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SAY MY NAME - *Inner and Outer Movement Building for a Better World*

Georgia State University

Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Ph.D., Georgia State University, College of Education and Human Development, 30 Pryor Street, Atlanta, GA 30303.

Contact: praxisubiquity@gmail.com

SAY MY NAME - *Inner and Outer Movement Building for a Better World*

As I begin to write this editorial at our Activist Writers Retreat in Atlanta, I cannot help but feel compelled, like so many others, to speak to some of the most pressing issues of our times here in the United States as well as the world beyond. As I do this, I want to embrace the stance of the activists John Lewis and Grace Lee Boggs. John Lewis was an African-American Atlanta congressman and civil rights icon who died July 17, 2020 at the age of 80; Grace Lee Boggs was a Chinese-American social activist who passed away at the age of 100 in 2015 on October 5. Both of these inspiring community leaders and builders left legacies that push all of us to create a better world for our present time and a blueprint for those who will follow us. On reading about their life works, I feel energized to follow in their footsteps and to continue in the quest for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (Dr. Ruthmae Sears, personal communication May 27, 2021). Boggs tells us to get over our self-centeredness, materialism and the propensity we have to be "more concerned with our possessions and individual careers," and she implores us to care about "the state of our neighborhoods, cities, country, and planet" (p. 33). Both Grace Lee Boggs and John Lewis call upon our sense of collective responsibility to make this world a better place, to "burn as one unified sun that can light up our world and even our universe" (Lewis, 2021, Reconciliation chapter, para. 4). When questioned about whether he and others wanted to press charges against the white men who had "savagely beaten" them on the Edmund Pettus Bridge , Lewis replied that the struggle is "not against individuals but against a system of injustice" (p. 182).

In part, it is our responsibility to work hard to unearth the past on which the systems of injustices have been built. This may involve long, painstaking hours of engaging in research and fieldwork to craft detailed historical ethnographies much like the work done by Vanessa Siddle

Walker (1995). Such writing about the past, which impacts our current state of affairs, need to be comprehensible not just to academics but more importantly, to the general public, and needs to be disseminated to the public, particularly through social media. Furthermore, as John Lewis (2021) explains, we need "*patient, persistent action*" to get the work of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion accomplished (Patience chapter, para. 10).

SAY MY NAME

The inequities more glaringly manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 as well as racial uprisings of 2020 brought people from around the world as well as those in the United States to a moment in time ripe for recognition that our choice is to either to bury our heads in the sand or to take action to make a difference. I recall my observation of the marchers who passed below my office windows shouting vociferously and passionately during the protests that erupted after the deaths of George Floyd, Armaud Arberry and so many others. I heard the chanter and then the chorus of voices:

Chanter: Say My Name!

Chorus: George Floyd!

Chanter: Say My Name!

Chorus: Armaud Arberry

Chanter: Black Lives Matter!

Chorus: Black Lives Matter!

Chanter: Say My Name!

Chorus: George Floyd!

As I stood far above them on the sixth floor of my college building in downtown Atlanta, I looked down, wishing to join them as an insider. Large groups of socially distanced, mask

wearing, multiracial people of all ages walked quickly through the street, pumping their fists vigorously in the air. I felt their pain and anger, yet I also felt that I was an outsider who desperately needed to understand the full import of the words ***BLACK LIVES MATTER.*** The full import of ***SAY MY NAME***. I needed to read, study, learn and reflect on what this all means beyond a surface reading of current social issues. In civil rights activist, lawyer and legal scholar Michelle Alexander's award winning 2010 book, *The new Jim Crow, mass incarcerations in the age of colorblindness,* she acknowledges her own similar limited depth of understanding. She wrote:

> I understood the problems plaguing poor communities of color, including problems associated with crimes and rising incarceration rates to be a function of poverty and lack of access to quality education – the continuing legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Never did I seriously consider the possibility that a new racial caste system was operating in this country. The new system had been developed and implemented swiftly, and it was largely invisible, even to people like me, who spent most of their waking hours fighting for justice (p. 3)

Alexander (2010) describes an epiphany to "connect the dots" as she later states, "Quite belatedly, I came to see that mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow" (p. 4). Alexander's comments against the backdrop of "the tragic list" of "police killings of unarmed black people" (p. xi) are very important indicators of how deeply we need to go to learn and make visible the entrenched roots of systems and structures of racism (Tinker Sachs et al., 2017). Alexander calls many victims by name, but since her 2010 publication, there have been many more including George Floyd.

When we call a person by their name, we are respecting them, we are demonstrating our shared humanity and we are assigning them, VALUE – not discounting them, or dismissing them of being of no consequence. Against the backdrop of slavery and enslaved men being called "boy" or no name, Say My Name assigns DIGNITY. We know ***All*** lives matter, but **BLACK** lives matter because **they have not mattered—**300 years of slavery, Jim Crow and mass incarceration attests to this (Alexander, 2010; Macedo & Gounari, 2006; Wilkerson, 2020). Alicia Garza (2020), co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement states,

> Black people are criminals whether we are eight years of age or eighty years old, whether we have on a suit and a tie (as my uncle did when he was stopped and arrested in San Francisco because he 'fit the description') or whether we sag our pants, whether we have a PhD or a GED or no degree at all. In America and around the world, Black lives did not matter (p. 116)

SAY MY NAME calls to mind the many thousands of lynched people in the United States —the majority being Black men— whose names have not been said honorably, whose mutilated bodies have been treated disrespectfully, and whose lynchings were ignominiously celebrated by social gatherings akin to picnics. The burial sites have not been recognized or memorialized, and many perpetrators remain unpunished (Wells-Barnett, 1892). Many of the lynched victims' names remain unknown and may forever remain unknown if we do not seek to unearth their histories and tell the terrible truths. Black Lives Matter demonstrators shout from deep down in their souls and punch their fists in the air with every fibre of their being from the wells of a traumatized past. Patrisse Khan-Cullors (2018) one of the cofounders of Black Lives Matter, says it far more profoundly than I can. She writes:

> The human beings legislated as not human beings who watched their names, their languages, their Goddesses and Gods, the arc of their dances and beats of their songs, the majesty of their dreams, their very families snatched up and stolen, disassembled and discarded, and despite this built language and honored God and created movement and upheld love (Khan-Cullors, 2018, pp.4-5).

Poet laureate, Elizabeth Alexander's "*Invocation*" can be found at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. The poem comes at the end of the tour and is a moving tribute to the thousands of lives lost from lynching. She says, repeatedly, "we will never dissever your names; your names were never lost and finally in the last stanza, "You are not lost to us."

SAY MY NAME also resonates for the LGBTQ+ community who want heterosexuals to "see" them and to call them by their chosen names and use their identified pronouns and not make assumptions about them (Ethan Trinh, personal communication, July 13, 2021; Trinh, in press 2020). Yes, indeed, ***ALL*** lives matter. However, Black people and indigenous people around the world want everyone to acknowledge the legacy of "less than" bequeathed to us that makes us want to shout, scream, and holler, for the recognitions and respect that we have never been given as human beings of worth equal to all others (Macedo & Gounari, 2006).

Taking Action – To Build a Movement for a Better World

These times call for taking action. Grace Lee Boggs took action just as John Lewis did, and just as Alicia Garza and Patrisse Khan-Cullors did and still do. They all took part in building a movement to make the world a better place for Black people and all those who have been discriminated against throughout the ages. Movement building is described as "…the concept of two-sided transformation, both of ourselves and of our institutions" (Boggs, 2011, p. 100). Garza

(2020) says "a movement is successful if it transforms the dynamics of power – from power being concentrated in the hands of a few to power being held by many (p. 56). She goes on to say that, "community organizing is often romanticized, but the actual work is about tenacity, perseverance and commitment" (p. 57).

The kinds of action that are taken or that can be taken depend on the movement – and one's alignment or misalignment with that movement. When I think of Black Lives Matter protesters and **the plywood boards** that were used to cover the windows of shopfronts to protect the stores from those who would seek to "make trouble" and cause loss of goods, maybe even life and other untold damages, I wonder if this is an assumption that things could not be peaceful because Black people were involved? I also think of **the masks** that we have been wearing as a safeguard against COVID-19. The boards and the masks were used to safeguard us supposedly from the potential threat of pandemonium and/or the pandemic. ***Who*** or ***what*** exactly is the threat? Is there an assumption of guilt and wrong-doing before it happens?

The Boards – Protection from what and from whom?

The plywood barriers that were put up by the shop owners over the windows are more than just protective barriers to safeguard the goods therein and minimize the potential loss of life. The plywood barriers also tell a story of those who have wealth and those without wealth, those who could afford the barriers and those who are angered enough to tear them down. Even more so, the barriers serve to protect those on the inside from those on the outside. The picture evokes the haves and the have nots: the insiders and outsiders, the comforted and the discomforted. The outsiders are angered by whom and what? The insiders are protecting themselves from whom or what? In the case of told and untold stories of police brutality and other brutalities well-known, including Michael Brown, George Floyd, Ahmuad Arbery and Breonna Taylor, and those lesser

known, like Stephon Clark, the plywood barriers were made into an artistic response to protest police brutalities. Maybe the insiders and the outsiders could come together, learn from each other. Sometimes we hold assumptions of guilt that are not always warranted instead of listening to one another to build a better world. The New York Times (Salam, 2021) reported how hundreds of boards will be displayed in exhibits in Minneapolis, New York, and Chicago. When people go to view these displays, what will they think and what will they do? More importantly, will everyone have free and open access to see the displays, ponder their sayings and meanings and make changes in their lives? Will people just walk away after the exhibit ends and forget about the messages? Who, will carry the torch and for how long? Can we come together?

Today we often hear the word *barrier* to mean something that is almost apparently impenetrable. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000) defines *barrier* as "an object like a fence that prevents people from moving forward from one place to the other." If we think of systemic racism as structures that represent multiple barriers that are layered on top of each other, we have to find ways to penetrate them so that we can eventually eradicate and overcome them politically, socially, emotionally and psychologically. Carol Anderson (2016) has spoken eloquently about and documented the innumerable present and past barriers faced by African descended peoples in her book *White Rage* as has Vanessa Siddle Walker in her book, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (1996). We turn now to the masks we wear as we start with our individual vulnerabilities and insecurities.

We Wear the Masks to Protect and Protest – They Wear the Masks to Protect and Maintain

Paul Lawrence Dunbar wrote the poem "*We wear the mask*" in 1895 as an artistic response to the racism in the United States. Post-colonial studies critic Edward Said wrote about

how Westerners perceived and assigned an “inscrutable mask” to Chinese people in his book *Orientalism* (1978, p. 222). Some of the masks are created by dominant groups and other masks are created by people to protect themselves such as the masks described by Dunbar.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872 – 1906)

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And moth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask.

The masks of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) are also part of today’s mask wearing for the descendants of the enslaved people of the past. But, like the barriers, masks can become

creative expressions as well as symbols of protest. In turning the masks and barriers into symbols of protest, Boggs would contend that this is not enough. We need to take these opportune moments in time to "go beyond slogans and to create programs of struggle that transform and empower participants" and promote "movement building" (pp. 99-100). The challenge is how will each of us contribute to "movement building" for inner transformation and outer transformation for a better world?

Those "programs of struggle that transform and empower participants" and promote "movement building" (Boggs, 2011, p.99-100), begin in the K-12 and teacher education classrooms. The curriculum that we design and the epistemologies with which they are created have the power to transform the lives of teachers and learners.

In our first article, "*Developing a Critical Social Justice Literacy by Reading Young Adult Literature: Reflections and Implications on Future Classroom Practice*," Henry Miller, Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko, Katia Nasra, Alex Mulroy, Reed Sanchez, and Heather Mufford explore instances of injustice in young adult literature with their teacher candidates. The authors use the text, *Is Everyone Really Equal* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) to study "*prejudices, discrimination and oppression*." The authors go from there to locate examples of "*prejudices, discrimination and oppression*" in selected young adult literature and develop questions that can be used to spur young people's classroom discussions. The authors contend that this work can transform the Eurocentric mindset of many of the predominantly white teacher education candidates in our colleges.

Ashley Dallacqua, Sarah Kersten-Parrish, and Mindi Rhoades, in the second article, "*Breaking the Rules [of Summer],"* challenge content area preservice and inservice teachers in Children's Literature courses *to "break the rules"* that serve to limit our ways of seeing and thus impact our capacity to travel across borders, metaphorically and physically. Dallacqua, Kersten, and Rhoades empower educators to become transdisciplinary by working with artful picture books and applications such as Shaun Tan's (2013), "*Rules of Summer*" to critique ways of *rewriting* rules that govern our school curricula and ultimately ways of thinking and being.

Nora Vines and Amanda Rigell in our third article, "*Transformational Discomfort: The Impact of Yoga Teacher Training on University Pedagogy,*" encourage us to "experience discomfort" if we are to grow as educators. The authors use yoga teacher training as a pathway for finding "*santosha*" or "*contentment*" as educators while facing the political, social, health, mental, psychological and physical challenges of our times. The writers and their students' engagement in yoga supported pedagogical shifts in the teacher education classroom,

Our fourth and final article is by Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko, Kathleen Olmstead, Mitchell Lalik, Heather Mufford and Reed Sanchez. Colantonio-Yurko et. al's *Expanding Worlds: Studying Abroad as Teachers*, take us on study abroad experiences with pre and inservice teachers to France and England. Instructors and students describe and reflect on their experiences. Through the study abroad, the educators grew interculturally, became more culturally sensitive and were able to create more diverse and culturally appropriate curriculum.

Some of the numerous pathways to criticality can be seen in articles for this themed edition, *Say My Name*. Collectively, these papers describe the creative curriculum opportunities available to us through literature, social applications, yoga and study abroad. When we adopt a critical praxis approach, we begin to see the possibilities to transform lives and empower learners to participate in "movement building" (Boggs, 2011) for a better world.

We thank all our reviewers for their great feedback to our authors. Thank you to our authors for considering Ubiquity – Praxis as a home for your work. We invite others to do so for our next themed edition on COVID-19. Please see our call.

Best Regards and Well Wishes to Everyone!

Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Editor

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