstrate how Black Latin Americans and Black Latinxs in the United States have refuted antiblackness. This is especially crucial for informing how we think about social movements and Black mobilization efforts that support Black political and human rights. Black mobilization and social movements are important for problematizing the myths of racial democracy that permeate from Latin American politics and political theory. Racial democracy ideologies, especially in tandem with mestizx nationalisms, play a major role in projecting much of Latin America and the Caribbean as sites free of racism, racial violence, and racial oppression. This means that despite a rich history of Black collective agency, Black social movements throughout Latin America are buried behind a projection of Latin America as a racially mixed paradise. We also know very little about Black Latin Americans and Black Latinxs as contributors to political, social, and intellectual thought across the Americas. In the case of Latin America, this erasure discloses Blackness from nation-building narratives, and in the United States, this results in the marginalization of Black Latinxs from significant discussions about Black political, social, and intellectual life.

Third, my research does not stand alone in suggesting that the Black Diaspora is poorly contextualized in curriculum (King, 1992, 2006; Woodson & Medina, 2017). My research has shown that for educators to learn and teach about the Black Diaspora across the Americas, it is crucial to cultivate authentic learning opportunities that extend beyond state-mandated curricula or whitewashed professional learning opportunities. I have worked with educators at all levels to design curricular units on antiblackness and Black presence in Latin America. Additionally, and especially at the high school level, I collaborate with educators to infuse Black Latinx history throughout the entire U.S. history curriculum resulting in students learning about transnational Blackness, movement, and the color line. In each case, we relied upon a wealth of materials (in English, Spanish, and Portuguese) as well as thinkers who are engaged in this work. Resultantly, students have demonstrated increased interest in learning history, and for some students, they have been able to tap further into their heritage knowledge (see King, 2006) which would otherwise be ignored in their educational experiences.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATORS

The possibilities are countless for ensuring that conversations on Black lives extend across the Black Diaspora in the Americas. I want to offer a few points of practical advice for educators (at all levels) to advance this conversation in their respective classrooms. This guidance is what I have found useful from my research and work with educators.

My first piece of advice, and this may sound cliché, is to locate your resources. Study up, or rather in the tradition of Diaspora Literacy, engage in some Critical Studyin' (King, 1992, 2006, 2011) of Black Diasporic histories. Not only is this vital in working towards an anti-colonial pedagogical stance, but it is also vital in undoing years of Eurocentric and

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Western schooling that has intentionally erased knowledge about Black people everywhere. Particular to Black Latinxs and Black Latin America, there are a number of texts that educators would find informative. However, I especially encourage texts authored by Black Latinxs and Latin Americans such as *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* by Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (2010). Also, visit public intellectual sites such as the Black Latinas Know Collective (<https://www.blacklatinasknow.org/>) and Latino Rebels where interlocutors are advancing conversations about hemispheric Blackness especially in this current global movement for Black lives. Finally, reach out to researchers at your local universities who might be engaged in scholarship on global Blackness. Developing intellectual relationships is productive for fostering collaborative avenues that can potentially transform classroom instruction.

In workshops and personal discussions, I often encourage educators to look to the other Americas, both as source and connection. Antiracism is everywhere, even in places that may appear to have more advanced race relations. Therefore, we are likely to find everyday forms of systemic racism along with overt forms of anti-Black racial violence regardless of where we look. Take Brazil for example, where Black people, especially Black youth are subjected to state-sanctioned and extra-judicial police violence in the form of unannounced police raids on homes or killings in the streets (Smith, 2016). This is not just a U.S. phenomenon, nor is resistance. Thus, educators should not look for ways to expand Black Lives Matter across borders, but instead look for how Black folk everywhere have long been involved in Black resistance efforts that acknowledge their enmeshment (Woodson & Love, 2019). Thus, while there are certainly diasporic connections to be made, it is equally as important to honor the local particularities that determine how forms of contestation materialize.

CONCLUSION

As there is increased interest surrounding Black history education, we must remember that Blackness is not enclosed by the boundaries of the nation-state. When we prioritize Black lives in our teaching, we must do so, everywhere.

Q&A WITH CHRIS BUSEY

Question #1

Teacher's Question:

Could you describe the sources you consulted during the research process that could be helpful for teachers who are interested in learning more about this topic?

Chris Busey's Response:

As aforementioned, the work of Joyce King was a crucial starting point for helping me to think about a critical pedagogical orientation towards teaching the Diaspora. In particu-



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lar, Joyce King's 2010 edited volume entitled *Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century* contained several chapters that established a conceptual and theoretical foundation for understanding the issues teachers in North America must confront when engaging curriculum and pedagogy related to teaching the global African Diaspora. George Sefa Dei is another scholar that I recommend teachers and educational researchers consult to build the theoretical dais necessary for appropriately informing praxis. From a pedagogical standpoint, I relied heavily on the work of U.S. Black scholars and scholars from Latin America, which requires diligent attention to the synergies and distinctions underscoring each body of work. Examining the work of Latin American scholars is especially important considering the epistemicide that often contributes to a favoring of Euro-Western or Global North perspectives over the knowledge production that comes out of Latin America and the Global South.

Question 2:

Teacher's Question:

Could you describe in more detail how you approached this research? Elaborating on the process could help me understand how to implement my own curricular investigations.

Chris Busey's Response:

Cultivating an approach to this work takes time. There is a lot of epistemological unpacking that needs to happen because of the overemphasis on Global North knowledge production. If someone is interested in implementing their own curricular investigations, I recommend building a knowledge base related to Blackness in Latin America that might allow teacher researchers to more effectively identify voids in the curriculum, deficit narratives, and pedagogical opportunities where Black Latin America can either stand alone or be integrated into a broader discussion of global Blackness.

Question #3

Teacher's Question:

How would you respond to teachers that say this work would be nice to teach, but it's impossible in the current climate of restrictive standards and high-stakes testing?

Chris Busey's Response:

High-stakes testing, and the political climate in general definitely presents a number of challenges. I have worked with teachers to circumnavigate this very issue by finding those opportunities within state tested areas to infuse Black Latinx, Black Latin American, and African Diaspora histories. For example, I worked with a high school US history teacher to disrupt linear narratives of early 20th Century migration to the US – which tends to focus primarily on White European immigration to the United States – with a focus on Afro-Cuban and Afro Boricua transnational movement to the US and the navigation of the color



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line. We used narratives from the Afro-Latin@ Reader co-edited by the late Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores in addition to other texts such as Evilio Grillo's *Black Cuban, Black American*.

Question #4

Teacher's Question:

Could you elaborate on how teachers can develop a rationale for incorporating content about Black lives in Latin America if they may be new to thinking of Black Histories as diasporic or have typically taught the topic as part of a distinctly national experience?

Chris Busey's Response:

As the quote in the introduction stated, you cannot teach about Black Life without teaching about Black people everywhere. Blackness is not bound to nationalism. Yes, how nations have emerged and drawn arbitrary borders certainly creates unique experiences, but it is imperative that teachers think from a global lens regarding Black history.

Question #5

Teacher's Question:

Are the curricular units you designed available to teachers? Where could someone that wants to implement this content now—but who does not have the time to read and research for themselves—start?

Chris Busey's Response:

Many of the curricular units I designed are available in *Social Education*, the *Social Studies*, and other journals and book chapters. However, I would caution against implementation without critical and intentional studying. If we are not careful, we could do more harm than good despite our intents to infuse the Black Diaspora into our teaching if we are unable to thoroughly address questions and explore nuances alongside our students.

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