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## In the wake of anti-Blackness and Being: A provocation for do-gooders inscribed in whiteness

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### ABSTRACT

Curriculum studies, like nearly all education scholarship, are predicated on Black suffering and death. Inspired by Christina Sharpe's treatise *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, we will engage with the difficult questions of what it means to be curriculum theorists inculcated into whiteness and settlement. Pivoting Cheryl Harris's renowned assertion that whiteness is property, we consider that whiteness may instead possess us. We draw upon Black and Indigenous brilliance to call for the death of whiteness, proposing that this act is necessary and the only way scholars and educators inscribed in whiteness can possibly imagine playing any positive role in liberation struggles. People are dying, and we either continue being part of the systems that delight in killing, or we take seriously the reordering of our own Being. We do so while being answerable to and in relation with Black studies. To initiate this ontological destruction, we write from the position of the s + cyborg in order to dissociate ourselves from our embodied whiteness. We invite white readers to join us as ghosts in the machine that short-circuit the currents of the wake. To this end, we provoke readers with a prescriptive curriculum towards killing whiteness. While whiteness is under destruction, we call for a turn towards speculative imaginings and futurisms that could envision a curriculum, a way of Being after whiteness.

### KEYWORDS

Black studies; indigenous studies; curriculum studies; relationality

I want to think 'care' as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake ... and that thinking and care need to stay in the wake. (Sharpe, 2016, p. 5)

All thought is Black thought. (Sexton, 2012, p. 1)

they believed they had to hate black women in order to be themselves ... which is also to say that some of the people on the planet believed they themselves were actually other than black women. which was a false and impossible belief about origin ... it was like saying they were no parts water. which they must have believed as well. you can see what they did to the water. (Gumbs, 2018, pp. 6–7)

Beginning and ending with Black suffering demands an *urgency* that refuses and exceeds what can be done, what has always been done, through education reform. Our children are despised ... [You] are killing their spirits and breaking their bones, in ways new and old, and without end. When [you] commit to know Black suffering—to occupy and be

occupied by it, as Sharpe says—[your] education policy debates are not places to deliberate the implementation of various [terms]... These terms are always premised upon the idea that [you] should not ask for too much, too quickly. [Your] urgency, expressed in [your] scholarship and in [your] teaching... imagines another temporality marked by a refusal to wait for another day, another conference, another publication, to get to work on an otherwise world. (Dumas, 2018, p. 43)

Dear reader, fellow educator, fellow s + cyborg (paperson, 2017) inscribed in whiteness:

Come, let's spend some time together today plotting the death of whiteness. Let's be the ghost in the machine for a while. Or maybe first, let's say hello to the ghosts that haunt you. No, let's do both, because time is running out. This letter is addressed to you, and is written to us white<sup>1</sup> educators, who—not for the better and just for the worse—dominate the field of education and are reading this special issue.<sup>2</sup> It is meant especially for those of you attempting to think through and against anti-Blackness with care. But to do this thinking you need to be answerable to Black life, resistance, and studies. You realize it is dangerous to once again centre whiteness, but you believe this to be a necessarily final act of bringing this filth into relief in order to expose and destroy it. You think it might be more dangerous for white people to continue presenting themselves as anti-racists, as decolonizing scholars, et cetera, without having actually done anything to destroy the rotten roots and foundations of our ontological Being<sup>3</sup> (e.g., Ohito & the Fugitive Literacies Collective, 2020). But if you can obliterate whiteness, maybe then you can consider what it would mean to aspire to Black studies.

But whatever you do, it will never be enough. Can you come to terms with that? Can you engage in this particular act of self-destruction if destruction of others is all you know? Will this death require the same violence you know so well, or something else altogether? Maybe this is a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2011, p. 1), but be clear with yourself: it is one that is already being had (Dumas, 2018; Grande, 2018; Martinez, 2017; Ohito & the Fugitive Literacies Collective, 2020; Rigby & Ziyad, 2016) and one that is desperately needed, even when it comes at great cost to those who engage in it.<sup>4</sup> But you rarely see education scholarship and curriculum studies seriously take up the death of whiteness, and now you are starting to realize why: you lack the courage to imagine otherwise (Crawley, 2015), the other side of after-whiteness, after-Man (Wynter, 2003). If, as Sylvia Wynter argued, "the function of the curriculum is to structure what we call 'consciousness,' and therefore certain behaviors and attitudes" (Thomas, 2006, n.p.), then curriculum studies are trapped within the confines of self-congratulatory whiteness, even while recognizing "the ways in which colonial heteropatriarchal white supremacy continues to pervade curriculum studies" (Gaztambide-Fernández & Murad, 2011, p. 15). Forty years of psychoanalytic self-exploration through *curre*<sup>5</sup> has gotten you no closer to justice (was it ever meant to?)—and people are dying. Indeed, *curre* as a method has admittedly nothing to do with psychic survival (Pinar, 2004, p. 4), much less preserving life. Your schools are harming Black and Brown children (Dumas, 2014); your (white) curriculum and theory are poisoned with Black suffering, they require it (Dumas, 2018); your foundational curriculum reconceptualists abuse Black intellectual practices as playthings to be "respectfully mime[d]" (Pinar, 2004, p. 46) like some kind of modern minstrelsy; your so-called critical whiteness scholar colleagues' curriculum will lead them to call you a

“race traitor” (Hernández Adkins & Mock Muñoz de Luna, 2019), a term that only reifies race as biological and maintains whiteness. Your curriculum is pathetically myopic. It privileges a myopia that is further tinted (“but my skin is peach-colored!”) by its rose-coloured lens on Being that manifests a “benevolent” anti-Blackness—that is, the delusions of whiteness. Your curriculum feeds on Black suffering like the sharks that trailed slaving ships in the Middle Passage, like the other sea creatures and organisms that devoured enslaved Africans who jumped or were flung overboard (Gumbs, 2018; Sharpe, 2016)—condemned/blessed to take up residence time<sup>6</sup> (Sharpe, 2016) in dispersed and rebirthed forms. Anti-Blackness in curriculum studies violently imagines Blackness as “solely in opposition to intellectualism and humanity” (Ohito et al., 2019) and positions education “as a civilizing (colonizing) process” (Truman, 2019), wherein curriculum “becomes a site that naturalizes Eurocentric [Human] ontology” (Desai & Sanya, 2016, p. 716). And if curriculum (studies), and education research more broadly, is predicated on Black suffering and death (Dumas, 2018), then so is the university. The terror-work of the armed neo-confederates who desecrated the Unsung Founders memorial last year at your university is also predicated on Black suffering, albeit in ways that you are more comfortable condemning and distancing yourself from. But it is the same disgust with Blackness (Dumas, 2016) and pleasure in its undoing. It’s the quotidian and the extreme, but it is the same paradigm. Both are contingent on the survival of the existing systems—one calls for its reform, the other for its return to glory days, but continued existence nonetheless (Dumas, 2018). And your whiteness, your sense of Being, your very ways of entering into this complicated conversation around whiteness are rooted and thrive in the violence of anti-Blackness. You know and re-write Being through your obsession with and attempts to destroy Blackness—alongside your continued efforts to make Indigeneity vanish. Ohito and the Fugitive Literacies Collective (2020) wrote that: “To overcome anti-Blackness in this world, there would have to be a disordering and dismantling of modern society wherein humanness and whiteness are conflated and considered constitutive of each other” (p. 15).

So, make no mistake: you are not talking about the disruption of whiteness, its “exploration” (McIntyre, 2002), of “letting it go” (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019), or even its critical study. There is nothing we need to know about whiteness other than that its death is long overdue, and that it is y/our responsibility to kill it. If you dare to call yourself an educator, you need to redress this historical emergency (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 812). And you must realize that the death of whiteness necessitates some part of yourself dying. Whiteness is not just a process, a structure of feeling (Walcott, 2020), an ideology, action, or thing to be destroyed (although it is all of those things as well); for you, and for many of us, it will mean some parts (or all of us) disappearing. If we are to ever meaningfully engage in the world-shifting conversations already happening in Indigenous and Black studies, first, we must, with care and intention, un-know our Being and our lives.

But, of course, many questions remain: What of you is already dead? What have you already killed? Will you be capable of plunging in the knife when it matters? What colour will your blood be? Or will this death be more like succumbing to the wake—the disaster of your own making—knowing and being swallowed by water? In order to answer these questions, you need new methods (Sharpe, 2016), new

questions, new foundations (Walcott, 2020). As Dumas (2018) reminded you, “Beginning and ending with Black suffering demands an urgency that refuses and exceeds what can be done, what has always been done, through education reform” (p. 43). In order to do our part to end Black suffering, we need to kill whiteness. In order for us to be able to behold Blackness outside of suffering, we need to kill whiteness.

What more than humanity will the death of whiteness bring to those currently coded as white, or aspiring to whiteness? Since liberal humanism over-represented itself (Man) to define and delimit the Human (Wynter, 2003) and founded whiteness, you are too ontologically indoctrinated to answer such a question. Leave it to your Black/Indigenous/Queer/Two-Spirit relations to imagine your liberation from the damning structures of whiteness and the limits of appealing to the Human. No doubt liberal humanism and settler colonialism are inextricable, and both conspired to create whiteness. The failures of the liberal humanist project have been documented by (Black/Indigenous and/or Queer) titans of critical theory (Lowe, 2015; McKittrick, 2015; Perry, 2018; Sharpe, 2016; Smith, 2012; Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 2003). When we obliterate whiteness, we (the formerly white and every racialized Other) may actually flourish. After whiteness, the US may be unrecognizable—if it still exists. This afterward, sometimes called the henceforward (Tuck & Walcott, 2017), will be a rememory (Morrison, 1987) of Black love and joy, as well as a return to proper relations to land as life (Smith, 2012), pedagogy (L. B. Simpson, 2014), and people (Carrillo Rowe & Tuck, 2017). Bringing about the death of whiteness might save us all. But you have much work to do in order to relate to the henceforward—much less reorder your Being towards it.

Dear s + cyborg, are you still there? Come down to the abyss with us, spend some time without the white light that you feel you need to see. Why the darkness, you ask? Tuck and Yang (2012) reminded you that in contrast to Western epistemological traditions, “Black feminist thought roots freedom in the darkness of the cave, in that well of feeling and wisdom from which all knowledge is recreated” (p. 20). The so-called “light”—what you represent—is a failed project. Whiteness is genocide, chattel slavery, killing non-human living beings, and destroying the land with shameful precision; as TallBear (2019) noted, it is “the social technology of mass destruction.” You represent a project of complete efficiency, and yet, of complete failure. Continuing to pursue education and curriculum through white theory and practice will only reproduce this violence; you must reach beyond your current project, beyond format, beyond method, beyond identity, beyond the disembodied whiteness of analytical thinking. The only future is in the darkness, in the beyond. You must dive into the electrical currents of the after-life machine that is the wake—the electrical currents of curriculum (Doll, 2000, p. ix; Niccolini, 2012, p. 15). There is a complex, vast system of Black and Indigenous knowledges in these currents, in the life beneath the surface (Tuck, 2019). You will not be alone. But you are also not of this place and space, and your presence is an intrusion. The arrogance of whiteness would have you think that you can take these knowledges and use them for your own projects that sustain whiteness. You cannot; we cannot. What is at stake here is an ontological seismic event, a radical reorientation to the world that you must commit to. You must travel

those networks, learn the routes, listen to the hums and whirs, learn to attend to the desires of your fellow *s + cyborgs*.

### The *S + cyborg* and You

*S + cyborg*: a queer turn of phrase/Being introduced by paperson (2017) to describe the agents bringing about a third university—that is, a decolonizing university. paperson wrote: “Decolonization is, put bluntly, the rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous and Black and queer futures—a process that requires countering what power seems to be up to” (2017, p. 2). The *s + cyborg* is extra-human and more-than-machine, the beyond cybernetic organism that “delights in the ways that [your] agency is extended by the very circuitry of systems meant to colonize” (paperson, 2017, p. xiv). You see *s + cyborgs* as a way to think through your renunciation of the singular and retreat *into* the social (Crawley, 2020, p. 95)—a tentative step towards another way of Being in this world. Writing as *s + cyborgs* makes the academic reader frantic in search of normalized expectations; writing as *s + cyborgs* de-centres the individual self and *y/our* entanglements with whiteness. Perhaps these beyond cybernetic abilities are why paperson “draws inspiration from Janelle Monáe’s dirty computer” (K. W. Yang, personal communication, April 22, 2020). Regardless, if we are to abolish whiteness in the academy and beyond, if you are to help bring about its death, *s + cyborgs* (or ghosts, or monsters, disturbances in the electromagnetic field) will surely play a part. *S + cyborgs* are the ghosts in the machine, the bug in the technology that disrupts and dismantles, that makes the university sputter and collapse and renders it a heap of junk (paperson, 2017). If we are to occupy/be occupied by the wake, and education is located in the belly of the slave ship as Sharpe (2016) asserted, then let us think about our work as situated there. Let us think about our Being as situated there, as part of the functioning of the ship that is causing the wake, the still unfolding disaster of slavery. And then let us think about how we can sink these ships, because as Sharpe (2016) asks, “How can the very system that is designed to unmake and inscribe her also be the one to save [us]?” (p. 92). The system/ship cannot and will not save us, under any circumstance. So, let us be mutineers and think care-fully about what that means for those of us on board. For those that we would enslave, terrorize, kill—it might mean the possibility of liberation. For those who jumped, as well as for those who did not jump but built lives and loves and kinship despite our best efforts, the least we can do is sink this ship, and ourselves with it.

But first let us tell you what we mean by whiteness, why we locate the death of whiteness in the wake (Sharpe, 2016), and then we will share with each other *y/our* own *s + cyborg* stories—and maybe we can come to some sort of understanding of how and why whiteness needs to die, and maybe us along with it.

### Whiteness as Property and Propertied

A quarter century ago, Cheryl Harris (1993) outlined how whiteness became intertwined with property and rights in the US legal project. But whiteness as property has

always fallen short of satisfying because you always wondered—what property? The delineation of whiteness as property is almost exclusively legible through the juridical exclusions from full personhood of Blackness under chattel slavery (Harris, 1993). Then the question lingers: what possesses whom? If we instead understand whiteness as possessing those who remain inscribed in it, then it is something you must dis-possess, dis-own. An exorcism of sorts. It must be either banished to the realm from which it came or expelled from our bodies and assassinated. And, no, *curre* cannot kill whiteness; it cannot deliver you to ontological reordering. *Curre* is the Cool-Whip of theories of change. It is artificial, white fluff meant to dupe and delight the consumer.

Understanding whiteness as property also properly situates it within the settler colonial nexus of ownership-erasure-exploitation (Harris, 1993; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Those familiar with Unganax scholar Eve Tuck's work may read a call for an exorcism and conflate it with haunting. However, haunting is agentic and disconnected from settler perceptions of haunting that are only and always connected to horror, demons, and the like. So, haunting, kinship, and the *s + cyborg* are all ghosts in the machine—new theories of change—capable of delivering us from the all-consuming hellscape of whiteness.

Whiteness in the wake is “living the afterlife of property” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 15). The conversion of land into property also mutated people and relations into liberal capitalist competition (Smith, 2012) and humanist conquest (King, 2019; Wynter, 2003). In other words, understanding the creation of whiteness as against both Blackness and Indigeneity—as paperson (2017) clarified of the settler-native-slave triad—is to understand whiteness as conquest and enslavement. Whiteness demands more land as property to drive profits; whiteness demands enslaved peoples as property to work that land and drive profits.

Once exorcised from us, whiteness is then vulnerable to our *s + cyborg* machinations. But what is left of us? The formerly white? Of course it is not as simple as becoming Black or consuming Black culture. That would be the Dolezal-ization of Blackness or analogous to the remove-to-replace pretendian-ism of people like Elizabeth Warren and Johnny Depp. No, what is required is to reconstruct our ways of Being in the world so that they are not built with Blackness at the fulcrum (Dumas, 2018; Harris, 1993; McMillan Cottom, 2019). We must look to and learn from Black joy and Black love—the persistence of more than just surviving in the face of the ever oppressive, exploitative, murderous, and demonic possession that is whiteness. Those racialized into Blackness in the US—either socio-genetically through the “one drop” rule or through other visual/linguistic/cultural markers of racialization (e.g., Rosa, 2019)—have insisted and persisted ontological frames that refuse the vagaries of anti-Blackness since its very inception. Whatever comes after whiteness certainly must learn from and be in good relations with those histories of Being that rejected the lies of anti-Blackness.

### Why *S + cyborg* Stories?

But how have we gotten here, dear *s + cyborg*? And why are we writing to you? (Or are you writing to us?) And who are you? And why have we thus far refused to



reflexively detail our embodied experiences in a way that is legible to the academy (i.e., you will not find a positionality “statement” in this letter)? Ashon Crawley (2020) wrote that a letter is a “broken” claim towards connection, where what is sought after and desired is relation, connection (p. 91). What we are seeking here is relation, which is what whiteness attempts to undo. Letter-writing as methodology is a tentative way to destroy whiteness because it actively refuses the rupture of kinship and imagines other ways of being in relation to each other. Crawley writes letters as an attempt to think through (among other things) a marronage fundamentally against Locke’s conceptions of possessive individualism, a marronage that attends to the “renunciation of the singular, the renouncing of individual-divisible being, the retreat into rather than away from the social” (2020, p. 95). In some ways, this is what this letter attempts to do as well; this is why we write to you, to us.

Seeking relation, as you understand it, involves intimacy, an intimacy that gives away something dear to you. So, what follows is an attempt at intimacy and connection, telling you how we s + cyborgs have arrived at this space where we see the death of whiteness as necessary, where we see our own stories as part of the web of whiteness that positions Blackness as the fulcrum of white supremacy (Dumas, 2018; Harris, 1993; McMillan Cottom, 2019). And because it is a technological fact that we are all s + cyborgs (K. W. Yang, personal communication, April 22, 2020), it is also your story, our story. We have asked questions about killing whiteness above; here, in the stories that follow, are a few of y/our tentative responses.

### **The First S + cyborg Story: Atravesando la Frontera or What Part of You is Already Dead?**

Carlitos, Rosa, y su hijo Leo<sup>7</sup> cruzaron el Río Grande ayer—quizás el día antes (February 20–21). They did not tell anyone in the family when they left Honduras for the US with a coyote. Even when our abuelita was dying, among all the talk of getting his father to the US to say goodbye to abuelita, no one mentioned anything about Carlitos and his family making their way to the US. You had already pledged to sponsor them in their petition for asylum, but you knew nothing of their imminent arrival.

Tu primo (well, according to the ways of whiteness and its genealogical separation, your partner’s cousin), the day Carlitos and his family arrived in Durham, North Carolina, told you and your partner, “Necesitamos descansar. Estamos—físicamente y moralmente—destruidos.” And you looked upon them like a dream. Sitting on the floor against the central dividing wall of the brick ranch house, you listened and observed with a slack face. Rosa sat on the couch to your right and quietly performed herself as mother while her partner spoke their traumas and hopes. The four-year-old rumbled and scurried about as four-year-olds do. Your child waddled back and forth, announcing their one-year-old presence with dat-dats and doos. How was it possible that these people, your family, were here in front of you after crossing three borders through unsanctioned and clandestine methods? How did the cousin you had not seen since 2006 when he was 14-years-old arrive to the US with a son and a wife? How did they not only survive the journey but also remain together through detention with CBP and ICE? How could it all have happened so quickly? You have studied



the US-Mexico border and the horrors of its enforcement (e.g., Abrego, 2019; De León, 2015). Unlike how paperson and Subcomandante Marcos describe México Profundo (paperson, 2017), not all that happens in the subterranean depths of the third or fourth world is safe and peaceful. Crossing/obstructing the border is messy at best, rapacious at worst. And yet, your family transgressed these borders, these colonial barriers, these time-space power constructions without great harm. Yet.

Carlitos's mother, tu tía, died the night before they transubstantiated (Sharpe, 2016) the fictive nation-state border of the US into nothing more than a relatively shallow stretch of river. She died not knowing that her son and his family had fled the country. There is a certain irony to a woman named Reyna (not a pseudonym; *que descanse en paz*) dying the day her son and his family disrupted a settler colonial border. Anyone from impoverished countries that have faced decades of war and/or its repercussions knows well the fallacies of the colonial borders of the nation-state. In the post-WWII era, most of the conditions of poverty and violent conflict are the result of US intervention, all in the name of "progress" (e.g., Lindo Fuentes & Ching, 2012). Pero, with this progress, tu primo lost both his mother y su tierra madre in the same transubstantiation of the border. For Indigenous transubstantiators, the border also erases Indigeneity and remakes these peoples into settler nationalities (Salvadorans, Hondurans, Guatemalans, Mexicans, etc.; Speed, 2019).

What is the wake in el Río Bravo? What transverse waves jettison from an already moving body of water? How does that vector alter the movements, the aftermaths? What is Middle Passage when the new land is both desired and visible from the moment of entering the water? If rivers feed oceans and seas, how does that influence the wake? What are the actions and reactions between fresh- and salt-water in the wake?

How are you in relation to the wake?

It strikes you that all US borders are built upon and through the Middle Passage. The wake en el río is once again anti-Blackness. As Tressie McMillan Cottom (2019), Michael Dumas (2018), and Cheryl Harris (1993) have noted, Blackness is the anchor, the fulcrum to whiteness. This anti-Black racism extends into and pervades Latin America. However, the self-same phenomenon is often referred to as colourism, which is either a failure of imagination or the inability to recognize settler-imposed racist hierarchies. No matter how different the Spanish-Catholic approach to settler colonialism may have been from the English/North-western European/Protestant form, each still held and holds Blackness at the counterpoint, the opposite of whiteness. After all, the US southern border was created by the warmongering slaver (and UNC graduate) James Polk in order to protect the institution of slavery, strengthen the white nation-state, and enliven whiteness in perpetuity. As such, the US-Mexico border—properly understood—is fundamentally anti-Black.

### **The Second S + cyborg Story: What Have You Already Killed?**

You realize now that you think about kinship often because you come from a family whose ties to/of kinship have been broken. Your mother, a Spanish woman, abandoned her two oldest children to escape imprisonment for adultery. Her

abusive husband left her the year before and was living with another woman—but when her husband’s family found out that your mother was pregnant with another man’s child—your father’s—they threatened to have them both arrested, and to take the children (including your unborn sister) away. They had the right and power to do so under Franco’s fascist regime. Your parents tried to fight, but ultimately fled Spain without the children. Had she taken her children—your siblings—your mother would have been a kidnapper in the eyes of Spanish law. Try as she might, your mother was never able to regain custody. As a result, your oldest brother and sister grew up with their aunt and have borne the brunt of your mother’s abandonment. You were raised in the wake of this brokenness, this dereliction of motherhood.

In years past, you have seen your mother as a victim of fascist Spain—perhaps as a way to convince yourself of her innocence, or an attempt to reconcile your oldest siblings’ deep anger towards her with your vision of her as a titan. You felt she had no choice. But recently you watched a video of Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2016) reading a poem she wrote for Ebony Wilkerson, a Black mother who drove a minivan, with her children inside, into the Atlantic Ocean. You heard Dr. Gumbs tell this mother that she understood why she had committed this unimaginable act, why she had tried to take the lives of her own children along with her own. In the poem, Gumbs tells this mother that she is not “the only woman crazy enough to remember that some days we just cannot. We cannot live here. We cannot give our babies to this world that eats our bones,” and that one day her children will understand her. You felt your world shift in the presence of her words.

After reflecting on this poem for a few weeks, you talked to one of your sisters and she insisted that your mother was not *only* a victim, but also a cunning and powerful writer of her own story. She suggested that your mother’s decision to leave her children was, in fact, a calculated choice, and a selfish one at that—she saved her own life at the cost of her children growing up without their mother. And later, while reading Saidiya Hartman’s (2007) *Lose Your Mother*, which recounts the loss and remaking of kinship in Black communities in the wake of slavery, a new understanding started to shimmer in the waters of the wake: if slavery is the ghost in the machine of kinship (Sharpe, 2016), and you have come to know kinship in the afterlives of slavery (Hartman, 2007) and colonialism, the ghost that haunts your family might be rooted in the same anti-Blackness and Black fugitivity theorized in the works of Black feminist scholarship. At the very least, you finally see this ghost being reflected in scholarship, whereas the rest of your education (a colonizing process) has otherwise erased or belittled your mother. You need to understand the otherwise possibilities of kinship because your mother saved herself in order to save all of her children (including you). She did so with purpose and a limitless love that you recognize in the mother who drove herself and her children into the ocean. Our notions of motherhood, the ineffable root of caring that constitutes your world, need to be rewritten by your mother (the abandoner), and Ebony Wilkerson (the would-be murderer), and Sethe (the murderer in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*) so that kinship and relationality and knowledge can be reimagined and reclaimed through these cunning and unimaginable acts of love.

## The Third S + cyborg Story: Will You Be Able to Plunge the Knife in When It Matters?

Recently, you were in the audience of a presentation by two Black women scholars at your School of Education, discussing the intersections of education and geography and their respective work around justice and fugitivity. It was an extraordinary moment of Black scholarship being intentionally centred (by students) in your institution. One of the presenters—to a mostly white audience (some of whom were her fellow faculty and administrators)—challenged us to consider, as a starting point, that classroom spaces are not safe for Black students and faculty. She then asked if fugitive classroom spaces were necessarily Black classroom spaces, and, if so, to what extent the experiences of white and non-Black students matter (Ohito & the Fugitive Literacies Collective, 2020). You felt for a moment that in bringing these questions so forcefully to that space and moment, Dr. Ohito was herself cultivating a fugitive space and perhaps also showing us a way to bring about the death of whiteness. But because white people ruin everything (T. Staton, 2018, personal communication, August 23, 2017), during the discussion section (even after the student moderators had followed Eve Tuck's peer-review-of-questions process) a white man immediately stood up and demanded that the two women *be more explicit* about how he as a white man could be less racist. The presenters warily gave a response without actually answering his repugnant demand, but this moment and your silence haunts you, especially because you see this happening in almost every meeting/presentation/conference/classroom you attend. You are even reminded of the discussion after you read parts of this very letter at a conference. This call for a complete and total ontological rearrangement was described as a “spoken word performance” and only one other person in the all-white, plus one Indigenous woman, crowd knew Sylvia Wynter; one white woman lamented that Grande invoked Christianity in her description of settler colonialism as original sin—as though Christianity was not part of the foundational architecture of whiteness. So here is how you might have responded to that demanding white man about how he, and you, can take the first tentative steps towards stopping the terror you so routinely cause.

### Step One

Shut the fuck up.

### Step Two

Show the fuck up (when asked to, and when needed). Attend rallies for movements like Black Lives Matter, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and Mauna Kea. Support Black colleagues and students by showing up to their presentations. Listen harder, more openly. Accept their conclusions. We know you want to explain away their findings—that is the epitome of whiteness.

At the end of these events, seek out activist leaders and their movements, then give them your resources. Redirect that unused travel stipend. Hire them as RAs for anti-racist work/research. Use your institutional/financial privilege for real change

beyond your own benefit. Repurpose and reappropriate university funds (e.g., Grande, 2018; Harney & Moten, 2013; Meyerhoff, 2019). Seriously, it is not hard to do.

### Step Three

Read. Do the work. Reorient your entire Being towards Black and Indigenous studies. If you aspire to Black and Indigenous studies, do so with ever-present care, intention, time, and without a mandate for conquest (Morrison, 1994). Those knowledges carry an ontology that never mistakes whiteness for anything other than the filth it is. Learn what it is to be formerly white in the world. Yes, while whiteness is under destruction, your body will still be racialized into possession by whiteness. You must learn to recognize when it happens and be otherwise. Here are some beginnings: abolish whiteness from your syllabi. Throw away Dewey and assign DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper. Swap Foucault for Fanon; Noddings for bell hooks and Audre Lorde; Deleuze and Guattari for Eve Tuck and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Spend the same time and devotion on these texts that you would on those that make up the “canon.” Speak up alongside your Black, Indigenous, and Brown colleagues and students, well. Vandalize the institution (Ahmed, 2018). Become the target of white backlash. Become an asshole in the eyes of white colleagues. Speak the truth into existence on behalf of yourself, destroy the reputation whiteness has allowed you, welcome the vilification and the material consequences that have always been poured over your Black, Indigenous, and Brown colleagues for doing the same. Give out zero cookies for baby-steps from white colleagues who refuse to recognize the enormity of the wake.

### Step Four

Initiate (good) relations. Aspire to Black studies (Sexton, 2012). Make demands of senior white faculty and administrators. Protest when those demands are not met. Disabuse yourself of the benevolence of institutions (Meyerhoff, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2018), especially the university as it is an arm of settler colonialism (Grande, 2018). Distrust all white people, especially the white women who dominate the field of education—including yourself and us. Expect your Black, Indigenous, and Brown colleagues and students to distrust you. After all, you still look white and may still be its property. Respect that distrust.

You should also expect your white colleagues to begin to view you as an enemy, or at least as an impolite or noncompliant colleague—a troublemaker, a sower of division, an asshole. Do not be surprised. These are predictable reactions to no longer catering to whiteness, especially in educational spaces. Frankly, while you work to destroy whiteness, educational and/or professional spaces are likely the least of your worries—however, substantial they may be. Familial relationships, under whiteness, are contingent upon either silent acceptance of irreconcilable beliefs in anti-Blackness or unspoken accords to not discuss the recorded strategies of whiteness that evolved in response to anti-Blackness. Once you recognize the foundation of these stances in your families as whiteness, then those familial relationships will become strained,

belligerent, and/or untenable. Do not expect an ontological reordering to come about peacefully.

### Step Five

Embrace publish or perish, but just the perish part—stop writing things that keep the ship afloat just to keep your career alive (Kelly, 2019; Patel, 2016). Publish so that others do not perish. People are dying. If your work continues to breathe any life into whiteness, it is time to resign.

### Step Six

Wake work. Try to occupy and be occupied by the wake. Only when your Black/Indigenous/Queer/Two-Spirit relations tell you that you have successfully killed whiteness will your work be done. Or maybe then it will only just begin.

## The Fourth S + cyborg Story: Can You Self-Destruct When All You Know is the Destruction of Others?

You attend another anti-racism rally where Black students lead you in chants, where your Black colleagues and friends speak difficult truths out into a crowd on a hot spring day on the steps of a library, a hallowed place of knowledge and archive of anti-Blackness. Later, as the protest turns processional, you decide to walk beside a Black woman who you notice is walking alone towards the tail-end of the marching protesters. You notice the cars behind the procession that are following too closely. The woman has put her body between the cars and the protesters. As you join her, she looks you in the eye, looks back at the cars, and then tells you, “these are my students. I am going to protect them.” And as the group of protesters marches past the building that houses your School of Education, you see some of your white colleagues and administrators taking pictures of the marching crowd. None of them join you.

The wake is the total climate; you only get glimpses of its full force. You see it now too in the majority of scholarship you are force-fed. The white, cis-het, and patriarchal canon. You realize the canon is nothing more than an instrument of naval warfare—of schools shooting at schools for greater control of the market, sinking ships into the wake itself only to be replaced by more efficient, more innovative ships. So, you must be ever vigilant of the workings of the machine, of ships that pretend not to be ships.

Solo hacen lo mínimo. Solo para decir que nos dieron algo, pero de lo más feo posible—feísimo. Y tiene sentido porque saben que vamos a decir a nuestra gente como fue, como sufrimos. Y están contando en que digamos que está horrible para que no vengan los demás.

Your primo offered this cutting analysis about the border enforcement machine, but it splices into the self-same circuitry of whiteness in the academy and everywhere in a settler colonial state. None of it is worth keeping. And as for your anger—well, now you more clearly understand why your Black colleagues do not always join in your s + cyborg warfare. And, perhaps, why they are not so quick to defend you at

every turn. Your momentary bouts of rage that hot-wire the circuitry of the machine constitute their total experience when it comes to their interactions with the system, with worthless white people just like you. They know better. They understand what it means to feel the weight of the quotidian violence of whiteness. They will behold you with suspicion, and they are right to do so. But they will stand in the way of ever-encroaching terror (the cars that follow too closely) and protect Black life and Black resistance. When they allow you, when they ask, walk with them.

You may be a s + cyborg for a very long time.

### **The Final (for Now) S + cyborg Story: What Colour Will Your Blood Be? Or, Whatever You Do, It Will Never Be Enough**

When your Black friends and colleagues stood in front of that protest in August 2018 and placed short, white nooses around their own necks as a visible marker of white supremacy on campus, you felt pain, confusion, anger, and sadness. You did not know how to understand their commitment to wear a noose on campus until Silent Sam came down. You exchanged text messages with your dear friend Kirk (K. D. Meade, personal communication, August 25, 2018), a Black man who is an anti-racism activist in Seattle, in order to make sense of Jerry and Cortland's protest. You sent Kirk a picture. His reaction grounded you. He wrote, "So you symbolically violate a black body in hopes of shaming whiteness?! That's not how that's worked historically." You knew the history of "black suffering as a pastime for white folk," but could not connect it to your colleagues. Kirk continued, "We ought to be able to imagine a liberation where we are whole—where the refutation of our personhood that whiteness represents is not centered in our reclamation work or our emancipation—a way without whiteness as a consideration." Kirk then pointed you to Dumas (2017) where he described a "failure to do what is necessary, which is to refuse to raise \*white\* children at all, which must also be a refusal to be a \*white\* mother."

You've sat with this exchange with Kirk for months now. How do you reconcile his critique with the justification of donning a noose from two equally brilliant colleagues? Two doctoral candidates studying Blackness and education enact a public protest that makes Black suffering on campus, then and now, impossible to ignore. A Black activist rejects the symbolic violence of the image they create, saying that tying nooses around the necks of two Black men necessarily recreates whiteness. You wonder if these positions are irreconcilable. You hope they are merely incommensurable (Tuck & Yang, 2016). But it's best that you recognize it is not your place to judge either Jerry and Cortland's protest or Kirk's critique. You are not qualified for that. As long as whiteness is under destruction, you cannot be qualified to make such judgements.

Recently, you ran into Jerry in the lobby of the School of Education. He'd been wearing the noose for about six months—you still had not gotten used to it, which you suppose is the point. He started talking about all the time he has spent lately with his young child. You refuse to recount the story here because it is not yours to tell (A. Simpson, 2007). But you can say that it was an example of the simple joys of parenting and the endearing silliness of children. You were engrossed. You did not

quite forget the noose around Jerry's neck, but perhaps you did not feel its presence as much as all the moments before, back to August.

You could not stop laughing. This moment represents Black joy. Such joy in the presence of a symbol of Black suffering and murder left you with much to think through. It felt like a different future—one in which you still carry the history of anti-Blackness and the terrors of whiteness (literally, like Jerry's noose), but carry them only as relics of the past, making room for Black childhood and Black joy. Like the everyday horrors of the as yet still unfolding of chattel slavery, this quotidian moment of Black joy contained a new world order. Black joy exceeds persistence in the face of the wake. It takes the rupture of Middle Passage as material, embodied fact and insists a euphoria (Rapsody, 2019) that supersedes or overlays Black suffering. It is the N\*gro spiritual, it is the blues, it is the Harlem Renaissance, it is soul food, it is the N\*gro Leagues, it is Motown, it is the Black Stonewall uprising, it is Black is Beautiful, it is #CiteBlackWomen (Smith & the Cite Black Women Collective, n.d.), it is Sethe, it is Black Out Loud (Gilliam & Wilson, n.d.), it is the quiet moment between a father and child. We will all be saved by Black joy and we must continue to bring it to bear in our lives, scholarship, and schools. Black joy will rupture the slave ship of schooling.

### **The Wake, Death, Relationality, and the S + cyborg**

Christina Sharpe (2016) began *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* with the words, "I wasn't there the day my sister died" (p. 1). In the spaces between those words you also read a warning: tread with care, like treading water. This is unlike anything you have read before and you will not be the same after reading this. *I am only sharing this with you because this story must be heard by those who need it, and maybe those who already know it in their bones, feel it in their waves.* The rest of you will hear/read/feel something else in these words. That is okay; it was not meant for you anyway. In this work, you thought you saw shimmers of Black love and joy—but you cannot be sure, because whiteness clouds your vision so much that it tricks you into thinking you can know things with certainty. But you felt that these are the methods and foundations that might help you find your way in the darkness. But remember, these methods are not meant for you.

Since then you've been revisiting Leigh Patel's (2016) *Decolonizing Educational Research* and have been struck by her challenge to educators and researchers to ask of themselves and their work: *why me? why now? why this?* In writing this paper, in using this space to outline your commitment to bring about the death of whiteness, the only forceful yet insufficient answer you can muster is: because you feel answerable to the Black woman who was not there the day her sister died—but who grounded her theory-building in the love that she carries for her sister, and all of her family; that this form of knowledge undoes method and theory as you know it and rebuilds it with care. Sharpe (2016) insists that we are always already in relation but we need only recognize it. Whiteness violently denies this relationality (Hoagland, 2007), and it is killing all of you, all of us, and it might do so before we can destroy it. Again, these words might not be meant for you, but you can do the work to be in good relation to them, you can aspire to the theory and thought and love that



Christina Sharpe (and so many others) have shared with us. So, turn your body, your attention, your care, to the woman whom you've never met but whose words sprung from a curved page and wrapped themselves around your shoulders like your mother's steady embrace—filled with a yearning for the not yet and not anymore (Tuck, 2009), and give into the swells of the wake and find a home in words, in another person, in the water of the wake. Embracing relationality might be a first step towards banishing whiteness. You should no longer be answerable to the academy—to the classrooms and people that deny feeling and cling so desperately to empiricism; to those who fear pain yet sustain careers on the pain of others; to those who invoke justice in their mission statements while perpetuating violence in the name of that justice. But making your actions answerable to others is not easy; you must unlearn the very foundations of your work, your Being. And you cannot help but feel that the waves that have trapped each of us in the wake have refracted the light/darkness and life in ways that make them illegible to you. The drag of the transverse waves pulls us apart from each other, and the sharks nip at us from below. We'll all be dead soon anyway, but will those swells draw us back to each other before then? Can distant storms re-form the swells that contain us? If we can change the weather, can we create a new region of disturbed flow? Can we once again be close enough to touch, to hold each other? To behold and care for each other in ways that honour the brilliance and splendour before you? Can you sit still for a few minutes and reach beyond? According to Patel (2016), reaching beyond recognizes that, "Such un-ease, such disease, though, are not reasons to abdicate from participation wholesale. I reach beyond what I've known while staying mindful of how I've been socialized... I must participate in the project of dismantling settler colonialism" (p. 7). If we were to think together, amidst this slow-motion disaster wrought by y/our own kin—this dis-ease—then how might we devise y/our own scheme for obliterating whiteness? People are dying, s + cyborg. Let us both take care and think care into the wake, as if our lives and deaths depend on it.

So, finally, you ask what is it you are reaching towards, s + cyborg? If the ontological death of whiteness is a theory of change, then what change does it imagine? Since education is perhaps the only inherently forward-looking discipline, then it is precisely you who may be most capable of imagining this curriculum. If we, as we have here, take whiteness as our self-same possessor, then perhaps we can accept culpability for our murderous possessor and execute that part of our Being. Yes. Let us embrace ontological reordering so that we may be liberated as something other than white. Remember, claiming white as an identity (or settler, for that matter) enacts the logic of possession that is whiteness.<sup>8</sup> Killing whiteness requires the literal death of whiteness as Being and a re-imagining into some-Being new. Just what this new formerly white Being might be is next (Tuck & Yang, 2016). It is henceforward (Tuck & Walcott, 2017). It is speculative documentary/archive (Gumbs, 2018). It is futurisms (e.g., Octavia Butler; Derrick Bell; see also, Kelley, 2002; Rifkin, 2019). It is exactly the curriculum you need; you do not want to remain a s + cyborg forever.

Whiteness has never required looking backward in order to reimagine a henceforward; it has never required looking forward to reimagine a speculative past. Whiteness

has never had an imagination. The future of whiteness is always already whiteness. That's why education has always been and continues to be curricular whiteness. Yes, whiteness is creative—it creates a lot, especially juridically—but it has no imagination. Once you kill whiteness, you need to learn to imagine, to speculate. To paraphrase the late Toni Morrison, as you relinquish power and initiate good relations, let's dream a little before we think.

With love,  
s + cyborg(s)

### Authors' note

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### Notes

1. White and whiteness are not capitalized throughout this piece (except if authors quoted have done so). Black is capitalized. See Dumas (2016). We have capitalized Blackness and anti-Blackness (see the call for papers for this special issue).
2. Whiteness here includes those phenotypically coded as white, and those who have been inculcated into the power structures and beliefs that sustain white supremacy and the violence of anti-Blackness.
3. We invoke a death and destruction that is unrecognizable to whiteness. When we write, "can you bring about your own destruction when all you know is the destruction of others?" we mean a different kind of death and destruction—one that whiteness cannot delight in or escape from. The death and destruction of whiteness is an ontological reordering, a breaking apart of the liberal humanist self.
4. For example, Jones (2017).
5. Currere, the dominant method of curriculum studies, is a procedural mode of writing that uses autobiography to make meaning of the social and curricular. The method is deeply ensconced in psychoanalysis and is meant as a project of self-actualization. We contend that any method with foundations so deeply rooted in anti-Blackness (Stoute, 2017) and sexism (Hoagland, 2007) as is psychoanalysis should be immediately rejected. Even trying to reform currere toward critical race and feminist thought still uses whiteness as a reference point ("who am I as a non-white woman?" Baszile, 2015, p. 119). Further, centering the "self" as something to be actualized not only retreats from the social (Berlant, 2011) and enlivens colonization (Mundt, 2019; Wynter, 2003) but also is antithetical to the collective and relational nature of Black feminist (e.g., Cooper, 1893/2007; King, 2019) and Indigenous thought (e.g., L. B. Simpson, 2007, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). Besides, as Sharpe asserted, we need new methods.
6. Residence time refers to what Sharpe (2016) described as the amount of time (millions of years) that the sodium from blood—and other components from human bodies—will remain in the oceans.
7. Pseudonyms used for their protection.
8. This idea was reinforced after viewing the recent roundtable between Goldstein et al. (2020), particularly starting at about 1:05:02.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

*Sean and Lucía* are doctoral students at the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a place of inescapable anti-Blackness that—out of love—must be destroyed. To that end, Sean and Lucía have initiated their s+cyborg mutiny by helping to curate a stolen, fugitive space in Peabody Hall, known as The Hub, where their co-conspirators embody the Raíces Collective (@LatinxHub). Together they write and fight toward Black life and Indigenous futures.

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