

## FOREWORD

I FIRST MET RITA KOHLI at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in San Diego, California, where we had a conversation about the state of urban schools and the everyday experiences of students and teachers of Color. We talked about various theoretical and methodological frameworks she and I had been using to wrestle with and advance racial justice. Rita explained that she had been a resource teacher in the Oakland Unified School District and had also served students from New York City Public Schools to San Diego City Schools, both in the classroom and with their college and career goals. At some point in the conversation, she told me she wanted to pursue her PhD working with me at UCLA, and in the fall of 2004, she began the doctoral program in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies in social science and comparative education with a specialization in race and ethnic studies. I was Rita's adviser and soon her dissertation chair, and four years later, she completed her dissertation, "Breaking the Cycle of Racism in the Classroom: Critical Race Reflections of Women of Color Educators."<sup>1</sup>

I share this story because it shows Rita's long commitment to racial justice and educational equity. Her experiences in teaching

and working with K–12 students, in the doctoral program at UCLA, and as a professor of education both at San José State University and now at the University of California, Riverside, have all contributed to this book, *Teachers of Color: Resisting Racism and Reclaiming Education*.

In the sixteen years Rita and I have worked together, we have traded many stories about our lives as teachers, researchers, and activists. She recently reminded me of my own teaching origin story—especially as it relates to this book. I was born, raised, and went to Catholic schools in a Mexican and Italian working-class community called Lincoln Heights, just east of downtown Los Angeles. I continued on to get my undergraduate degree in sociology and Mexican American studies at Loyola University in 1972. The summer after graduation, I became a high school social studies teacher at the Los Angeles County Central Juvenile Hall School—a youth correctional facility. I was part of a program called the National Teacher Corps, one of the first federally funded teacher training programs to prepare educators to work in urban and rural underserved communities of Color, and the year I participated the program’s focus was on urban corrections. As a first-year novice teacher, this is where I found the work of Brazilian educator and critical social theorist Paulo Freire. In our classrooms, with an amazing group of other Teacher Corps interns, we worked together to engage the students in what Freire refers to as “reading the word” and “reading the world.” Freire’s three general phases of problem-posing pedagogy include identifying and naming the problem, analyzing the causes of the problem, and finding solutions to the problem.<sup>2</sup> To create a liberating education for my students, I used a variation of this method, in which two-way dialogues of cooperation, respect, and action between

the student and teacher became the focus, content, and pedagogy of the classroom.

We began “naming the problem” by engaging in dialogue about injustice in the worlds students came from—mostly South Central and East Los Angeles. In those discussions, I asked students to tell me about their communities and the people, places, and things that were important to them. Their communities were the ones I grew up in, journeyed through, and worked in during my adolescent and adult life. After school and on weekends, I traveled and took photographs of people, places, and things they mentioned. These photographs (color slides) became my “generative codes,” the visual or physical renditions—as in pictures, drawings, stories, articles, films, or other artifacts—of significant themes or problems my students had identified. In class, I projected the images using a Kodak slide projector and we continued to dialogue through Freire’s three phases of problem-posing pedagogy.<sup>3</sup> As students viewed the scenes from their neighborhoods and described their lives outside the walls of their confinement, they spoke into a cassette recorder. I transcribed their taped words into typed text and used Roach Van Allen’s Language Experience Approach to teach the “word,” or basic literacy skills, to the students.<sup>4</sup> We then used Freirean problem-posing pedagogy to critically examine their “world” and further make sense of the injustices they saw and experienced.<sup>5</sup> The students were literally reading their own words to read the world.

Many of us had come to Teacher Corps with experience in home, school, and community activism, and thankfully, we had one another to work through the challenges and opportunities of this first experience in classroom teaching.<sup>6</sup> In retrospect, we were beginning to engage in what Patricia Hill Collins would later call a “rethinking of Black women’s activism”: “[It] may be

more useful to assess Black women's activism less by the ideological content of individual Black women's belief systems—whether they hold conservative, reformist, progressive, or radical ideologies based on some predetermined criteria—and more by Black women's *collective actions* within everyday life that *challenge* domination in these multifaceted domains" [emphasis added].<sup>7</sup>

We were trying to engage in these "collective actions" as teachers serving Black and brown students and trying to "challenge domination" in these "urban correctional" schools. I believe the teachers' narratives in *Teachers of Color: Resisting Racism and Reclaiming Education* embody my own and other teachers' stories. These educators have brought new tools and insights to the individual and collective activist struggle in and out of the classrooms and communities they serve.<sup>8</sup>

There is a history of teachers of Color who have resisted schools' assimilationist goals for students of Color, challenged the deficit framing of students and communities of Color, and disrupted the anti-Black, anti-Mexican American, and racist curriculum in schools.<sup>9</sup> These are teachers who had a set of ethics and values centered on the transformative education of students of Color. They were and are part of a long tradition of transformative educators in the service of racial justice for students, parents, and communities of Color—a service that went unrecognized by the schools they served. We need to recover, document, and honor these stories in our educational history.

In the higher education setting, faculty of Color also speak of this unrecognized labor. It has been referred to as the faculty of Color tax, Black tax, minority tax, and cultural tax. There are at least three dimensions of this tax. First, it is the uncompensated and unrecognized labor (salary or promotion credits) faculty of Color do for the college or university when it comes to dealing

with, being a representative for, or serving as an expert on issues of race, equity, and diversity. Second, it is the added stress that race, gender, equity, and diversity work put on the body, mind, and spirit of faculty of Color. Third, it is the added burden that comes with being a person of Color in everyday life—the everyday instances of disrespect and incivility encountered on and off campus.

The tax is also the everyday vigilance it takes to prepare yourself for the world outside your home. It is the reality of working twice as hard to get half as far. And you are not the only one who pays the tax: your family and your community are also taxed. Faculty of Color have been paying this tax and have received little recognition or compensation for their labor. That being said, there is the compensation that salary and promotion can't buy—the joy and value of working with and serving students of Color, colleagues of Color, and communities of Color. The educators of Color in Professor Kohli's book also pay this tax, are impacted by this tax, and—like their higher education colleagues—pay a physical, emotional, and psychological toll.

This book and its powerful counterstories of individual and group activism are an extension of what Professor Kohli started in her dissertation and has been engaging in over the last decade in her subsequent work, of telling the stories of teachers of Color in the K–12 setting. We need more counterstories. We need to recapture the teacher of Color counterstories of our past. We need higher education counterstories. We need to tell more stories of racialization, resistance, and reimagination at all levels. These stories are gifts to this generation of educators and those to follow. At whatever level, these educators pay the tax and still do the work. Because that is who they are: transformative racial justice educators. If they are the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of our

ancestral teachers, then what are their dreams, hopes, and aspirations for future generations of educators? Professor Kohli and the counterstories of these thirty transformative educators provide the pathways to answer the question.

I close by congratulating and thanking Rita and the thirty educators in this ground-breaking contribution to the field of education. They have provided us some of the most compelling, asset-based, anti-deficit, anti-sexist, and anti-racist counterstories in K–12 education.

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