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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Edwin Mayorga & Chanelle Wilson, *#CritEdPol* Co-Editors

We write in the context of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice, and the wave of tensions tied to the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Economic inequality, antiBlack and antiIndigenous violence, food and housing insecurity, immigrant children in cages, social disconnection and the deterioration of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being signal the effects of this historical moment. For many Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), and other marginalized communities, these dual pandemics have only further brought to light that they have been in states of unwellness for centuries. And yet, Marc Lamont Hill (2020) recently reminded us, “we are still here.” The question is how? How, in the midst of material, social and health conditions that leave BIPOC vulnerable to premature death (Gilmore, 2007, 2017) do people continue to do more than survive (Love, 2019)?

Seeking to further explore this question we at *#CritEdPol* draw inspiration from the history of struggle and freedom dreaming of Black women and Black womanist radical traditions. The theme for this volume, “beautiful experiments,” comes from writer and historian Saidiya Hartman (2017, 2019), who describes beautiful experiments as the moments, movements, and legacies of resistance, fugitivity, and worldmaking that are taken up to “refuse the menial existence” scripted for poor Black girls. Not a metaphor but a politics, we extend this politics to marginalized populations writ large to consider how their various experiments either respond to or raise implications for education as a site of struggle. While mainstream education

discourse seeks to focus on the intersecting economic, political, and ecological crises that uphold a narrow, fixed victimhood of those deemed “the truly disadvantaged,” we believe the current discourse erases the ways students, families, community activists and agitators have continually imagined and actualized “otherwise” visions for education, reshaping the terrain of struggle for a more just world.

#CritEdPol is an ongoing beautiful experiment. Initiated by Dr. Edwin Mayorga and his undergraduates at Swarthmore College the vision of the working group, and subsequently the journal, was to engage in a practice and politics that troubled what is understood to be legible knowledge and production within critical education policy studies and activism. First, we have sought to organize our editorial board and pool of authors to reflect the various voices involved in the educational policy landscape, including undergraduates, educators, community advocates/activists, and scholars. Organized in this way we have centered the perspectives, knowledge and leadership of those most directly affected by policy, but who are so often marginalized from policy struggle. We disrupt the notion that only policy makers and researchers can be expert policy actors. Our journal also opens up the ways that policy actors can articulate their perspective and create solutions to policy problems by inviting journal contributors to write in formats that include, but go beyond, the traditional academic paper. In sum, we think that the contributions in this volume, each beautiful experiments in their own right, reflect the overarching intentions and politic

of *#CritEdPol*.

Issue one of this volume opens with “The Erasure of Black Women,” a multimodal creative essay created by mother and daughter team, Tamara Anderson and Maya Anderson. Tamara is a Philadelphia-based educator and activist, and Maya is a second-year student at Susquehanna University. Through a mixture of poetry and expository writing, the Andersons ask, To what do we owe Black women? Everything. Taking on the myth that leadership and progress are the measurements of Black men like Dr. King, Stokely Carmichael, and DuBois the Andersons demonstrate that the erasure of Black women from the historical record is a direct result of patriarchy, white supremacy, and the practice of focusing the spotlight on individuals as opposed to the multitude of organizers that incite social change. Ultimately, their contribution is a call to action saying, No More!

Next, is Dr. Tara Bahl’s essay, “Don’t Worry, I Got You. You Can Do This’: A Student-Centered Approach to Reimagining College Access.” Bahl discusses the decline in time high school college counselors have to provide consistent one-on-one counseling to support students with college planning, which produces a counseling process for many students – particularly those in large or under-resourced schools – that is depersonalized and transactional, rather than supportive of student development. Drawing on narrative and ethnographic research, Bahl’s paper explores a unique program that positions young people as paid college access professionals in their schools. Findings show that these students who become Youth College Counselors (YCCs) in this beautiful experiment, make college planning a more student-centered, meaningful experience for advisees. In doing so, YCCs, Bahl argues, resist a dominant

narrative of young people, particularly those living in marginalized communities, as objects onto which policy happens, and instead serve as school change actors.

The third contribution is early childhood teacher and graduate student, Emma Butensky’s essay, “Queering Elementary Education: A Queer Curriculum for 4th Grade” where Butensky explores the positioning of queer students and queer curriculum in elementary education. Applying an intersectional mode of analysis that is grounded in queer theories, educational theories, and feminist theories, Butensky first argues that queer subjectivities have (not) been included in schools via curriculum for elementary school children. Given these exclusions from the curriculum, Butensky then interviews educators in New York City to better understand how they have been disrupting this practice of exclusion by incorporating queer topics into their classrooms. Butensky closes their essay by describing how this research was used to create a 23-lesson curriculum for 4th grade teachers that investigates bodies, puberty, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

From queering curriculum we move to fugitive acts of learning in doctoral student Karen Zaino’s philosophical essay, “Fugitive Learning.” This paper draws on educational scholarship that calls for abolitionist and rebellious practices of teaching and learning against the institutional practices of containment, surveillance, and expungement that Black students experience in the schools. Zaino asks, what “fugitive acts of learning” take place in our schools, and what relationship to these practices can teachers adopt so that we might “serve and shield” these spaces of “unruly learning” (Patel, 2016, p. 400)?

This issue closes with Dr. Tabitha Dell’Angelo

and artist Maria DeGenova's comic, "Down the Rabbit Hole: A Fantastical First Year of Teaching." Taking an arts-based approach that recognizes performance as both a method of investigation and representation (Worthen, 1998), Dell'Angelo and DeGenova draw on interviews and observations of first year teachers in the northeastern U.S. to construct a comic that is a beautiful visual and scholarly disruption. They communicate the excitement, fears, and competing demands of a beginning teacher, and in so doing present a surreal picture of the affective realities that the teachers expressed through their interviews. In doing so, the authors have provided a wonderful example of an arts-based approach that recognizes performance as both a method of investigation and representation (Worthen, 1998).

We want to highlight how each contribution in this issue pushes us to center students in educational and social change. Co-authors Tamara and Maya Anderson's powerful highlighting of Black women in herstory, are a beautiful braiding of student and educator perspective. Tara Bahl shares stories of students as change agents; capable, willing, and compensated to inform and transform. Emma Butensky captures the unique work of curriculum construction that transgresses the heteronormative, racist, and exclusive curricula found across the U.S., offering students a more authentic foundation. While Karen Zaino shows students as abolitionists and fugitives; we witness the outcome of the beautiful experiment of allowing students to lead, fostering natural inclinations and action. Then, Dell'Angelo and DeGenova articulate and illustrate the pressures of conforming to a system and the beauty that can be found in letting the students fly. In sum, we hope that the beautiful experiments explored in this volume guide the reader to consider

what it means, what it takes, and how we disrupt oppressive practices that have been normalized in education. As we continue forward in the struggle, we invoke resistance, fugitivity, and worldmaking to envision a transformed future. Finally, we want to express our profound appreciation for all who were involved in producing this issue. Our brilliant group of editors were the people who moved Hartman's notion of beautiful experiments in our call for papers, while reviewers thoughtfully provided contributors feedback to further develop each of these experiments. We want to also extend a special thanks to Pempho Moyo, who single handedly attended to the formatting of the issue. We think that readers will find what Pempho created in putting the contributions together accessible, educational and beautiful as well. Thank you all

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