



Editors' Introduction to Confronting Truth in Contentious Times: Voices of Black Social Studies Educators in the Field

Carla-Ann Brown, Elizabeth Yeager Washington & Rasheeda T. West

University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA



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Corresponding Author:

Rasheeda T. West

rwest@coe.ufl.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Contentious issues in social studies education are not new, nor is the pressure felt by Black social studies teachers who are charged with teaching under administrative and legislative pressure while also navigating the emotional weight of their role. Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) is a term used to describe the hostility that Black faculty and students face at predominantly White colleges and universities (Smith, 2004). Scholars have coined this Black educator experience as Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), defined as a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily (e.g., racial slights, recurrent indignities, unfair treatments, including contentious classrooms, and potential threats under tough to violent and even life-threatening conditions). (Smith, 2004, p. 180)

There exists a direct correlation between (1) instances of self-censorship, racial slights, hyper-visibility/invisibility, contentious work relationships, seen and unseen dangers, and withdrawal in school spaces and (2) the negative impact of anxiety, depression, loss of control, lack of sleep, and a decrease in quality of life of Black educators (Smith et al., 2007; Jay 2009; Pizarro and Kohli, 2018). Unfortunately, physical, emotional, and mental health impairments are common afflictions for Black educators and have become more severe over the past couple of years (Souto-Manning and Melvin, 2021).

We live in one of the states leading the charge in Whitewashing history and passing discriminatory laws and bills that serve the purpose of dismantling truth and protecting White fragility and supremacy. For example, according to the Florida Board of Education: “examples of theories that distort historical events and are inconsistent with State Board approved standards include...the teaching of Critical Race Theory, meaning the theory that racism is not merely the product of prejudice, but that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems to uphold the supremacy of white persons.” (Florida Board of Education, 2021). The Board further states that teachers “must not share their personal views or attempt to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view that is inconsistent with Florida curriculum standards (Florida Board of Education, 2021).

Collaboratively, and focused on critical literacy and social studies as a prerequisite for social justice, our dialogue has evolved to include the experiences of teaching while Black in various spaces, especially spaces in which the teacher is the minority. Having both had this experience, Dr.'s Brown & West want to invite social studies educators who find themselves teaching critical and controversial topics in White-majority spaces to join the dialogue about what it means, what it takes, and what it costs to teach while being Black.

As Black practitioner researchers, we question:

- How Black teachers find extra energy and motivation to endure being black and teaching while Black?

- How does the current state of Black America impact Black teachers' classroom performance? Barring all the tensions in school, how does the effort it takes to exist while Black in America impact teacher performance?
- In what ways can Black teachers merge Black life with the curriculum in a way that benefits teachers, students, and families?
- What strategies can be used to teach critical content in spaces where Whiteness is the majority and the teacher is a minority?
- Can legal mandates and critical discourse co-exist in social studies classrooms? How?

With this reality for Black teachers in mind, this special issue was born. The theme for Spring 2024 is “Confronting Truth in Contentious Times: Voices of Black Social Studies Educators in the Field.” As educators, we want to facilitate dialogue about how recent legislative changes, as well as political discourse and local unrest around Black history education, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and Critical Race Theory (CRT), have impacted Black teachers’ social and emotional well-being. Serving as educators in the State of Florida, which remains notorious in news cycles for educational censorship/book bans, erasure of Black history through curriculum revisions, and banning CRT, we believe that we have perspectives and experiences that many can relate to.

ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

The articles in this issue continue to build on the experiences of Black educators in the United States. Ebonie S. Bennett unpacks her experience as one of the last groups of doctoral students to learn about Critical Race Theory (CRT) at a Florida public university in the wake of Florida’s House Bill 7, also known as the Stop Woke Act and revisits the political shift against CRT throughout the country. Dr. ArCasia James-Galloway explores how critical educators might consider what some of Texas’s most recent “diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)” statutes signify about the effectiveness of critical Black social studies teachers’ work. Drs. Delandrea Hall and Kelly R. Allen question how social studies teacher educators make sense of their roles in politically contentious atmospheres. Finally, Dr. John Bell shares his experience as a Black male creating and implementing elementary social studies units focused on the American Revolution and Activism in the United States.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Carla-Ann Brown

I am a University School Associate Professor at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School at the University of Florida. She earned her EdD in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Florida. She was granted a Fulbright Distinguished Teacher award in 2023. She previously taught practitioner research and restorative practices university courses as well as middle school social studies classes. Her primary research areas focus on culturally sustaining and universally designed student experiences. Presently, she serves as a Fulbright teacher exchange alumni ambassador and continues to research Black educator experiences in K-12 environments.

Elizabeth Yeager Washington

I am a Professor and Coordinator of Social Studies Education at the University of Florida. She earned her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from The University of Texas at Austin. She previously served as editor of *Theory and Research in Education* (2001-2007). She teaches secondary social studies methods and critical democracy courses. Her research interests include civic education, the teaching of controversial issues and difficult history, and the teaching of social issues. Presently, she serves on the Advisory Board for Trends and Issues in Social Studies and on the Editorial Board of the *Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers*.

Rasheeda T. West

I am an Instructor in the University of Florida School of Teaching and Learning and a Facilitator in the University of Florida Literacy Institute. She earned her EdD in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Florida. Dr. West has served as an educator in Florida for 20 years. She continues to teach, develop, and research factors that impact teacher development, student outcomes, and Black educator experiences. Her recent work can be found in *Civic Engagement in Communities of Color: Pedagogy for Learning and Life in a More Expansive Democracy* (2023).