

Other People's Daughters: Critical Race Feminism and Black Girls' Education

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The intellectual product of the minority feminist scholar should incorporate in a formal fashion the ethical and moral consciousness of minority women, their aspirations, and their quest for liberation. Her partisanship and advocacy of a minority feminist jurisprudence should be frankly acknowledged and energetically defended. Because her scholarship is to be grounded in the material and ideological realities of minority women and in their cultural and political responses, its operative premises must necessarily be dynamic and primarily immanent; as the lives of minority women change, so too should the analysis.

—Regina Austin (1995, p. 426)

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The above quote is extracted from legal scholar Regina Austin's 1995 article, "Sapphire Bound!" In the article Austin calls for minority female scholars in the legal field to straightforwardly, unapologetically, and strategically use their intellectual pursuits to advocate on behalf of poor and working class minority women. At-risk of being stereotypically identified and labeled

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as overly aggressive, overbearing, loud, audacious, or in other words, the “angry Black woman” (e.g. a bitch), Austin encourages minority female scholars to re-define the Sapphire stereotype to testify to the social and political circumstances impacting minority women. She believes that legal scholars, like herself, embody the necessary attitude and agency it takes to bear the burden of collective struggle alongside, with, and on behalf of other minority women. The legal scholar suggests that collective struggle is overdue considering the marginalization of poor minority women, especially of Black women, in the U.S. political economy.

Even though Austin is arguing from the perspective of a woman of color, with experience and interest in the legal field, her comments are also relevant to conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical efforts in the field of education. In this article, we are mainly concerned with Austin's (1995) personal and professional insights for its implications and relevancy to urban girls, in particular, African American girls being schooled in urban school communities. There is a need for more scholarship in the field of education that looks at the educational experiences and schooling processes of African American girls. Because feminist epistemologies tend to be concerned with the education of White girls and women, and raced-based epistemologies tend to be consumed with the educational barriers negatively effecting Black boys, the educational needs of Black girls have fallen through the cracks (Evans-Winters, 2005). Like Austin suggests above, there is a need for more minority female scholars in the field of education and other related areas, to directly confront, unabashedly, the social and educational needs of minority girls of color. Female scholars of color have documented the unique challenges young Black women encounter in many of our urban schools, due to their raced, classed and gendered status.

Research with Black Girls in Mind

Fordham (1993) has suggested that students and school officials alike have stereotyped African American girls as loud, aggressive and masculine. However, Fordham suggests that many Black girls have embraced a loud and tough persona in order to be heard and not overlooked in classrooms and school buildings that tend to ignore them and marginalize them as students. In later work, based on data from ethnographic work at a U.S. high school, Fordham (1996) made the claim that high achieving Black girls and their male counterparts may take on a race-less persona to attain academic success. A race-less persona refers to the absence of behavioral and attitudinal characteristics related to a particular race; thus, Fordham's claims have suggested that Black high achieving students do well because they reject an ascribed Black identity.

In contrast to Fordham's (1993; 1996) findings, Carla O'Connor concludes in her research findings that high achieving African American girls actually embrace a strong positive Black female identity. Also utilizing ethnographic field methods in a majority Black urban school community, O'Connor uncovered those positive

characteristics of students and families that may lead to school resilience. She found that those students who were most resilient were those young women whose families not only taught them about race, class and gender oppression, but also participated in family conversations that explained to them how to combat racist, classist and sexist forces.

Based on her observations, O'Connor (1997) concluded that academically resilient Black girls are socialized to have a strong sense of racial identification and commitment to fighting against race, class and gender injustices at school, in the community, and in society overall. More than likely, because Fordham was formerly trained as an anthropologist, she may not have understood the complex historical and political conditions playing out in many urban public schools. On the other hand, as a scholar in the field of sociology of education, a Black female scholar, O'Connor, may be able to grapple with the larger social structures and interpersonal relationships that impact girls of African American descent of working class backgrounds in mainstream schools.

Similar to O'Connor, Annette Henry, too, found in her research on the schooling experiences of African American girls attending an African-centered school that Black girls have dual personas that lead to resilience inside and outside of the classroom. In sum, Henry (1998) observed Black girls who learned to practice silence as a strategy for getting ahead in class, but also practiced strategies of "talking back" to speak out against classroom discourse and practices that were not necessarily viewed by them to be in the girls' best interests. Henry's observations and conclusions suggest that even in an African-centered classroom, where African pride is embraced and celebrated, some Black female students may still have to confront gender dynamics that overlook, ignore, or suppress their multiple identities as women of African ancestry. Henry, herself an African American female scholar, like O'Connor, understands how the intersections of race, class, and gender yields unique experiences for girls of African descent.

Because of racism, sexism, and class oppression in the U.S., African American girls are in multiple jeopardy of race, class and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions. As pointed out by Evans-Winters (2005), many urban Black girls face stressors in their families, communities and schools that challenge their abilities to cope in the face of adversity. In this three year ethnography, which followed a group of students from their middle school to high school years, the researcher found that the most resilient students were those young women who received support from their families, communities and school simultaneously. Again, Black girls' school resilience was complicated, yet fostered, by social forces inside and outside of the school. Ironically, Black girls' multiple jeopardy (King, 1995) may actually promote reliance on multiple support systems to buffer negative ways of coping with stressors.

In sum, the above research studies were highlighted for two important reasons. The most obvious reason that the above studies were cited is because these were research studies implemented by Black women conducting research with other

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young Black women. Drawing from Austin's (1995) open call to minority female legal scholars to directly address those social and legal policies that affect minority women overall, the scholars cited above have attempted to address problems in our school systems that affect Black girls. Black female students struggle against systematic racist, sexist and classist policies in schools. Without a doubt, many of the noted scholars offer insight into the distinct raced, classed and gendered experiences of Black female students beyond a traditional Eurocentric, male-dominated, middle class female lens. Fordham, O'Connor, Henry, and Evans-Winters have embraced the social agenda of a collective struggle with and alongside one of the most vulnerable student populations in public schools, young adolescent females of color.

Furthermore, as proclaimed by Austin (1995) in "Sapphire Bound," there is a need for more analysis by and for minority women that gives attention to the power of structural forces in society and their influence on the lives of black adolescents without undervaluing the young women's own sagacity. In Austin's words, "the impact of these structural forces does not make the problems constricting the lives of black adolescents entirely beyond their locus of control, however. The cultures of poor young blacks play a role in the reproduction of their material hardship; their cultures also have strengths and virtues" (p. 431). In that regard, the research cited above was also selected because, theoretically speaking, the research topics and analysis employed begins to move those of us in the field of education away from deficit-oriented research on Black girls toward research frameworks that privilege resilience and agency. Traditional research in education on Black girls typically concerns itself with early pregnancy and sexuality, school dropout, drug use and abuse, and aggression. Very few research studies examine positive adaptation and school resilience among African American female students, perhaps because not very many scholars are aware of the large proportions of Black girls who succeed in school despite social imposition, such as poor social and economic conditions impeding in the lives of their families and school communities.

Yet, in order to empirically understand the dynamics impacting Black female students' school experiences, scholars must embrace alternative methodologies beyond traditional positivist paradigms. For example, all the aforementioned research studies utilized ethnography in schools to draw conclusions. Although critical race theory in education has been charged with relying too heavily on subjective ontological categories "states of mind and feelings to which only one actor has access" (Duncan, 2005, p.101), critical race ethnography attempts to "engage the multiple ontological categories that give meaning to lived experience" (Duncan, 2005, p.106). Such categories could include data from interview, observational, statistical and documentary sources. Using ethnographic field methods, the above studies incorporated researcher reflexivity, interviews, observations, artifacts, and statistical analysis. Also, with a close reading of the cited research studies, it is interesting to find that the scholars used an interdisciplinary lens to study the schooling experiences of African American female students. In particular, the researchers borrowed methodologies and theories from education, anthropology,

sociology, psychology, child and adolescent studies, women's and African American studies.

Of course, educational research is necessarily multidisciplinary, but these scholars also understood the necessity to understand the historical, political and social conditions that have helped shape the educational situations many Black girls find themselves engaged in daily. Again, in her writing Austin (1995) reminds us that because the lives of minority women are convoluted and dynamic, any analysis must also be complex and vigorous. Even though several studies have examined issues affecting young Black women of school age, the above were pointed out for this article because the researchers, the research participants, the interdisciplinary nature of the study, and the studies' implications embody theoretically, methodologically, and in spirit Austin's call to minority female legal scholars to advocate on behalf of other minority women.

For the sake of clarity, it is probably important to note at this point that we are not suggesting that only minority women can or should research the educational issues affecting minority girls inside or outside of schools. At the very least, such a stance would be negligent, simply because there are enough social and educational problems confronting the social and emotional development of minority girls that we need allies on all fronts. Furthermore, to suggest that only other minority women are competent to research African American female students is shortsighted because there is much to learn from this student group that any researcher or educator, regardless of race, class, or gender, could learn from the resourcefulness and vitality of Black girls.

Nevertheless, in this article we argue that there is a need for a coalition of educational researchers who seek to understand Black girls' multiple realities. Along these same lines, there is a need for scholarly endeavors that not only serve to empirically validate the experiences of girls of African descent, but also make use of such findings to strengthen coalitions across academic genres and communities, transform pedagogical practices in classrooms; and, actively promote social and educational policies at the micro- and macro-level, with those in mind who exist at the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Critical Race Theory in Education

At this historical moment, critical race feminism may offer all of these possibilities for understanding and researching the educational experiences of African American female students. Educational scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Dixson and Rosseau (2006) have illustrated the usefulness of critical race legal theory's application to education, critical race feminism's (CRF) counterpart in legal studies. Critical race theory (CRT) has five tenets that have the potential for informing educational research, curriculum and policy formation: (1) that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent and fundamental in defining and explaining how U.S. society functions, (2) challenges dominant ideologies

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and claims of race neutrality, objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness and equal opportunity, (3) is activist in nature and propagates a commitment to social justice, (4) centers the experiences and voices of the marginalized and oppressed, and (5) is necessarily interdisciplinary in scope and function (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

Following the lead of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) in demonstrating the legal tenets of critical race theory's implications for addressing problems in education, first we look at CRT's relevancy to female students of color, and Black girls' education in particular. Notwithstanding CRT's obvious usefulness to those of African descent, female scholars of color have already discussed its limitations for conceptualizing life at the intersections of race, class and gender. Therefore, we look at critical race feminism in particular as a useful framework for representing and speaking to the experiences of Black girls in educational spaces. This overview of CRT and CRF serves the purpose of (1) demonstrating that CRT and CRF have practical and relevant implications for the study of African American female students' school experiences, and (2) to begin to envision the possibilities of a critical race feminism in education theoretical framework.

Legal scholar Bell (1995) informs us that the *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 decision brought to an end state mandated racial segregation. As pointed out by the legal scholar, the case was decided on the basis that legal racial segregation benefited the interests of Whites, while actively excluding and discriminating against Black citizens. At the time of *Brown v. Board*, civil rights scholars successfully argued that legal segregation was a violation of the 14th amendment's equal protection clause. Nonetheless, argues Bell (1995), the *Brown* decision and other social and legal issues decided by the courts are only brought forth when they appease the White populace. Therefore, any legal remedies as they relate to educational reform will necessarily "secure, advance, or at least not harm" (Bell, 1995, p. 22) the state of affairs for Whites. Bell refers to the tendency of the judicial system of maintaining or not treading on the privileges of White citizens, in the interest of Black citizens, as the principle of interest convergence.

Bell's assertion about the challenges affecting progressive education reform, and the theorist's interest convergence theory, has implications for the education of girls of African descent. For example, research shows that public schools located in central cities are more racially segregated than they have been in the past, and the majority of African American and Latino/a students attend predominately minority schools (Orfield, 2001), where the student population is non-white. The problem is not with minority children attending school with other minority children, nor is the problem with minority children not attending schools with White children. The problem is that many White middle class families on the surface have no interest assisting in providing social and financial support to low-income and working class students (who are disproportionately minority) with a quality education (Kozol, 2006). Consequently, the interests of the White middle class may not converge with the interests of Blacks attending public schools.

If one takes a closer look inside our nation's public schools, especially schools serving low-income families in African American communities, more than likely one would notice that Black girls outnumber the boys in these classrooms. Black girls are left to fend for themselves in desegregated public urban and private school classrooms, more than likely with White female middle class teachers from family and economic backgrounds different from their own (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005; NCES, 2004). What interest do the White middle class have in meeting the needs of Black female students? From an interest convergence theory perspective, where do the needs of Whites and males intersect with the needs of African American female students? There may not be an answer to this question, without, of course, considering the question and its possible response from a human rights perspective. All U.S. citizens have the right to a free and appropriate education.

Yet, from a social justice perspective it will be difficult to argue for educational reform from a legal or legislative perspective, considering women of African descent were left out of the Constitution as women and as Black Africans (Ruth, 1990; Hine, 1988; Franklin & McNeil, 1995). In fact, considering that African American women go on to college at greater rates than their Black male and Latino/a peers, young Black women may be perceived as a potential threat in the marketplace to some Whites. As for young and informally educated Black women, they have served as the scapegoat for everything that is morally wrong with the U.S. social welfare system (Monnat, 2007; Augustin, 1997; Collins, 2005). Thus, Bell's (1995) interest convergence theory presents a bind for pursuing educational efforts on behalf of Black girls.

Furthermore, Peller (1995) asserts that race and racism in mainstream American politics has been articulated and contested primarily through an integrationist ideology. Such an ideology, according to the legal scholar, views race and racism as a set of beliefs situated in the notions of prejudice and stereotypes based on skin color, which positions racial "progress with the transcendence of a racial consciousness" (p. 127). As outlined by Peller (1995), the consequences of an integrationist ideology has resulted in the suppression of White racism; Black nationalism being equated with White supremacy; race consciousness on the part of Whites or Blacks would be deemed as unintelligent and culturally backward; and, the publicly consumed opinion that racism can be replaced by knowledge of and contact with the "other."

Accordingly, efforts toward racial justice from an integrationist perspective downplay the significance of race, while propagating a stance of neutrality, objectivity, and White middle class normativity (Peller, 1998). For example, theoretically speaking, school children from diverse racial backgrounds immersed together in a classroom and learn through daily contact that deep down they are all the same, even if they are different on the surface. Peller argues that such a notion is shortsighted and too idealistic and only proliferates Whiteness as the norm or White middle class values as the ideal ways of thinking or behaving.

Furthermore, Peller (1998) asserts schools as a result of integrationist ideological frameworks are more technocratic, impersonal, and dominated by White middle

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class perspectives on teaching and learning. Yet, education is mantled as aracial, culturally neutral, and politically objective. Therefore educational theorists and advocates will have to exert an enormous amount of effort and sophistication when arguing for educational reform at the intersections, because it would be nearly impossible for young Black women, especially those from lower and working class backgrounds, to fully integrate racially or otherwise into mainstream society. At this historical moment young Black women are socially constructed as the epitome of exactly what whiteness (as maleness) and femininity (as whiteness) is not: dark, sinister, raunchy, belligerent, burly, and licentious. In other words, white femininity is sacrosanct to patriarchy and vice versa. An integrationist approach to educational equity would only further marginalize the majority of African American female students, because full integration may not be an option, for other's identities are constructed around young Black women's identity as the "other,"

Furthermore, considering critical race theorists have unveiled the legacy of whiteness as property (Harris, 1995) and educational theorists have outlined its ramifications in the history of Black education in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the state of young Black women's educational development is in further jeopardy. Harris (1995) contends that whiteness or white identity comes with a set of private and public privileges in America that has been protected, affirmed, and legitimated by the law. Under the institutionalization of slavery, Blacks became equated with property, while Whiteness became a tangible and intangible protection against slavery; therefore, whiteness became an asset to be acquired, protected, and cosseted. As this relates to Black women, under the institution of slavery, Black women's bodies were deemed a vessel for increasing property. Thomas Jefferson made the following statement in an 1805 letter: "I consider the labor of a breeding woman as no object, and that a child raised every 2 years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man" (as cited in Harris, 1995). During slavery, Black women were viewed as property that begets property, and any possibility of her humanity was only tied to her ability to "breed" more labor for White men. Today, from a critical race feminist perspective we have to raise the following question: If a young Black woman's worth is measured through her aptitude for reproducing the next generation's labor (i.e. capital), what would be the interest of the privileged class in assisting in the development of her educational well-being through self-empowerment or social and financial support? Once more, where does the interest of the White middle class converge with the interest of young women of African descent?

With Bell's (1995) interest convergence theory, Peller's (1995) reflections on the limitations of integrationist ideology, and Harris's (1995) averment of whiteness as property in mind, we call for curricula, pedagogies, and educational policies aimed at *intersectionalities*. For instance, women of color's social and political needs have traditionally been positioned in between the needs of a feminist agenda and antiracist efforts. White feminism politicizes the experiences of women, while antiracist efforts are inclined to emphasize the experiences of people of color. Kimberle' Williams Crenshaw (1995) claims that identity politics often overlooks

intragroup differences. The experiences and political concerns of women of color tend to fall through the cracks by those focused on gender-based initiatives or race-based initiatives. Crenshaw points out that women of color's lived experiences are influenced by both their identities as women and as persons of color.

For example, in her examination of women in transition from domestic violence, she found that White female led organizations tended to marginalize or exclude their women of color clients, based on class, language, or other differences. Similarly, those in communities of color tended to advocate on behalf of protecting males involved in domestic violence situations. Meanwhile, the voices of women of color typically fall through the cracks when addressing the problem of domestic violence in communities of color or developing and implementing prevention and intervention programs. As Crenshaw (1995) argues, everyone loses when women of color's needs are overshadowed by the political agendas of White women or men of color. "Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always paralleled to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms," articulates Crenshaw (1995, p. 360). Consequently, mainstream social and political efforts usually fail to adequately address the concerns of women of color, because white women define the feminist agenda and men conceptualize the antiracist agenda. This analysis suggests a need for social, political, economic, and educational reform initiatives and pedagogies that consider and interrogate the specific academic needs of female students of color. Young women of color have educational experiences that are simultaneously similar to, albeit divergent from, the needs and experiences of White girls and boys of color.

Critical Race Feminism in Education

Black women deserve a theoretical framework that combats racial and gender oppression from multiple standpoints. Critical race feminism in education may provide legal and academic stratagem for studying and eradicating race, class, and gender oppression in educational institutions. Critical race feminism is a branch of CRT. As a movement, CRT grew out of critical legal studies, which was dominated by the voices of white male legal academics (Wing, 1997). Those legal scholars who were apart of the CRT movement forefronted legal issues and strategies affecting people of color. In an overview of the history of critical race feminism, Wing (1997) explains that CRT scholars have taken up diverse issues, such as de facto segregation discrimination, affirmation action, and federal Indian law. Unfortunately, similar to how white males in critical legal studies excluded the voices and experiences of people of color in their efforts, often CRT was dominated by men's experiences, excluding the perspectives of women of color. Additionally, feminist legal theorists highlighted the viewpoints of white and upper class women, but assumed that the gendered experiences of white women and women of color were identical in character.

Because of its unapologetic examination of the intersection of race, class

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and gender in the legal sphere and the broad experiences of women of color, the premises of critical race feminism is distinct from, but at times, intersects with CRT. Critical race feminism in education is beneficial to investigation and theory building around educational issues impacting Black girls in the following ways:

Critical race feminism as a theoretical lens and movement purports that women of color's experiences, thus perspectives, are different from the experiences of men of color and those of White women;

Critical race feminism focuses on the lives of women of color who face multiple forms of discrimination, due to the intersections of race, class, and gender within a system of White male patriarchy and racist oppression;

Critical race feminism asserts the multiple identities and consciousness of women of color (i.e., anti-essentialist);

Critical race feminism is multidisciplinary in scope and breadth; and

Critical race feminism calls for theories and practices that simultaneously study and combat gender and racial oppression.

In the section below, we attempt to make the case that critical race feminism is currently the most useful lens for studying, analyzing, critiquing and celebrating the educational experiences of African American female students, based on the above outline. First, keeping in mind that white feminists have tended to overlook or ignore Black girls experiences in schools (Ladner, 1987; Scott-Jones, 1986), feminism alone cannot address the educational concerns of Black girls. Also, the social and educational problems challenging African American boys' educational development should not be conflated with the gendered trials and tribulations confronting Black girls.

There is little doubt that Black boys face the cruel realities of the school-to-prison pipeline (Duncan, 2000) and justified separate and equal education (see Dunbar, 2001, for the overrepresentation of Black boys in alternative education programs). Regrettably, African American girls have faced their own share of exclusion and marginalization in the educational system. For instance, research shows that African American girls are more likely to be reprimanded or praised for social behaviors in the classroom as opposed to academic pursuits, teacher expectations are lower for Black girls than White girls, and Black girls are more likely to experience racist remarks from peers (Scott-Jones, 1987). Also, research shows that young Black women's bodies are simultaneously policed, controlled, and heckled, while at the same time a site of spectacle (Roberts, 1997; Collins, 2005). Such beliefs and practices about Black women's bodies, spills over into the school system, with young women reporting strict dress codes and negative remarks about their presumed sexual innuendos (Evans-Winters, 2005). In addition coping with stereotypical beliefs about their attitudes and behaviors from teachers and peers, Black girls also face harsh disciplinary actions in schools. For instance, in 2003,

Black girls were twice more likely to repeat a grade, to be suspended, and to be expelled than their White female and White male peers before acquiring a high school diploma (NCES, 2003).

As the above studies demonstrate, Black girls' experiences in schools differ from the experiences of boys of color and young White women. Therefore, a critical race feminist lens in the examination of the schooling experiences of African American female students allows for the avoidance of gender and racial essentialism. Harris (1997) explains gender essentialism as the notion that there exists a monolithic woman's experience, regardless of one's race, class or sexual identification. Likewise, racial essentialism is the term used to describe the idea that all members of a racial/ethnic group are all the same. African American female students' lived experiences are diverse, based on race, class, gender, sexual identification and location. Any form of essentialism is harmful to theorizing and advocacy on behalf of Black girls, because it leaves analysis of their experiences void of richness, multiplicity and distinctiveness- all of which it means to be human.

Inevitably, critical race feminism acknowledges and asserts the notion of a multiple consciousness. As Wing states (1997, p. 31):

We as Black women can no longer afford to think of ourselves or let the law think of us as merely the sum of separate parts that can be added together or subtracted from, until a White male or female stands before you. The actuality of our layered experience is *multiplicative*. Multiply each of our parts together, 1 X 1 X 1 X 1 X 1, and you have one indivisible being. If you divide one of these parts from one you still have *one*.

Above, Wing is describing the multiple consciousness that many women of color learn to adapt in order to survive in a racist patriarchal society. Women of color are required to hold on to their own beliefs and values, while also being aware and conscious of the state of mind of the oppressor. Many young Black women are able to survive in schools also because of this multiple consciousness. For many Black girls, their identities shift between their personalized identities (shaped by their socialization in their immediate families and neighborhoods) and the perspectives of White male or female middle class school administrators and teachers.

There is a need for theoretical frameworks in education that acknowledge and celebrate the vulnerability and resilience of girls of color. For instance, the proportions of Black and Hispanic bachelor's degree recipients who were female in 2000-2001 (66 and 60 percent, respectively) were higher than the proportion of White degree recipients who were female (57 percent) (Freeman, 2004). Considering that the majority of African American girls graduate from high school, and many of those will go on to postsecondary education, there is a need for theoretical frameworks and praxis that unveils for young women and others their individual and collective tenacity. Critical race feminism in education may perhaps function at the micro- and macro-level as a bulwark against "spirit murder" (Wing, 1997, p. 28) and as intellectual and emotional support (Guinier, 1997) for those young women navigating White middle class educational spaces.

Conclusion

In sum, in this article we call for educational research, theorizing, and practice by women and scholars of color who are adamant about improving the academic outcomes and schooling experiences of Black girls. As previously explained, we believe that female scholars of color, across academic fields, may have the affinity for and determination to understand the multiple layered realities in which Black girls exist. Critical race feminism offers multiple possibilities for the amelioration of Black female education and quality of life. In the postmodern, Black girls and women continue to be beset by racism, poverty, and gender discrimination in our families, communities, and schools. Yet, white feminists have been complacent about addressing the educational and social affairs of girls of color, and to some extent beguiled by the promise of science and reason to solve girls' educational problems. Meanwhile, many Black male scholars have been preoccupied with the demoralization of Black boys in our nation's schools. Meanwhile, the educational concerns of Black girls have fallen to the wayside. The gratuitous neglect of Black girls' educational development may be a result of limited frameworks and research agendas that overlooks or ignores the significance of multiple identities, oppressions and consciousness. Consciously, critical race feminism in education posits that scholars, policymakers, the judicial system (see Roberts, 1997, for discussion of antisubordination theory and governmental policy) and society at large are responsible for seeking to understand and improve the state of Black girls' education. Through a critical race feminism lens, we call attention to the following realities of the state of Black girls' education:

Girls of African descent are at the bottom of the social totem pole in society; thus, there is an urgent need for a theoretical framework that serves to expose, confront and eradicate race, class and gender oppression in our families, communities and schools.

Currently, not enough is being done by scholars in the field of education on the policy front or pedagogically to unabashedly develop and implement classroom practice and curriculum that directly relates to the needs of Black girls.

In the postmodern era, Black girls' psyches and bodies are being subjected to subjugation in the media, racist and sexist school policies that serve to exclude and silence Black girls, and social and legal policies that dehumanize rather than foster the quality of life of many low-income and working class young women.

Young women's existence at the margins presents both constraints and possibilities for all educational reform efforts and overall societal transformation. Therefore, research with and on behalf of Black girls benefit the whole of society.

Critical race feminism in education offers the most nuanced and straightforward framework for contending with the social, economic, political and educational problems confronting Black female students inside and outside of schools.

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