

Overkill: Black Lives and the Spectacle of the Atlanta Cheating Scandal

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Abstract

This article examines the 2015 Atlanta cheating scandal trials and sentencing. Using critical race theory, the authors argue that cheating is a natural outgrowth of market-based school reform and that racial realism will always lead to scrutiny of Black performance. The sentences of these Black educators is overkill, rooted in anti-Blackness, and can be best understood as a means of preserving Whiteness as property.

Keywords

African American educators, school reform, standardized testing, African American students, urban education

Introduction

I have no mercy or compassion in me for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand under the weight.

—Malcolm X

On April 14, 2015, 11 Black educators were sentenced to varying terms from probation and community service up to 20 years in prison after having been found guilty of false swearing and conspiracy in the biggest cheating

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scandal in American education history. This is especially alarming in the era of #BlackLivesMatter, as we continue to watch murderous police officers and neighborhood vigilantes go uncharged, untried, exonerated, and/or free, while these educators have become convicted felons, inmates, stripped of their professional livelihoods. We do not hail these educators as heroes, nor do we excuse or condone cheating. We are assuming there were improprieties in the ways these educators handled standardized testing, though we recognize that many of these educators have never admitted guilt, and we do not thrust that guilt on them. Regardless, due to the continued American injustice in which we see unarmed Black people killed without due process or justice, sparking movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, we would be remiss if we did not elucidate the severity of these educators' charges, trials, and sentencing. We reject the supposed guilty verdict and pleas of these Black educators for the following reasons: (a) Despite the presiding judge framing the case and sentencing as justice for the children, these educators, now convicted felons, still care more for Black children than the state of Georgia does, and (b) these educators are products of a failed system.

In the United States of America, the state protects its own interests, not Black children. In duping the high-stakes standardized testing system, these Atlanta educators were merely reflecting the ethos of the state. It is also possible that, in protecting their jobs, they were protecting their students from the corporate takeover of their school system and the concomitant replacement of the educators who know them. While we do not condone or support the actions of these educators or those of the state, we do not demonize these educators for their actions, inactions, or for what they have been convicted. However, we do fully expect that a government allegedly for the people be held to a higher standard than the people.

This article first explores the roles played by market-based/neoliberal school reform and racial realism in the Atlanta cheating scandal, and what such factors mean for Black lives in America. We then go on to discuss the state's overreach to humiliate and make examples of the Black educators involved in the scandal. To this end, we use a critical race perspective to argue that (a) cheating is a natural outgrowth of market-based/neoliberal school reform, (b) racial realism and anti-Blackness will always lead to scrutiny of Black performance, and (c) the sentences of these Black educators is overkill, best understood as a means of preserving White supremacy.

Market-Based/Neoliberal School Reform

Market-based school reform is made possible by the triumvirate invasion and dominance of hyperstandardization, hyperaccountability, and neoliberalism

in public education (Royal & Gibson, 2017; Sleeter, 2012). Market-based school reform applies the capitalist logic of supply and demand to public schooling. That is, when a particular school is in high demand, it is believed to be excellent in providing education for students. This belief may not be valid for all students. And when parental demand is low for a school, policy-makers interpret that as a reason to restructure or close schools. High-stakes standardized test scores are used as capital in multiple ways in this context. The desirability and marketability of homes for purchase can be based on perceptions of school quality (Lareau & Goyette, 2014), which is often determined by students' performance on standardized tests. Furthermore, high-stakes standardized test scores are essential markers for school districts in making assessments of school performance and, subsequently, decisions about school closings. Schools with low test scores are seen as less valuable and are, therefore, closed, as the market demands.

A Nation at Risk's, the 1983 report from President Regan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, problematizing of public school teachers and students led to the beginning of market-based school reform. It was engineered during the late 1980s and strategized in the early 1990s by President George H. W. Bush's administration (Payne, 2008; Royal & Gibson, 2017; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Through his *America 2000* plan, George H. W. Bush and his New American Schools Development Corporation attributed "every problem, every challenge we face" to schooling, an extension of the fury and fear invoked by President Ronald Reagan's *A Nation at Risk* (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The development of market-based school reforms continued through President Bill Clinton's administration (Ravitch, 2010). In the 1990s and early 2000s, large urban districts began shifting their governance and management to structures, policies, and practices modeled after businesses and corporations (Boyd & Christman, 2003). This culminated in the passing of the largest, most expansive and destructive legislation in the history of American schooling, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The Atlanta Cheating Scandal

On April 1, 2015, the sentencing of Atlanta Public Schools (APS) educators, indicted on charges of racketeering as well as lesser charges, sent shock waves through the country. This polarizing case left many people bewildered and frustrated that these educators were akin to the mafia in being convicted of racketeering. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (AJC) brought the APS cheating scandal to the fore when it began an investigation into suspicious test scores in 2008 in preparation for their series, *Cheating Our Children*, which aimed to highlight suspected school cheating on standardized tests

across the United States. However, it was the response, or lack thereof, from APS that led to an investigation into the suspicious increase in the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) scores by the state Board of Education.

This inquiry led to six years of investigations, reports, disciplinary actions, indictments, plea deals, and convictions. Although the AJC looked beyond the state of Georgia and found 196 school districts across the country with questionable testing patterns, the investigation of APS was then taken over by Georgia's attorney general. Through the attorney general's probe, 178 educators across 44 schools were implicated in the APS cheating scandal. This included teachers, administrators, and district-level educators. While 21 of those implicated educators were cleared and reinstated to their positions, 35 were indicted on charges ranging from misdemeanor counts of obstruction to felony violations of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO). The status of the remaining 121 educators implicated in this scandal is unclear. The 35 indictments resulted in 21 defendants pleading guilty to lesser charges, while 14 maintained their innocence and opted for a trial. However, two of those indicted, Ms. Willie Davenport and Dr. Beverly Smith, died of breast cancer before being tried (Blinder, 2015). Thus, 12 educators went to trial, and all but one were convicted on a variety of charges (Blinder, 2015). The other defendant, Ms. Dessa Curb, was fully acquitted (<http://www.myajc.com/news/APS-trial-defendants/>).

The curious nature of the APS cheating scandal centers around four major issues: (a) the active investigation into test score increases, the subsequent charges, and the use of the RICO statute; (b) the handling and treatment of these Black educators by Judge Jerry Baxter; (c) Judge Baxter framing the case and sentencing as justice for the children; and (d) the status of students' academic achievement after the cheating was exposed. Regarding the first point, in response to the AJC's queries, APS did conduct an internal investigation in 2010, which was followed by the state's investigation, which began a year later (<http://www.ajc.com/news/news/a-timeline-of-how-the-atlanta-school-cheating-scan/nkkLH/>). While APS found no irregularities, the state's investigation resulted in the educators' dismissals and prosecution using the RICO statute. The use of the statute to prosecute teachers and principals was unprecedented for the Georgia State's Attorney, as it had only been employed to try those involved in organized crime (Rankin, 2015). Essentially, this was a test case for the use of the RICO statute to go after people who were accused of committing nonviolent crimes.

The second issue is how Judge Baxter handled the 35 educators criminally charged in this case. Media accounts foretell Judge Baxter as intent on setting a precedent with this case while humiliating these educators. He certainly demonstrated a level of preference for the 21 who plead guilty; their charges

were reduced from felony violations of the RICO statute to misdemeanors because they openly admitted their guilt and read apology letters in open court. These educators were forced to participate in Judge Baxter's spectacle of forced contrition and imposed discomfiture. They had to choose between taking a plea (i.e., admitting their guilt) and going to trial (i.e., maintaining their innocence). Either option would inevitably present a hardship for the families of these educators, many of whom were eventually sentenced to jail time, fines, community service, and probation, regardless of plea. Eleven educators refused to take a plea, went to trial, and were found guilty. Judge Baxter meted hefty sentences ranging from 5 to 20 years in prison, fines ranging from US\$5,000 to US\$25,000, thousands of hours of community service, and 10 or more years on probation, and he had them escorted from the courtroom in handcuffs.

Two weeks after their sentencing, Judge Baxter reduced the sentences of three educators who received the longest sentences, stating,

I want to modify the sentence so I can live with it. I'm going to put myself out to pasture in the not too distant future and I want to be out to pasture without regrets. The punishments are in line but I want them to be something I consider fair and I can deal with. (Cook, 2015)

Still, how Judge Baxter framed the APS scandal and justified the severe sentences he initially imposed are curious as well. During the initial sentencing, Judge Baxter told the court, "There were thousands of children that were harmed in this . . . This is not a victimless crime" (Holmes, 2015). On the surface, most people would agree with the judge that these educators' actions victimized these APS students. However, these children were victims of the state long before this cheating scandal. They were, for years, subjected to state-sanctioned under-resourced, underfunded urban schools. These students and their families were victims of racialized economic policies that relegated them to second-class citizenship through housing policies and lack of employment opportunities, and federal and state education policies that served to evaluate them more than to educate them, using those evaluations as leverage for removing necessary school resources. Perhaps, this case and others like it would be nonexistent if those agents of the state were concerned about Black and Brown children before this cheating scandal occurred. Certainly, there were many indicators of the perilous state of education in APS, such as student performance on the CRCT, the inordinate priority given to test scores rather than instruction and resources, and the inadequate and highly problematic NCLB legislation that set the stage for 196 schools nationwide to have testing improprieties. Even after the cheating scandal, both the agents of the

state and the school district continued to victimize the APS students by not providing the academic assistance that Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard promised was coming (Bloom & Clark, 2015).

Last, one of the most curious aspects of this case centers around the status of the APS students' standardized test scores following the cheating scandal. If cheating was occurring, as highlighted through the investigations, one would have expected the scores to decrease after those who were implicated in the scandal were removed. However, Cooper and Jackson (2015) reported that despite educators being dismissed and convicted, close examination of NAEP test scores for Black students in APS, following the exposure of the cheating scandal, revealed a 10% increase in achievement. So what accounted for the steady rise in student achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) after the cheating was exposed?

NCLB, High-Stakes Standardized Testing, and Market-Based School Reform

If we believe its best intentions, NCLB ensured state-learning standards, unified curricula, and the measurement of student learning by corporate-created, state-sanctioned, high-stakes, multiple-choice exams in an effort to ameliorate the underperformance of Black, Latino, and low-income students, to reduce disparities between the achievement of these students and White, middle-class students. NCLB's premise was "that low-quality schools will be motivated to change if they are identified and shamed, and that their students will be better served if given other educational options" (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 250). It included a system spectacle and surveillance: unachievable test score targets, punishments for chronic underperformance, such as using students' test scores to publicly publish low school performance rates, restructuring school staffs, removing school leadership, the reallocation and/or withholding of federal funds, and school closures, among other components (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Lipman, 2004; Vergari, 2007). The law expired in 2014, and little academic improvement was yielded (Ramanathan, 2008; Turner, 2015). Instead, states lowered their standards to meet federal mandates, negating the ideology of the legislation and rendering accountability through high-stakes testing as a shell game (Darling-Hammond, 2007). NCLB was sleight of hand to manipulate appearances. School-based educators felt pressure to perform well on state tests or face major professional, material consequences. For educators enduring this policy, the threat of losing their jobs and homes, and being unable to provide for their children was an unfathomable option.

The pressures of high-stakes standardized-test-based performance can negatively influence school culture and educators' efficacy, diminishing how they see themselves in their work (Aronson, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003; Rex & Nelson, 2004; Royal & Davis, 2010; Wilms, 2003). Too often, the most exceptional teachers do not teach in the most desperate urban schools, where the professional and intellectual climates tend toward the negative, and students and communities need their expertise and excellence the most (Nieto, 2003; Weiner, 1999). Teachers and principals do not want to teach in schools that have been labeled as failures (Darling-Hammond, 2007), especially not as more districts, including within the state of Georgia, measure teachers' job performances based on their students' standardized test scores. Rex and Nelson (2004) found teachers' definitions of their professional situations were determined/shaped by their necessity to prepare students to pass the high-stakes state exam. The politics governing school systems matter, as do the politics of high-stakes standardized testing, replete with its "well-documented history of abuse of minorities and the poor" (Hilliard, 2000, p. 296).

Racial Realism

Critical race theory purports that race is enacted as a hegemonic tool of the state to maintain White dominance throughout and within American society, systems, and structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2006; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Racism lives through "racial projects" at both the macro-level (as in state actions or entities) and at the micro-level (as in person-to-person interactions) to which no one in society is immune (Omi & Winant, 2002). Bell (1992) described "realism" as the distance between policy and practice. A tenet of critical race theory, racial realism is the idea that racism is systemic, endemic, and fully embedded in every facet of American life; that colorblindness, merit, and neutrality are farcical (Bell, 1992). Bell (1992) argued that, though the law is supposed to be colorblind and neutral, this blindness ignores our contexts while the law upholds and protects White privilege and White supremacy. Ladson-Billings (2004) described White supremacy as pathology within localities and school districts. NCLB is emblematic of White supremacy and pathology enacted as a racial project through federal policy. While NCLB was supposed to be meritocratic, it actually "mask[s] policy choices and value judgments" (Bell, 1992, p. 369).

As a racial project of neoliberal multiculturalism and as a policy choice, NCLB was a value judgment about Black lives, Black schools, Black educators, and Black children (Au, 2016). Its positioning of high-stakes standardized tests while withholding much-needed funds from under-resourced (often

Black and Brown) schools reified the so-called “achievement gap.” As such, high-stakes standardized tests are also tools of anglonormativity and White supremacy while denying the massive education debt America has amassed (Royal, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Hilliard, 2003). High-stakes standardized tests are presumed objective and scientific, though they are the progeny of eugenicists’ racist pseudoscience (Au, 2016; Hilliard, 2000). Thus, as Au (2016) pointed out, “High-stakes testing cannot dismantle racial inequality because it fundamentally and materially advances the project of increasing racialized injustice” (p. 41). Therefore, we apply Bell’s racial realism and understanding of the law to NCLB, generally, and to the case of the APS cheating scandal, specifically.

Hilliard (2000) bemoaned conflating high academic standards with high-stakes standardized testing; the latter does not guarantee the former, pointing to the racial realism of NCLB. Hilliard (1998) also argued against holding students responsible for not meeting high academic standards if the opportunity to learn has not existed. Instead of blaming students, the 2015 Atlanta cheating scandal was an attempt to hold individual Black educators responsible for failing children by subverting the high-stakes standardized testing system while acting as if this testing system is in the children’s best interests. As public school employees, these Black educators were both supposedly representatives of the state and advocates for children. But what about the state’s responsibility for this flawed high-stakes standardized testing system and its untenable consequences for the failure the state all but guaranteed?

Anti-Blackness

Anti-Blackness, as defined by Heitzeg (2015), is an insidious form of racism that seeks to preserve Whiteness as property by associating Blackness with negative or undesirable traits. While this definition certainly provides some insight into how anti-Blackness operates, it does not provide a concise conceptualization of the phenomenon. Dumas (2016), who theorizes anti-Blackness, situates it in the context of Afro-pessimism, but he is clear that no tenets, principles, or singular theory of anti-Blackness exists. However, anti-Blackness—especially anti-Blackness scholarship—allows for the “. . . interrogation of the psychic and material assault on Black flesh” (Dumas, 2016, p. 12). Furthermore, Dumas asserts that education policy is a site of anti-Blackness. The history of education in the United States is replete with examples of White domination of access to education via policies that function to exclude Blacks from educational opportunities. While those policies, which were steeped in overt racism, are no longer the norm, current policies rest on notions of colorblindness and color muteness that disguise racism and allow

Whites to adopt ideological frames that deny the existence of racism (Heitzeg, 2015) and deny the humanity of Blacks and their right to education (Dumas, 2016). Present education policies are imbued with covert racism. In reflecting on the APS cheating scandal through the lens of anti-Blackness, we are able to highlight the constant surveillance of Black people (i.e., Black educators; Dumas, 2016; Tillet, 2012). In our analysis, we have assumed, as Dumas (2016) asserted, that “any racial disparity in education . . .” (p. 17) specifically related to the curious case of the APS cheating scandal is “. . . exacerbated by disdain and disregard for the Black” (p. 17).

Neoliberal School Reform, Racial Realism, Anti-Blackness, and the Scandal

We have already discussed that since NCLB became law, school reform is advanced via hyperstandardization, hyperaccountability, and neoliberalism. This triumvirate cannot be separated from the racial caste system of the United States. Neoliberal school reform policies have been devastating to under-resourced urban communities affecting mostly people of color (Royal & Gibson, 2017). Au (2016) wrote “current neoliberal-imbued education reform efforts are often constructed around narratives of racial equity, including the use of high-stakes standardized testing” (p. 40). For example, mass public school closings and far-reaching, extensive layoffs plagued Philadelphia and Chicago in 2013 and 2016 (Ahmed-Ullah, Chase, & Seter, 2013; Bentle, 2016; The Notebook, 2013; 3,783 being laid off from Philadelphia school district, 2013). We contend that the mandates surrounding high-stakes standardized tests serve to maintain White racial dominance and to reify the imaginary so-called achievement gap. Atlanta is evidence of how racialized injustice is advanced through school reform policies fueled by high-stakes standardized tests. While NCLB mandated a constant increase in students’ test scores, the law did not mandate equitable distributions of resources for public schools’ most economically disadvantaged students. As of 2015, APS’s student poverty rate was more than 75%. So while NCLB was purportedly intended to ensure no difference in the academic performance of White, middle-class students, and Black, Latino, and poor students, this difference was all but guaranteed by NCLB. NCLB actually ensured the difference would be maintained in how students achieve because there is a difference in how schools are funded, the resources available to them, and the stressors that affect families of color disproportionately in this country.

NCLB brought forth market-based school reforms that demanded an over-reliance on scripted curricula and tools, devaluing educators’ as professionals, not trusting them to make instructional decisions, yet blaming them for

not yielding high enough test scores from their students. High-stakes test scores served as grounds to demote, transfer, and/or terminate educators. NCLB served to shame these educators into students performing better, and to make this shame palatable. But you cannot shame adults into producing higher test scores from students, especially without the resources to do differently. NCLB required larger gains from lower-performing schools, which represented an undue burden on the educators in these schools who were trying to meet students' vast needs with the least amount of resources (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Given unachievable test score targets, NCLB was set up not to serve these children but to demonstrate them as problems, show their teachers as the sources of their problems, and the White/wealthy students to which they are compared as excellent standard bearers. These students will never meet such standards because of racism masked as educator ineptitude. NCLB is rooted in the underlying assumption of Black intellectual inferiority, and essentially, the Atlanta educator cheating scandal elucidated this confirmation bias.

NCLB, at the federal level, and its implementation, at the state and local levels, were racist and unjust. When policies are predicated on quantity and not quality, when performance is measured in completion and not thoroughness or accuracy, when state actors are supposedly colorblind, manipulation becomes standard operating procedure, and White supremacy is maintained. Whether it is viewed as manipulation, gaming the system, self-preservation, or business as usual, cheating is a natural outgrowth of market-based ideology and policy. The educators implicated in the Atlanta cheating scandal did what they thought they needed to do to keep their jobs in a system that was not built to protect or advance them or their students.

It is impossible to remove the Atlanta educator cheating scandal from its racialized circumstances. APS is comprised of more than 80% Black students, and more than 75% are labeled impoverished (Duda, 2012). The educators who are now convicted felons are Black and worked in schools where the students are predominantly Black. In all but one of the schools where cheating is suspected, 95% or greater students are impoverished (Georgia Department of Education, 2012; FTE). The city of Atlanta is 54% Black and 38% White, while the state of Georgia, responsible for investigating patterns of irregular erasures on the CRCT, is approximately 30% Black and 60% White (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Judge Baxter, who adjudicated the case against these educators, is White. Bell (1992) argued that judges make decisions based on their personal beliefs. Omi and Winant (2002) also argued that "ideological beliefs have structural consequences, and that social structures give rise to beliefs" (pp. 138). Judge Baxter was admittedly influenced by his own beliefs. What other ideologies led to Judge Baxter's ruling

in this case? What ideologies informed Judge Baxter's "rude, dismissive, judgmental tone" toward these Black educators (Cooper & Jackson, 2015)? What are the ideologies that contributed to these educators' improprieties? If these educators conspired to cheat, did they buy into the pervasive anti-Blackness and anglonormativity inherent in the historiography of American education?

Until the AJC's investigative report, very few people were concerned with the state of education in APS or the educational policies that were put in place, which contributed to the conditions that led to the cheating scandal. However, as the test scores began to climb, both the Black children and educators were closely scrutinized and under constant surveillance. Do White schools receive this same level of scrutiny or surveillance? Had APS been a predominantly White school district, would the investigation have happened? Would the outcome have been the same? Would the Georgia state's attorney prosecute the educators using the RICO statute?

Judge Baxter's framing of the case as a form of justice for the [Black] children was a vicious and violent form of anti-Blackness. He deliberately used the Black lives of the children to make an example of and humiliate the Black educators. Not only had the children suffered at the behest of a school system that is steeped in anti-Black ideology (Dumas, 2016), but the judge described them as hopelessly bound for lives of crime destined for state supervision and then blamed that on the Black educators. Judge Baxter did all of this under the guise of being concerned for the lives of Black children, but a critical examination of his language about the children illustrates that he was more concerned with the Black children being problems to White society and ending up before him in court as defendants (Holmes, 2015). His recasting, positioning, and dangerous imaginations of the Black children and educators involved in the cheating scandal exemplifies the notion that Black people are the problem, rather than people suffering from the ills of anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016). This continual imaging of Black people as the problem—anti-Blackness—allows White people to maintain their privilege and preserve their Whiteness.

Overkill

How does America demonstrate that #BlackLivesMatter in its public schools? Although they were idealized in the Common School Movement as the great equalizer, public schools are sites of pervasive inequity, disenfranchisement, and anti-Blackness. Neoliberal multiculturalism blinds school actors to the needs of students of color and their families. The demand for high scores on standardized tests and the concomitant formulaic, scripted curriculum and

instruction squelch opportunities for culturally relevant pedagogy in the general curriculum. The overemphasis on conformity rather than intellectual engagement impedes students' abilities and educators' opportunities to be creative and critical thinkers. Local and state policymakers, fueled by federal policies, close schools and lay off educators en masse. Public schools make policies forbidding the wearing of traditionally Black hairstyles, such as braids and locs (Klein, 2013; L'Heureux, 2016). In none of these ways does America show that Black lives matter in public schools. These inequities, disenfranchisement, and anti-Blackness are present in Georgia and in the curious case of the Atlanta cheating scandal. A Georgia state education assistant superintendent posted on Facebook, "If I hear one more thing about the Finland educational system . . . not everybody in the U.S. public schools are WHITE!" (emphasis in original), demonstrating the false belief that Black students cannot be academically successful. Throughout the APS cheating scandal, Judge Baxter and the Georgia State's Attorney have demonstrated a complete lack of awareness of the current and century old policies that have allowed for the miseducation and undereducation of Black Lives. The judge, who felt he was acting on behalf of the children, meted out hefty sentences to those Black educators who maintained their innocence, completely ignoring the role of the state in creating this high-stakes testing madness.

Judge Baxter described what he saw as the importance of "fairness" in this case. How fair is it that while 10 of the APS educators were sentenced to prison time, New York Police Department Officer Peter Liang, convicted of killing Akai Gurley, received a suspended sentence? How fair is it that these educators are now convicted felons, yet not one officer will be convicted of Freddie Gray's death? The litmus test police officers reportedly use is, "Did the incident pose for them a reasonable fear that their lives were in danger?" (*Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 2015). But if that logic is applied to these educators, the question becomes, "Given the intense and inflamed nature of high-stakes testing culture in schools with low test scores that struggle to rise, high poverty, and in the context of anti-Blackness, did these educators have a reasonable fear that their livelihoods were in danger?" The answer is likely yes. Both police officers and educators are agents of the state. But police officers who have taken the lives of unarmed citizens have gotten far greater treatment than these Black educators in Atlanta.

If this cheating occurred, these educators are not heroes. They were not doing anything noble for the advancement of Black people, collectively. If this cheating occurred, it is likely that these Black educators were looking out for themselves, not the students, families, and communities they were supposed to serve. It is possible that these Black educators have bought into White supremacy, anglonormativity, and American individualism. It could be

that they ascribe to deficit ideology about our children. However, there is a difference between their individual, even if coordinated, behavior and the responsibility of the state. The federal and state governments bear responsibility for this case. And instead of accepting its responsibility, instead of working to dismantle racist education policies, the government scapegoats Black educators, who have done far less harm than police officers who have killed unarmed citizens. Officers continue to kill Black people quickly, while federal, state, and local education policies kill us slowly by undereducating Black children and locking us into a vicious cycle of poverty and/or limited educational and professional options. In the United States of America, the state protects its own interests. Police officers who follow inherently racist policies and practices reflect the interests of the state. Black educators, who subvert racist policies and practices, whether that subversion is rooted in their own self-interests or those of their Black students, do not. To the government supposedly by the people, for the people, Black lives do not matter on the streets. Black lives do not matter in dark hallways. Black lives do not matter in Black homes. And Black lives do not matter in schools. We wholeheartedly, summarily, and completely disagree.

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