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# “We don’t care about these kids”: Chicago, Ethnic Studies, and the Politics of Caring

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## **Abstract**

This article juxtaposes two recent Chicago Public Schools (CPS) policies and expands upon Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) “politics of caring.” Given the unique space of Chicago for modeling neoliberal school reform policies, I analyze both the 2013 massive CPS closings that targeted predominantly Black communities and the subsequent institutionalization of African American and Latina/o Studies through CPS committees and curriculum. These CPS school closings and ethnic studies policies, I argue, mark a foundational relationship of racial and colonial power between students and communities of color and the settler city-state. Drawing upon community testimonies, news and popular media, and critical caring and ethnic studies scholarship, this article interrogates that racial-colonial relationship by tracing the manipulation of the politics of aesthetic and authentic caring through the Chicago public schooling apparatus. Finally, given current community struggles for education, I examine the possibilities of theorizing beyond authentic caring and towards a decolonial politics of caring.

*Keywords:* Chicago, neoliberalism, Ethnic Studies, politics of caring, decolonization

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My name's Asean Johnson. I'm from Marcus Garvey School, located on 103rd and Morgan. I come to you today to talk about the school closings. Rahm Emanuel thinks that we all are toys; he thinks he can just come into our schools and move all our kids all over they lines, and just say, "Oh, we can build a building right here. Let's just take this school outwe don't care about these kids." But it's kids in there. They need safety. Rahm Emanuel is not caring about our schools; he is not caring about our safety. He only cares about his kids. He only care about what he needs.

–Asean Johnson, 2013

On May 20, 2013, Asean Johnson spoke to thousands of students, parents, educators, and community members at the city-wide rally to protest massive Chicago Public Schools (CPS) closings. Nine years old at the time, Johnson represented Marcus Garvey Elementary, a Southside school part of the longer list of over one-hundred schools initially slated for closure through Chicago school board policy (Ahmed-Ullah & Chase, 2013). While Marcus Garvey did not ultimately figure into the almost fifty schools voted on to be closed later that year, Johnson's viral speech remains a testimony to practices of race governance (Hesse, 2014) within public schooling.

In particular, Johnson repeatedly refers to Mayor Emanuel and CPS's policies as *not caring* about the predominantly Black students and communities affected by the school closings. The significance he places on the practice of *caring* and the various ways in which he describes its absence within the CPS system grounds this article. Both CPS and Mayor Emanuel's school reform policies inform Johnson's speech and occupy an important space within the national neoliberal education agenda; this will be discussed further in the context of *caring*.

In this article, I further examine Angela Valenzuela's (1999) politics of caring: How might the racial-colonial schooling apparatus manipulate the politics of caring through its policies? Examining the CPS system and the unique space of the urban Midwest as a case study, the politics of caring are an important site to interrogate and disrupt genealogies of state violence against young people of color. Drawing upon community testimonies, news and popular media, and critical ethnic studies scholarship, this article begins to trace the processes and conditions of *caring* within Chicago public schooling. I argue that through the manipulation of the politics of caring, the 2013 CPS school closings policy and subsequent CPS ethnic studies policies mark

a fundamental relationship of power between communities of color and the settler city-state.

## Chicago

“You should be investing in these schools, not closing them. You should be supporting these schools, not closing them.”

–Asean Johnson, 2013

Struggles for public education in a large, hyper-segregated city like Chicago offer valuable insight into public policy and grassroots organizing under severe conditions of segregation and austerity. As David Stovall (2014) writes:

Despite rampant gentrification in certain areas, Chicago is not a city of neighborhoods but a city of universes. People can spend lifetimes here never experiencing certain parts of the city due to age-old demarcated lines that live in our minds and bodies.

In this way, the third largest and third most segregated city in the U.S. houses the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system (Frey, 2016). CPS is also the third largest school district in the contiguous United States, composed of approximately eighty-five percent Black and Latina/o students (Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2015; Chicago Public Schools [CPS], 2017). Similarly to how João H. Costa Vargas (2008) talks about Los Angeles’s racialized landscape, Chicago is a hyper-segregated city where the “institutional and everyday discriminatory practices of state and society” are arranged spatially (41). Chicago’s public and private schools, for example, are sanctioned into racialized enclaves that determine the school system’s distribution of resources.

In the context of this racialized landscape, CPS formally announced the closure of fifty schools on March 21, 2013. The complete list of CPS school closings that emerged remains unprecedented both numerically and racially. The largest mass school closing in U.S. history, this decision specifically targeted Chicago public schools categorized as “underperforming” and “underutilized” (Wisniewski 2013). These were schools with predominantly African-American students and staff, “90% had a majority Black student population and 71% had a majority Black teaching staff” (Chicago Teachers Union [CTU], 2014: 33).

In response to these conditions, community organizing against this policy decision garnered local, national, and even worldwide attention and support. The world witnessed the images of “20,000 people who attended community hearings, hundreds who participated in a three-day march that rallied from one potentially closing school to the next, and culminated in a rally attended by thousands of parents, teachers, and members of the community outraged by CPS plans” (CTU, 2014: 3). Thousands of people echoed Asean Johnson’s concern that CPS and “Rahm Emanuel [are] not caring about our [predominantly Black] schools.”

Since 2004, Renaissance 2010 policy paved the way for these massive school closings in Black neighborhoods and other neighborhoods of color, both in Chicago and other cities (Lipman, 2011). A Chicago policy lobbied for by private interests under ex-superintendent/CEO Arne Duncan, Renaissance 2010 planned for CPS to close down 60-70 “underutilized” and “underperforming” schools by 2010. Analyzing the implications of Renaissance 2010, Pauline Lipman (2011) writes, Chicago is:

Incubator, test case, and model for the neoliberal urban education agenda. Chicago is where big city mayors go to see how to restructure their school systems. It was Arne Duncan’s prototype on his national road show to promote school closings and education markets after he was appointed U.S. Secretary of Education in 2008. (19)

As Chicago’s school system becomes more privatized, more schools in communities of color are closed down, students are uprooted from their neighborhood schools, and moved around as Asean Johnson says, “like toys.” The neoliberal impetus for charter expansion and privatization coming from Chicago, then, is a racialized impetus.

While Black school-communities remain hyper-segregated and dis-invested from by the city-state, this is not a new condition of power in Chicago. Just as the City remains distanced from Native Chicago and indigenous displacement and genocide, it erases the foundational realities of anti-Black racism. Chicago historically maintained Black Codes and firmly established practices of slavery. Later as a part of and alongside “The North,” Chicago developed practices of anti-Black violence that extended the racial-colonial relationship of elimination created through slavery and genocide (Drake & Cayton, 1945). While marked with a difference because of our particular space and

time, practices of anti-Black, settler violence continue today, and I argue are marked again by the 2013 CPS school closings in a post-colonial conjuncture.

In the aftermath of the school closings, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) published, “Twelve Months Later (2014). This report researched and asked one year later: Were educational conditions for Black students better? Had public schooling in the city improved? In response to these and other questions, the report found, “The tragic answer to these questions is ‘NO’. School closings have done nothing to improve the education of CPS students, nor have they saved money, but the same policies that led to massive closures continue to be implemented” (CTU, 2014: 12). The CTU found that in the aftermath of the school closings policy, the city of Chicago maintained an absence of caring towards Black students and their school-communities. Twelve months later, most schools were not replaced in the same location, but rather replaced elsewhere, miles away with a new charter school.

Before and after the school closures, however, major news outlets joined CPS in erasing race as a central organizing principle. Manipulating the politics of caring, the school board and mayor were able to resist publicly acknowledging that it was mostly Black schools they were not caring about. Emanuel and CPS did not talk about the school closings as Black school closings; in fact, they even stated that the school closings were “not about race” at all (Moser, 2015). Instead, they boasted that “underperforming” and “underachieving” schools must close down to allow for better education opportunities. CPS adopted the moral stance that students would be transferred to “receiving schools” and be better taken care of. Still, as reports show, “the direct funding that CPS gave to receiving schools to use at their discretion for student needs was just one-tenth of the transition support expenditure,” and in fact, per student, pales in comparison to the amount of start-up funding given to charter schools in 2013 per student (CTU, 2014: 2).

Conditions for Black students in receiving schools have not improved. The effects of hyper-segregation on communities of color are hyper-visible, but organized communities in resistance to school closings continue to fight for Chicago and the schooling apparatus to care and make visible that school closing policies are always already racialized and colonially constituted.

### The Politics of Caring

Noddings (1984), Valenzuela (1999), Cammarota and Romero (2006), Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006), and other Education scholars have theorized the significance of *caring* within the classroom and through the relationships inside of a school. These theories continue to challenge deficit-based or “culture of poverty” theories which classify students of color as somehow more likely to underachieve academically or “not care” about school because of their culture(s). This construction of students of color becomes explained socially through culture as if *culture* was disconnected from a racial referent. However, within this construction there remains a propensity to understand “academic underachievement” as something that is inherent from one generation to the next through a culture that is always already racialized.

In this way, Valenzuela explores the racial constitution of “culture” and “underachievement” in *Subtractive Schooling* (1999) by examining two modes of caring amongst the staff, teacher, and student relationships at “Seguin” High School in early 1990’s Houston. Valenzuela found that schools like Seguin subtract resources from youth by dismissing students’ own definitions of care and education and minimizing their culture (109). In this article, I borrow from Valenzuela’s framework of a “politics of caring” which argues that there are two primary modes through which *caring* is practiced in schooling—“aesthetic” and “authentic” caring. “Aesthetic caring” is described by Valenzuela as a superficial and assimilationist politic of caring that fails to acknowledge how decisions are being made by one group for another within a set of power relations. Valenzuela writes about aesthetic caring that “when goals, objectives, and strategies are systemically blind to the experiences of the ‘other’s’ history and culture. . . they are sure to meet with limited success” (263). Consequently, Valenzuela argues for *authentic* caring in opposition to aesthetic caring. “Teacher and other school personnel are to depart from their penchant for aesthetic caring and embrace a more authentically caring ideology and practice” (263). Under this definition, authentic caring necessitates that educators and school officials remain informed and affirming of students’ culture(s) and reject institutional, aesthetic caring practices. Both of these concepts mark the racialized absence, presence, and manipulation of the politics of caring within school institutions.

On one level, the politics of caring and subtractive schooling function intra-school. They also function, I would argue, materially outside of a school, for instance, as practiced through school policies. The politics of

caring outside of an individual school are thus manifested in the relationship between a neighborhood school-community and the local/municipal and national schooling apparatus. There is thus a relationship of power to interrogate between school-communities of color in Chicago and CPS as an institution of the racial-colonial state. As Leigh Patel (2015) writes, “Schools [and by extension school policies] are one of the most historied and intractable locations of racialization in the United States. . . . To critique education as an institution is, then, to critique the nation itself.” CPS upheld foundational anti-Black, settler violence when dictating a massive school closings policy that predominantly Black students and communities were forced to contend with. Through a historical relationship of power, CPS maintains its power and authority over the distribution of resources and physical space between Black and people of color communities. This dispossession enacted through policy decisions marks a foundational absence of caring by the city-state.

Still, many analyses of the school closings by the CTU, media, and other scholars do focus on the lack or absence of caring on behalf of CPS policy towards communities of color. While continuing to study the absences of caring by CPS and the city of Chicago remains crucial, it is also crucial that we critically examine 1) the systemic and settler colonial nature of these absences of caring and 2) instances where CPS policy *does* appear to demonstrate a presence of caring for communities of color. Studying the politics of caring in Chicago’s racial-colonial schooling apparatus, in all of its absences, presences, and manipulations, is critical to understanding the histories, processes, and conditions that facilitate violence against communities of color.

In this way, I consider a significant policy demonstrating investment, support, and *caring* for schools of color in the aftermath of the school closings. After the 2013 school closings, CPS introduced an African-American Studies committee and curriculum and later did the same for Latina/o Studies (CPS, 2013 & 2014). These ethnic studies policies introduced by the Chicago public schooling apparatus are interpreted by many as policies marking progress—the presence of caring—on behalf of CPS towards communities of color. This politics of caring, however, must be studied in the context of the massive Black school closings, Chicago’s settler colonial founding, and critical ethnic studies scholarship. In the aftermath of public denunciation of CPS for not caring about Black school closings, CPS instituted support for ethnic studies that became publicly applauded as an example of aesthetic and authentic caring. Our challenge, then, is to trace how and why these politics of caring are manipulated, placing them within a genealogy of violence against



students and communities of color.

Regardless of whether the formation of CPS ethnic studies committees and curriculum were an intentional response of *caring* or not, the impact of their institutionalization on our historical memory of the 2013 school closings policy is something I will explore further. Tracing how the politics of caring change for CPS historically, then, can be part of our praxis of creating and defining new ways of caring for our communities that fundamentally challenge the particular power dynamics of the current political conjuncture (Hall, 1992). To help trace those changes, I am informed by “distortion” and “quarantine” which are theorized by John Márquez (2014) as two particular tropes of historical memory. They are useful analytical tools for reading, remembering, and building alternatives to the absences, presence, and manipulation of aesthetic and authentic caring in CPS policies. For Márquez, distortion is “a method through which acts of injustice are simply ignored, or they are manipulated to convey a different moral or ethical stance” and quarantine “considers all historical periods to have a beginning and an end. . . crisis is quarantined from having any connection to relations of power in the present” (196). First, I read the politics of caring during the school closings through “distortion”—what genealogies of violence are at the root of justifying and ignoring CPS school closing policy affecting predominantly Black communities? Next, I read the politics of caring in CPS’s ethnic studies policies through “quarantine”—what genealogies of organizing and resistance are being contained and isolated? In both of these readings, nevertheless, distortion and quarantine are not mutually exclusive.

### **Distortion**

In many ways, communities of color in Chicago know, feel and see a foundational absence of material caring from the city-state. The violence against Black and indigenous communities that made it possible for what is now referred to as “Chicago” to exist is a foundational absence of caring. However, the historical and ongoing memory of this politics of caring and racial governance in the City has been *distorted*.

Chicago is a settler colonial city. Rosalyn LaPier and David Beck (2015) write that by the nineteenth century, Chicago’s development:

...in many ways mirrors the growth of the United States as a nation. Throughout the century the Indian people lost their land

and resources and Chicago built itself into one of the great economic centers, and the second largest population center, of the nation. (15)

Through a foundational absence of caring about *Chicago's* Native people, through disregarding their humanity, territory, schools, and ways of knowing, a relationship of power became established between the white settlers and Native people. This politics of caring marks the current relationship of power between the settler state, indigenous communities, and communities of color. Chicago is created through practices of dispossession, conquest, and genocide, and these practices and policies of coloniality remain ignored or justified by the city-state.

In this context, we might begin to think about the distortion of both the presence of aesthetic caring and the absence of authentic caring from CPS towards students of color today in relation to the foundationally violent absence of caring that created “Chicago.” In particular Patrick Wolfe’s (2006) “logic of elimination” helps us understand how relationships of race and coloniality are recurrent and foundational to this city. As Wolfe notes, the drive or “logic to elimination” is foundational to settler colonialism, and similarly the practice of closing down schools in communities of color, is one of systemic dispossession and elimination. Wolfe wrote that:

Negatively [the logic of elimination] strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land-base— as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. In its positive aspect, elimination is an organizing principle of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence. (388)

In this way, we might consider how post-colonial and settler colonial practices function relationally in Chicago. “Settler colonialism destroys to replace” and that ethos is greatly present in the ways in which Black schools are closed down and eliminated by CPS, a system that acts as an extension of the settler-state (388). Both Chicago’s absence of caring and aesthetic caring for “underperforming” and “underutilized” Black schools are not completely new practices on behalf of the settler colonial city-state. Instead, their root causes have been distorted.

In the efforts to complete that distortion, the settler city-state accuses Black communities of “underperforming” and “underutilizing” their schools,

space, and territory both in similar and different ways to settler accusations of Native communities “underutilizing their “underperforming” indigenous lands (Glenn, 2015: 57). Native communities became displaced and dispossessed because somehow settlers could perform better and use the indigenous territory more “efficiently.” Today, performance and efficiency are also important markers of the neoliberal schooling apparatus. Black students are displaced and dispossessed of their community schools because somehow CPS policies can combine different schools to perform better and more efficiently move students across neighborhood lines. As Eve Tuck (2012) reminds us:

Neoliberal ideology, which shapes schooling in the United States, is often theorized as a new logic that emerged in the late 1970’s, yet Indigenous scholars argue that neoliberalism is a contemporary expression and extension of colonialism. Whilst settler colonialism (as a structure and not an event [Wolfe, 1999]) is primarily concerned with the dispossession and erasure of Indigenous peoples, neoliberalism as an extension of colonialism is concerned with the dispossession and erasure of the unworthy subject. (341)

The policies that continue to govern students of color and their schools, through racialized categories such as “underutilized” and “underperforming,” constitute a systemic and settler colonial absence of caring and neoliberal presence of aesthetic caring. Ignoring and justifying the injustices of the school closings, in complete isolation of Chicago’s genealogical violence against Black and indigenous communities, keeps in place a racial-colonial relationship of power under our current neoliberal conjuncture.

### Quarantine

“Latino Studies curriculum will make CPS a pioneer [emphasis added].”

– Title of article in *The Chicago Reporter* (Sanchez, 2014)

Today, this relationship of power is visible in the face of the Chicago schooling apparatus’s recent pursuit of its own African American Studies and Latina/o Studies policies. We can read CPS’s interest in ethnic studies through the framework of the politics of caring. In December 2013, CPS

formed the “CPS Interdisciplinary African and African-American Studies Program” committee under ex-CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett. In February 2014, CPS formed the “Interdisciplinary Latino and Latin American Studies Curriculum (ILLASC).”

In my undergraduate thesis, *Therapeutic High Schools: Healing in the Age of Ethnic Studies* (2016), I examine the contemporary history of ethnic studies overall in the unique space of the city of Chicago. I caution the ways in which CPS, and the U.S. colonial schooling apparatus at large, works to *quarantine* an ongoing genealogy of violence against Black and Latina/o communities through new support for ethnic studies. Historically, there is an absence of care from CPS for ethnic studies. However, for some, CPS’s new ethnic studies<sup>1</sup> policies appear to represent a presence of authentic caring in the city of Chicago. This conjuncture may indeed seem indicative of liberal notions of progress and multiculturalism. Foundationally, however, learning about the racial-colonial relationship between students of color, the schooling apparatus, and the settler city-state is not a part of CPS’s ethnic studies policies. Instead, CPS’s ethnic studies outreach and curriculum remain quarantined from the historical and material realities of students of color in Chicago. This is aesthetic caring only. Quarantined from the historic struggle for ethnic studies in the U.S. and the struggle against the 2013 school closings in Chicago, CPS ethnic studies policy is not authentic caring. Students are not encouraged to honor their own agency and take action against oppressive systems through this new policy and curriculum.

What’s more, years prior to this recent move towards caring about ethnic studies, the state of Illinois enacted HB 2859 in 1991, mandating that Black history be taught in public schools (Muhammad, 2013). The timely policy of African/African American Studies curriculum by CPS in 2013 begs the question: Where was this curriculum for the past twenty years when mandated

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<sup>1</sup>My undergraduate thesis interrogates the current state of ethnic studies in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) from my subject-position as an alumni of an ethnic studies course during my own tenure in CPS. Examining patterns amongst ethnic studies high school courses posted on CPS school websites and through community conversations, I found ethnic studies courses in approximately 10-15% of CPS high schools at some point in recent time. These courses are typically an elective, not a core class or requirement, housed within a school’s History or Literature department, and predominantly listed as Latina/o Studies or African American Studies oriented classes. Ethnic studies remain uncommon within CPS schools, and the ethnic studies classes that do exist often face obstacles to their existence, such as budget cuts.

in 1991 by state law? Why do both this curriculum and the Latina/o Studies curriculum only appear now in the aftermath of massive school closings policy? Regardless of whether the formation of CPS ethnic studies committees and curriculum were an intentional response to the school closings or not, their development remains quarantined from the ongoing power struggles that constitute the lived experiences of students of color in Chicago.

Borne out of movements of struggle, community care, and self-determination<sup>2</sup>, critical ethnic studies pedagogy is one way through which communities of color have historically fought against the quarantine of critical analyses of the relationships of power that constitute our lived experiences. Ethnic studies, both inside and outside the classroom, both as a discipline and as an epistemological project, was dreamt and mobilized as a politics of and beyond authentic caring that fundamentally challenged Western power-knowledge interfaces (Anzaldúa, 2015; Hu-DeHart, 1993). We remember the students, faculty, and community members who have demanded autonomous spaces for ethnic studies on their K-12 and university campuses since the 1960s—extending the organizing work of Third World movements on campus. Community and student grassroots movements set intentions for ethnic studies that were “explicitly critical and oppositional” (Hu-DeHart, 1993: 520). They condemned the schooling apparatus as a knowledge-power interface that “misinterprets, misinforms, and erases the histories, experiences, and actions” of communities of color (Espiritu, 1999: 511). As Black, indigenous, and people of color have done since the inception of coloniality, ethnic studies sought to *critically care* about communities of color as producers of knowledge, “condemn[ing] the production of ‘objective’ and ‘universal’ knowledge” as productions of Western modernity (Espiritu, 1999: 511).

Since then, ethnic studies in both universities and high schools remains under attack, but also becomes increasingly institutionalized. Institutionalization is often described as movement towards traditional academic structures, assimilation, and professionalization. This signals a shift away from the original ethnic studies commitment to liberation and the lived realities of communities of color (Hu-DeHart, 1993; Lowe, 1996; Acuña, 1997; Ferguson, 2012). While much is written about the institutionalization of ethnic studies in universities, these processes of incorporation into the K-12 schooling

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<sup>2</sup>“We do not forget that ‘ethnic studies’ was the compromise to the autonomous ‘Third World College’ ”(Moraga, 2011: 170).

apparatus are much less researched (Wun, 2013; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). As Chicago and other areas of the country see school districts and state legislatures considering and adopting ethnic studies, the fight against aesthetic caring—the quarantine or institutionalization of the community goals of ethnic studies—is imperative.

Ethnic studies policies mandated by CPS cannot be our compromise in the face of ongoing community struggles for Education in Chicago. Our struggle for ethnic studies in Chicago requires new strategies, a new politics of caring, in the face of ongoing austerity and material attacks on schools in Black communities and communities of color. While the goals of ethnic studies are rooted in opposition to the quarantine of the school closings and other colonial crises by the schooling apparatus, ethnic studies can also be complicit in processes of quarantine—whether intentionally or not. How can we fight to truly center communities of color as primary sites of knowledge production within CPS as our physical spaces of learning continue to be under attack? As the institutionalization of ethnic studies reveals a politics of aesthetic/superficial caring, are practices of authentic caring also enough to disrupt the foundational relationship of power between communities of color and the racial-colonial schooling apparatus?

### **Beyond Authentic Caring**

”What does it mean ‘to care’? The answer to this question is provided by the students themselves.”

—Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*, 1999

In *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela found that to “make schools truly caring institutions... authentic caring, as currently described in the literature, is necessary but not sufficient” (109). Valenzuela’s own critique of authentic caring brings political clarity and issues of race, difference, and power into central focus by arguing that authentic caring must consider relationships through their structural positions. In this article, I expanded upon Valenzuela’s analysis of authentic caring from relationships within schools to the structural relationships between communities of color and the schooling apparatus. Unpacking distortion during the school closings and quarantine through CPS ethnic studies policy, however, it became apparent that authentic caring can be co-opted and manipulated by the schooling apparatus. As seen in Chicago, inserting culturally relevant curriculum policies into the

schooling apparatus, understanding ourselves as racialized educators and students, and feeling affirmed in our identities is necessary but not sufficient to disrupt colonial processes of distortion and quarantine that maintain this settler colonial city. These policies caution us to continue to develop our own grassroots policies and practices that go beyond authentic caring and impending institutionalization.

Indeed, K-12 critical caring and ethnic studies scholars are creating community models of education and knowledge-production that go *beyond* authentic caring. Their scholarship highlights student subjectivities and students' own visions of caring to transform our communities under the current neoliberal, racial-colonial schooling apparatus. Scholars such as René Antrop-González and Anthony De Jesús theorize beyond authentic caring in "Towards a Theory of Critical Care" (2006). They term "critical caring" as a process of honoring community knowledge production, high-quality relationships, and high academic expectations. Antrop-González and De Jesús argue for a framework of *critical care* grounded in their study of two small community-based, urban high schools that are "not created in sociopolitical/historical vacuums but emerge organically from community struggles for improved educational opportunities as well as political movements for self-determination, community control and decolonization" (410). Recently, ethnic studies educators have consolidated similar processes that include processes of authentic caring but encompass a larger "critical pedagogy of race" and "ethnic studies pedagogy" for K-12 schooling. Cati V. de los Ríos, Jorge López, and Ernest Morrell (2015) outline a *critical pedagogy of race* rooted in movement building, civic engagement, interdisciplinarity, and learning across struggles. Like Antrop-González and De Jesús, they root themselves within a genealogy of ethnic studies, specifically tracing back revolutionary Black and indigenous scholarship and schooling practices in the 1990's, continuing the call for students to actively and collectively interrogate their subject-positions within systems of power. Furthermore, in the article "Towards an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy," the Tintiango-Cubales et al. (2014) address the need for educators to build ethnic studies processes that are accessible, relevant, and a bridge to community involvement and transformation. In a moment when ethnic studies becomes increasingly institutionalized through school policies, the authors' demand their own policies which outline high-quality teacher preparation and training in ethnic studies.

Read together, these scholar-educators all manifest a deeper and expanded politics of authentic caring—but they ground that within the de-

colonial ethic of early ethnic studies organizing. As the authors of “Towards an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy” wrote:

Early Ethnic Studies activists were inspired by the work of Fanon on decolonization, defining it as both the physical act of freeing a territory from external control of a colonizer, and as the freeing of the consciousness of the native from alienation caused by colonization (Fanon 1963). (111)

Our task of going beyond authentic caring necessitates a serious commitment to decolonization. Going beyond authentic caring requires imagination and decolonial relationships with each other and the earth we exist in relation to—the heart of a genealogy of ethnic studies.

### **Towards Decolonial Politics of Caring**

“Education is a right! That is why we have to fight!”

—Asean Johnson, 2013

Based out of Chicago’s current conjuncture with national repercussions, I am a witness to students and communities of color engaging their own pedagogies of race/ethnic studies and critical care to transform their material conditions—including fighting for their very school buildings. Many students, like Asean Johnson, continue to remind us that the racial-colonial schooling apparatus engages in a manipulative politics of aesthetic and authentic caring through its policies. I believe, however, that the critical caring and community organizing happening in the face of severe austerity locally, and in educational crises throughout the country, create another chance to remain committed to the genealogy of ethnic studies. Ethnic studies is not a movement bookended between the 1960s and 1970s that only begins again now. Instead, the genealogy of ethnic studies encompasses a decolonial politics of caring that seeks to build alternatives to the foundational relationship coloniality introduced and extended between students of color and the schooling apparatus. A decolonial politics of caring is rooted in our perpetual struggle to disrupt the distortion and quarantine of racial and colonial relationships of power.

In Chicago, a politics of decolonial caring is committed to centering our communities as primary sites of knowledge production and ethnic studies,



fighting against policy attacks on school-communities of color, and resisting settler colonialism in this city which continuously erases Native people, their indigenous land, and their leadership. As Tintiango-Cubales et al. write, “This process of decolonization should not be mistaken as only an academic exercise; the aim of decolonization is to move toward self-determination, claiming of an intellectual identity, and active participation in the transformation of material conditions” (111). Indeed, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) declared, decolonization is not a metaphor—and especially in our work towards decolonizing education, we must be historical and specific about our caring work to disrupt and build alternatives to settler colonialism and the logic of elimination, inside and outside the classroom. We must continue to resist that which has come at the cost of our communities and imagine that which escapes the conviction of the state and schooling apparatuses. Echoing Asean Johnson’s speech which opens this article, we must continue to fight because coloniality has constituted public schooling and its policies, in Chicago and elsewhere, to continuously rest upon a relationship of racial governance to students of color. So, if Education is a right—then why are we still fighting? In the end, Education through the inception of Western modernity has never been intended as a right *for everyone*. So we continue to fight, as we always have, for something different and decolonial. *La lucha sigue.*

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