



Chapter 2. Race Shapes the Terrain of Struggle

Like educator struggles in Madison, Wisconsin, and the broader economic focus of Occupy Wall Street in 2011, educator organizers and their supporters in these states demanded accountability from the wealthiest extractors of resources and labor. And like the CTU strike in 2012, the mantra that teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions emerged as a central frame. At the same time, educator organizers described contending with disagreements or uncertainties about how to maintain popular support while addressing the uneven ways that communities experience education disinvestment, dehumanizing English-centric scripted and standardized test-focused curriculum, and punitive disciplinary policies across racial, class, and geographic divides.

In the following, we aim to better understand the racial politics and complexities of educator organizing in the lead up to, during, and in the aftermath of the 2018 strikes. Our analysis of the 2018 strikes emerges from a deeper study of the entwined longer histories of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and the construction and development of U.S. public education. This chapter operates, like much of the rest of the book, on the premise that contemporary educator organizing is only strengthened through understanding its complex histories, and that these histories are (always) constitutive of our present moment. Our premise is strongly supported by the experiences of organizers in the "red" state strikes, where efforts to depoliticize the racialized underpinnings of educational disinvestment and neoliberal reforms to make appeals for wider public support appeared to weaken, even fracture, continued organizing momentum following the strikes.

In West Virginia, public discourse and media analyses suggested that race featured relatively insignificantly as an overwhelmingly majority (ninety-six percent) White state. Alternatively, in Kentucky, race featured quite significantly as the educator movement coincided with the state's proposed Gang Crime Bill. The proposed legislation would make gang recruitment a felony, rather than a misdemeanor, and identified a gang as any organization of three people sharing two out of four characteristics: sharing a name, colors, hand signals, and symbols. Individuals convicted under this new legislation would have to serve eighty-five percent of their sentence before the option of parole was available. Outrage over the proposed bill intensified already existing "fault lines" (Asselin) between (mainly Louisville) educator organizers who sought a race-conscious approach and others, who advocated a colorblind economic lens to win wider White support. While Arizona and Oklahoma did not have the same kind of immediate movement crisis that emerged with Kentucky's Gang Crime Bill, we illuminate how public education disinvestment in these states has long been wielded unevenly and via justifications premised implicitly on race and White supremacy.

We begin by drawing from political, economic, labor, and education histories that we feel are key for understanding what, to many, felt like a surprising turn of events in 2018, in right-leaning places. For decades, teacher (and all public employee) militancy had long occupied the position of shameful non-producer and anti-union legislation had been propped by White producerist public sentiments against taxation (Shelton). A longer, deeper history of race, education, and educator labor struggles reveals the very issues that propelled the labor actions—*austerity, school privatization, de-professionalization and hierarchization of education labor*—are legacies of the last significant wave of teacher militancy in the long 1970s. Then, as now, race, Whiteness, and racism are central.

● Race, Public Education, and Teachers' Unions

The creation of common schooling emerged during a tumultuous time in the mid-to-late nineteenth century when power, land, and wealth did not always appear to be guaranteed to the elite owning class. The shift from an agrarian to an industrializing economy produced pitched, often bloody battles between waged workers (including children) and capitalists (Bartoletti; S. Smith). In industrializing U.S. cities newly booming from rural and transnational migration, the use of state resources to expand and provide working-class immigrant access to compulsory lower education became more desirable as progressive social reformers sought to expand young working class people's access to childhood and "shelter children from the harmful impact of urban-industrial life" (Wolcott 13). David Wolcott and others describe the progressive bourgeois response to drastic urban social transformation as the "child saver movement"—encompassing advocates for compulsory education, juvenile justice, and social work institutions, which included many White, well-to-do women (Lesko; Meiners, "Right to be Hostile"). Ultimately, the child savers sought to expand the parental role of the state in response to what upper class advocates understood as a cultural pathology of the poor and not-quite or not-at-all White.

Many young working class people rebelled against their containment, and, as Madeleine Grumet writes, even preferred waged labor to early urban school conditions—at least if they were forced to work, they would be paid for it. Resources for constructing the infrastructure of public education, including the proliferation of normal colleges (teacher education institutions, which would later expand to become the backbone of the U.S. public higher education system), were won, in large part, on the claims that common education could produce a more compliant, unified society (on the cheap by paying women teachers a pittance (also see Strickland in the context of higher education) at a moment when post-Civil War fears of Native, populist, worker, and freed Black rebellion might unravel the contingent social order.

As K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty describe in the context of the history of Native education in the US, the state has always pushed a project of assimilation, creating spaces for Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices

only when these were understood by the state as safe for maintaining the social order. Schools were a central way the federal government sought to solve the so-called “Indian problem,” which is, as the authors write,

that Native communities have persistently and courageously fought for their continued existence as peoples, defined politically by their government-to-government relationship with the United States and culturally by their diverse governments, languages, land bases, religions, economies, education systems, and family organizations (7).

Lomawaima and McCarty go on to write, “The federal government has not simply vacillated between encouraging or suppressing Native languages and cultures but has in a coherent way . . . attempted to distinguish safe from dangerous Indigenous beliefs and practices” (6). During early periods of rapid westward expansion and dispossession of Native lands, the “safety zone” was narrow and Indigenous boarding schools, guided by federal policy, engaged in the most extreme forms of violence, i.e., forcibly stealing children and relocating them to boarding schools great distances from their home communities, severely punishing children for speaking their languages at school (Lomawaima and McCarty). Many Indigenous children perished from staff violence, illness, and neglect as a result of the conditions and practices of these early boarding schools (King). The publication of the 1928 Meriam Report, commissioned by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, marked a shift from the strict assimilationist logic of the previous era and expanded the “safety zone.” The report argued that people have the right “to remain an Indian” only after federal powers had been established within state and tribal relations. As the authors’ document, Native communities have, throughout the history of colonization, resisted the prescriptions of the safety zone (as cited in Lomawaima and McCarty).

An excerpt from the Board of Indian Commissioners’ 1902 report illuminates the centrality of schooling for the construction and policing of White supremacy and racialization in the pre-Meriam Report era: “Schools alone cannot make over a race, but no one instrument is so powerful in producing desirable changes in a race as are schools for the young” (Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs [ARCIA] 781; cited in Lomawaima and McCarty 7). Ongoing efforts continue to construct an education system that seeks to efficiently manage racial, cultural, linguistic, gender/sexual, class, and other differences for the benefit of a racial, heteropatriarchal capitalist social order. In response to such efforts, many students, teachers, and communities have always engaged everyday and formal organized resistance in classrooms, schools, communities, and beyond. From students’ subversion of the curriculum through disruptive acts in the classroom (coded as “bad behavior”) or teachers’ engaging in critical pedagogy behind closed doors to boycotts of mandated testing, parent-led hunger strikes, and student and educator walkouts, education is a continuous site of contestation and struggle.

How such resistance to the management of racial hierarchy has borne out in the context of teachers’ unions, historically, has been fraught.

● Race and Teachers' Unions

Scholarship recounting the formation of contemporary teachers' unions in the US tends to focus on narrating the origins and evolution of the NEA and the AFT, and specifically key constitutive struggles on the part of local organizations in Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia, among other Northern urban places (Gaffney; Hansot; Karpinski; Lichtenstein; Lyons; McCartin; Mirel; Tyack et al. as cited in Hale, "Development of Power").

However, as Hale notes, "an emphasis on the AFT, the NEA, and their local affiliates privileges a northern and urban perspective that overlooks the racialized dynamics of professional teacher associations in the American South" (Hale, "Development of Power" 445). He further argues that the 2018 strikes and militant organizing across Southern states and the Sunbelt "is built upon" the histories of Black teacher organizing in the South, and further, that "[t]his history reveals that the professional organization of educators' labor constitutes a unique, though overlooked, aspect of labor and civil rights history as it provides a framework to situate a movement that has at times been framed outside the grasp of American history" (Hale, "On Race" 2).

Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which ended de jure segregation in educational institutions, White teachers' unions excluded Black teachers from membership. The NEA, for example, was segregated until the 1970s, when it consolidated the African American Teachers Association, while some state affiliates integrated sooner (Urban). Under segregation and excluded from White unions, Black educators organized professional associations to advocate and take action to improve access to educational resources, professional training, and equitable pay (V. S. Walker). Unlike the NEA's form of professionalism, which sought to constitute a body of professional knowledge within and managed by White institutions (e.g., colleges of education) that could bolster the prestige and aims of the profession, D'Amico Pawlewicz and View suggest Black teachers' associations advocated a form of professionalism that saw, instead, teachers as "community workers" (1287). Professionalism, within many Black teachers' associations in the South, took the form of pedagogical training that sought to premise education on the cultures, histories, and aspirations of Black students and communities. Across the US in the pre-*Brown* era, educators of color "navigated the gray area of profession as institutional bolster and profession as social justice activism," for example, Mexican American and Japanese American educators created language programs in response to English-only policies (D'Amico Pawlewicz and View 1287).

V. S. Walker writes that African American teachers in the segregated South have been narrowly framed in the literature and popular discourse as either victims of racial oppression or caring maternal or paternal figures. Alternatively, she paints a more complex view:

[T]eachers were caring individuals, but their behaviors were more than caring. Likewise, although they worked in constrained educational

circumstances, they were not debilitated by these circumstances. Rather the teachers were increasingly well-trained educators who worked in concert with their leaders to implement a collective vision of how to educate African American children in a Jim Crow society. (753)

Within Black teachers' associations, a collective vision centered on fighting for equitable pay and resources for Black schools and an end to segregation. Black teachers' associations and Black educators developed critical coalitions with other civil rights organizations.

For example, the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers (OANT) formed in 1893 and existed through the 1960s. It disbanded not long after the NEA opened its rolls to Black Oklahoma teachers in 1955, and its political resources and membership steadily declined with the pushout of Black teachers during integration (Billington). Donnie Nero, founder of the Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame, writes that few of its organizational records exist, beyond brief mention of a few well-known OANT leaders in periodicals documenting the history of the formation and later desegregation of public education in the state. According to Nero, the organization was a stalwart driver for "professional development, training, coordination and structure for African American educators during a time when segregation was the law of the land." In the 1940s, OANT existed at its height of organization and influence, pushing for and achieving significant increases in funding and resources for Black schools, then funded via a dual and completely separate mechanism than White schools in the state (Clayton). While many Black Oklahoma educators, like elsewhere in the nation, lost their positions, the OANT among other Black community and political organizations since Black settlement in the territory proliferated legacies of knowledge, relational infrastructure, and inspiration to contemporary organizing (A. Brown).

Like the OANT, beginning in the 1930s, Black teachers' associations in many key Southern states had built significant momentum for challenging dismal material conditions in their schools, low pay, and racism. Black teacher organizing played key roles in advancing the Civil Rights Movement yet are underappreciated for doing so (Baker, "Pedagogies of Protest"; Hale, "On Race"; V. S. Walker). In Mississippi, Alabama, Virginia, and South Carolina, among other states, Black teacher organizers were able to make such advances because they were able to advance social and racial justice visions and analyses in ways that White-dominated educator unions were unwilling:

Race functioned to divide the organization of all teachers but at the same time it permitted Black teachers to organize autonomously to address civil rights issues in the larger movement for equal education. This agenda, which spanned over half a century, shaped the Civil Rights Movement's broad democratic social vision in ways that White and northern teacher associations did not. (Hale, "Development of Power" 445)

The work of Southern Black educator associations in this era, as Hale argues, offers an important example of social movement educator unionism that employed a visceral understanding of the role of racialization in the construction of the conditions of educators' work. Black educator associations simultaneously fought for such common good and Civil Rights Movement-relevant demands as curricular self-determination, pay equalization among White and Black teachers, higher professional standards, and, during desegregation, for the right for Black educators to work.

Continuing to use Oklahoma as an illustrative example, Black educators in the state were a critical source of leadership in the Civil Rights Movement locally and nationally. Clara Luper, Nancy Randolph Davis, and Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher are three prominent examples of skilled local educators and community organizers who worked within networks of Black civil rights organizations and mobilized analyses of the relationship between the racist education system and broader social issues to enact significant change efforts for anti-racist policies and civil rights. For example, Luper and other Black educators organized with striking Black sanitation workers in 1969 and faced retaliation in their schools (A. Brown). It is unclear to what extent, for example, Luper, an Oklahoma City educator, infamous leader of the OKC NAACP Youth Council lunch counter sit-in movement that inspired similar efforts nationally, and OEA member, had a relationship with the waning OANT in the late 1950s. The OANT had tended to take a more conciliatory approach of "friendly persuasion" to advocate for equitable integration policies after *Brown v. Board* (A. Brown).

President at the height of public education policy transformations to facilitate the Supreme Court mandate, Fredrick M. Moon is oft cited as a minor opinion in studies of Southern Black teacher perspectives on integration: "I know our teachers feel that if it is a question of losing our jobs or having segregated schools, we will take the job loss" (Haney 90). Many Black teachers did not feel similarly yet lacked the meaningful support of the OEA to challenge Black teacher pushout and post-Brown re-segregation, especially in that state's two major urban areas of Tulsa and Oklahoma City (Billington).

While these struggles played out differently in different places in the North and South, Baker suggests that it was, in fact, in the Southern White institutional response to such struggle from which emerged the foundation and logics of contemporary neoliberal school reform. In this way, nearly every educator's agitation over de-professionalization, high stakes testing, and loss of curricular autonomy has roots in the White retaliation and racial animosity against Black educators' efforts toward racial justice. In response to the successes of such organizing for equal pay, educational quality, and an end to de jure segregation, standardized testing emerged as a tactic to "restrict black access to White institutions and the professions" (Baker, "Paradoxes of Desegregation" xvii). In a striking example, University of South Carolina president, Daniel W. Robinson "helped officials expand testing and tracking in primary and secondary schools, arguing that 'this difference in achievement between the races may be our last line of defense'" (Baker,

“Paradoxes of Desegregation” xxii). At the same time, Black educators understood the challenges and risks of both school and union integration:

African American educators were wary about the suitability of relinquishing their allegiance to their own associations that had their well-being as a primary goal in favor of the NEA whose commitment was questionable. Moreover, school desegregation threatened the professional status and job security of African American educators (Karpinski 14).

Similarly, in Oklahoma, Black educators slowly trickled into the newly desegregated OEA (with the support of the OANT) yet remained supportive of the OANT. In 1958, the Black educator association counted 1,500 of the state’s 1,622 Black teachers as members (Clayton). In the 1950s, OANT shifted its efforts to fight against the pushout of Black teachers in the state. While Black membership grew in the newly integrated state NEA-affiliate, the OEA did not elevate or prioritize the issues facing its newer members (Billington), and until it officially disbanded in 1958, the remaining OANT infrastructure and leadership steadily fought for equal pay and the recruitment of Black educators in re-segregated and integrated schools through the 1960s.

The manipulation of desegregation policy to perpetuate a racist education system that could continue to reproduce oppressive and hierarchical gender and class relations is at the root of educators’ 2018 grievances. As Baker writes, “officials used their control of education [during the years of desegregation] to construct a more rational educational order that has proven to be more durable than the educational caste system it replaced” (“Paradoxes of Desegregation” xvii).

● Race, Teacher Power, and the Rise of Neoliberal School Reform

The 2012 (and later 2019) Chicago teachers strike is oft cited as the most recent predecessor and influencer of the 2018 resurgence in teacher militancy (Weiner and Asselin). Karen Lewis, then-president of the CTU and member of the CORE, is an example of the ways in which Black political organizing for education justice in our contemporary moment is borne on the backs of Black (women’s) teacher organizing. Lewis’ inroads to education organizing began during her time as a student activist. As a high school student, she, along with many other students across the city, organized a school boycott, demanding the hiring of more Black faculty and staff and community control of schools. Todd-Breland notes her ideological motivations were rooted, at the time, firmly within the Black Power Movement (219–220). Later, as CTU president, Lewis encapsulated the racial and class project of neoliberal school reform with the following remarks in 2013:

Children of the elite are given a full, rich curriculum that allows them to explore, create and imagine, while the children of the poor and those

who chose publicly funded public education are given the drudgery of test prep. Children of the elite are given a curriculum that prepares them to rule, while our children are given a curriculum that prepares them to be greeters at Wal-Mart. (Todd-Breland 227)

Citing Pauline Lipman's work on the neoliberal reshaping of urban education, Todd-Breland writes that austerity policies (at the center of the 2018 red state strikes) are directly linked to the labor-economic needs in late stage racial capitalism: while the children of the elite few have access to well-resourced schools that employ creative curricula and pedagogies, "a larger number of under-resourced neighborhood schools and 'no excuses' charter schools focus on the 'basic skills,' 'ability to follow direction,' and 'accommodating disposition work' required for employment in the expanding pool of low-wage and temporary service sector jobs" (227; Anyon; Bowles and Gintis).

Standardized testing in K-12, for teacher credentialing, and for college admittance continued to proliferate in the decades that followed desegregation from South Carolina throughout the South and nation as "more defensible forms of separation based on class as well as race" (Baker, "Paradoxes of Desegregation" xxii). The implementation and proliferation of high stakes standardized testing in K-12 and for college entrance aimed to limit BIPOC access to White education institutions in the wake of desegregation and had the effect of Whitening the teacher pool (Baker, "Paradoxes of Desegregation").

More recent merit pay and tenure elimination policies, among other achievement logic-based policies, have pushed out a significant percentage of African American teaching faculty (Buras; Jankov and Caref). As scholars of neoliberal urban education policy have illuminated in the context of urban education, such measures have been strategically utilized to support state and local governments to read educational failure in working-class, often working-class BIPOC communities, and most often in neighborhoods that appear ripe for real estate development (Buras; Lipman; Picower and Mayorga). Scholars of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act argue, the ability to point to supposedly objective data proving failure provided justification to enact drastic punitive measures that had the intended effect of privatizing and de-unionizing public education (Klein; Saltman).

While the demands of the 2018 red state strikes were primarily for equitable wage increases, education historians have documented the ways in which the racialized conflicts of the 1970s were central to shaping White public support for the rampantly individualist regime of neoliberalism in education and other social policy. White teachers' unions were often pitted against Black political organizing for community control and self-determination, and White teachers' notions of (conservative) professionalism existed in stark tension with Black community organizing efforts toward community-based, culturally sustaining notions of professionalism. Shelton articulates these various tensions as they played out at the height of 1970s teacher militancy:

For some [white] teachers, this new power meant avoiding teaching students whom they viewed as dangerous and difficult to teach. For some white teachers committed to improving education in black schools, many assumed that only through teaching middle-class, individualist values could blacks overcome the “culture of poverty” that entrapped them. For other teachers, however, increased teacher power clashed with the demands by Black Power activists that teachers should shoulder more caretaker responsibilities in the schools. (Shelton 57-58)

It is important to note that educator unionists were far from homogenous in their political perspectives during this era. Yet, more radical educator organizers had been systematically pushed out from their unions and teaching positions during the “red scare” era of anti-communist political repression (M. Murphy; Taylor). In combination with the decimation of major social movement union organizations, like New York’s TU, the complex ways that administrators and municipal and state leaders pitted White teachers’ and Black communities’ class interests against one another, sowed long-lasting divides that, alongside retaliatory anti-union right-to-work legislation, made it increasingly difficult to respond to the proliferation of austerity policies in response to the economic crises many urban and rural municipalities faced during deindustrialization and White flight in that era (Golin; Podair; Taylor).

The histories and legacies of Southern Black teachers’ associations, among other educator movements for educational self-determination and equity, help us to understand the breadth and depth of education organizing and the significance of Black educators in advancing the Civil Rights Movement and shaping the terrain and aims of social movement unionism, historically and today. The rise of teacher union militancy across the nation and its conflicts and tension with Black Power, among other anti-racist working-class revolutionary movements of the 1970s, provides necessary context for understanding the dangerous implications for centering color-blind narratives in contemporary educator movements. As education union historians and scholars of anti-racist and social movement educator unionism have unequivocally illustrated, efforts to repress community-based anti-poverty, multiracial, and anti-racist union movements offer a measure of how threatening such approaches are for the social order—repression on the part of national union political leaders (M. Murphy; Urban; Weiner), the state and ruling class (Goldstein; Taylor); and White society (Shelton; Todd-Breland).

These tensions and conflicts have been documented and studied, to some extent, with the emergence of social justice caucuses and social movement unionism in urban contexts (Asselin; Maton; Morrison; Riley; Stark). However, they have been relatively absent in recent analyses of the 2018 “red” state strikes (Hale, “On Race”). As our analysis illuminates, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arizona each have their own situated histories and geographies of racialized oppression and resistance in education (and beyond).

● A Race-Conscious Context of the Appalachian Educator Strikes

Race and Appalachian history, alongside the intertwined histories of the western territories that are now Oklahoma and Arizona, have often intermixed through a combination of White violence, genocide, slavery, and forced migration. As White settlers began pushing westward in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Indigenous groups were forced out of the region almost entirely (Pollard). At the turn of the twenty-first century, two-fifths of Appalachia's Indigenous population lived in twenty-one of the four hundred ten counties, with the greatest concentrations in western North Carolina. No region in central Appalachia between West Virginia, Kentucky, and western Virginia had a single county with more than five-hundred self-identified American Indian residents. Colonialism in Appalachia pushed out whole communities, beginning long before the Trail of Tears and which later became exacerbated by it. As such, much of the previous history of Indigenous Appalachians is marginalized in narratives of the region (Pollard).

Although central Appalachia's Black population is the smallest of all three regions, the historical roots for this modern demographic shift are important. The enslaved population in Kanawha County (formerly Virginia) grew from three hundred fifty-two in 1810 to 3,140 by 1850 in large part because of the precious salt industry along the ten-mile stretch of the Ohio River, the Great Kanawha, which lie three miles north of Charleston (Stealey III). Western markets had an insatiable demand for salt—both for processing and preservation—and the Kanawha Valley's salt mines provided a ready supply for markets out west. Because of the easy access to the Ohio River, which could load barges of the Kanawha brine to markets across six states, central Appalachia's enslaved population boomed in the antebellum period (Stealey III). The region was well-known for its role in the interstate slave trade. Appalachian households ranging from the poorest Whites to the wealthiest elites played a role, directly or indirectly, in trafficking enslaved people. Merchants and non-slaveholding farms benefitted greatly from the slave trade, with each county courthouse having its own slave auction block (Dunaway).

During the Jim Crow Era, Black Appalachians experienced chronic poverty similarly, in some ways, yet also disparately to their White counterparts. In Clay County, Kentucky, for example, Blee and Billings note that “a more complex relationship between regional poverty and migration” exists (367). For example, economic security in the nineteenth century (i.e., land ownership) was possible for Whites but not Black residents. White persisters, those who remained in the county, tended to accumulate more property over time whereas Black persisters, who tended to have little or no base of property, became even more impoverished. In addition to land ownership, resource accumulation and the shift from subsistence farming to commerce and industry made life easier for White persisters than Black persisters. During times of economic depression, White

persisters could more easily live with kin than could Black persisters, with the latter living with White nonkin as domestic or agricultural workers more frequently (Blee and Billings).

The second generation of Black families that had grown up in Kentucky and West Virginia knew a similarly racist region. Despite the ground-breaking Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, many of the old racist habits that this generation's parents faced were suffered by them as well. As Karida L. Brown states,

As long as the terms of the old racial contract were maintained, there was no reason for exerting overt, repressive measures to maintain order. Instead, the ideology of White supremacy and the structure of separate and unequal were internalized into the habitus of everyone living in the Jim Crow South. As long as they had internalized these overt structures, there was no longer a need for signs and lynchings; all people knew their place. (98)

After the 1950s, Black Americans were forcibly relocated into central Appalachia in service to the extractive industry—mining and salt manufacturing. After mechanization, fewer Black miners had jobs and competed with White miners for the better benefits of remaining in the mines (Clark). Within a few generations, those families had moved farther North as the economy shifted from agriculture and extraction to service and commerce. Therefore, despite a growth in non-White residents in Appalachia, only three counties in West Virginia and none in Kentucky had at least ten percent minority residents in the 2000 census (Pollard).

The racialized poverty and lower education status for non-White residents account for much of the stereotypes about Appalachia's "backwardness." In 2000, 13.6 percent of the region's total population lived below the poverty line, one percent higher than the national average (Pollard). The gap between White and non-White residents, however, is higher. Twelve percent of White Appalachians lived in poverty in 2000, compared to twenty-five percent of non-White Appalachians, higher than the national average. In eastern Kentucky, the numbers are worse: twenty-four percent for Whites, thirty-one percent for Black residents, and thirty-seven percent for Latinx residents (Pollard).

The predominance of an almost entirely White homogeneity in Appalachia is not simply a benign fact. Instead, it is the result of active and persistent actions designed around a White supremacist framework for the creation of this region. Barbara Ellen Smith explains that this Whitening approach to Appalachia by academics is dangerously reductive. Smith argues instead for a race-conscious perspective on Appalachia which "understands the region as a repository for America's evasions and conflation of race and class but refuses to participate in the obfuscation" (53).

In 2019, 3.6 percent of West Virginians identified as African American, 1.7 percent identified as Hispanic, and 1.8 percent identified as two or more races (U.S. Census). Likewise, in Kentucky, 8.4 percent of state residents identified as Black,

3.8 percent identified as Hispanic, and 2 percent identified as two or more races, significantly higher racial diversity than in the Mountain State (U.S. Census). However, Black and Latinx enrollment in teacher preparation programs in both states are relatively low when compared to states with larger non-White populations. Both West Virginia and Kentucky scored in the lowest categories for Black and Latinx teacher preparation program enrollments for 2018–2019 (Partelow). Thus, although diversity in demographics exists in both states, relative to their student population, both states have low numbers of non-White educators.

○ Kentucky's Not Quite 120 United

This imbalance between BIPOC students and a mostly White education workforce presented challenges in both West Virginia's and Kentucky's statewide strikes. As stated in Chapter One, Kentucky's legislature was about to end their 60-day legislative session in late March, only to pass SB 151—the pension overhaul package or Sewer Bill—at the last minute. The JCTA Facebook page proclaimed after the passage of SB 151, “JCTA has called for job actions in the past and the situation may come to that again, but the Association certainly is NOT calling for such an action at this time.” This, despite having made a previous post that day that stated, “If you are an education employees (sic) or a supporter of public education and can possibly get to Frankfort IMMEDIATELY, please come NOW!!!” Kentucky's largest local affiliate appeared to ask education workers and their supporters to demonstrate at the capitol, but only if they were capable of doing so without disrupting the school day.

On Friday, March 30, 2018, more than five hundred protesters arrived at the capitol steps shouting in anger that the legislature had passed what should have been a defeated bill at the last hour. A sick-out had shut down schools in more than twenty counties. Even Jefferson County had been forced to close after one thousand teacher absences were called in and several hundred more anticipated. These numbers represented a sizable portion of Jefferson County's education workforce. Jefferson County employs more than six thousand teachers and has more than one hundred schools in its district. According to district spokesman Daniel Kemp, the wave of mass absences meant that all schools would have unfilled classrooms, and around twenty schools would have double-digit absences. A large red banner was unfurled from the capitol's balcony that stated in bold red letters: “Kentucky deserves better.” The strike was officially on.

Brent McKim, president of the JCTA, informed media outlets that JCTA would bring a legal challenge against SB 151. First, they would challenge a provision that did not allow teachers to use unused sick days when calculating pension benefits. Then, they would use this challenge to declare that the entire passage of the bill was unconstitutional. Working alongside then-Attorney General, Andy Beshear, whose father had been the Democratic governor of Kentucky until Bevin had taken office, JCTA employed a calculated lobbying tactic more comfortable for both JCTA and KEA leadership.

Kentucky's walkout continued that following Monday. It was on this day that the fruition of KY 120 went from online organizing, under a name of solidarity as an homage to their neighbors in West Virginia, to an actualized struggle of solidarity unionism. All one hundred twenty counties' schools were closed for the first day of statewide action. Many counties' schools were on spring break at the time, and there was some confusion as to whether educators in those counties would be expected to "strike" alongside their fellow educators or continue with their pre-arranged plans.

It appeared that, although the walkouts were able to amass large swaths of energy from rank-and-file educators from across the state, KEA was unfavorable to future actions. The following Tuesday, KEA voted not to support any future strike actions—sickouts or walkouts. Without on-the-ground support from the unions, there was little ability for the KY 120 page or zone leaders to call future actions.

Nema Brewer, KY120 leader, stated to Brendan in an interview that one of the primary concerns for the page was that if continued actions occurred, it might jeopardize JCTA's contract negotiations. Jefferson County is the only county in the state that has collective bargaining rights. It is also the largest school district in the state with disproportionately higher numbers of students of color compared to the rest of the state. Future labor actions could, in theory, force the JCTA to go on the defensive against both their members and a hostile state legislature. Governor Bevin had wanted to put the school district under state control since he came into office. Given that Jefferson County voted overwhelmingly for his opponent in the last election, Jack Conway, Bevin recognized the collective power of organized labor in this part of the state. "There are people in our state who wouldn't care if Jefferson County seceded tomorrow," Brewer stated. "The goal was to keep everyone united. We're not the 119 united or the 1 united, we're the 120 united and what affects one of us affects all of us."

Organizing for continued action, the group had difficulty maintaining cohesion. First, KY 120 had only been in existence for less than a month when the first non-union-sanctioned walkouts began on March 30. Zones and representatives across the state had been established through an impromptu call for members. For a sustained action to occur, longer-term planning would likely have been necessary. KY 120 had many unvetted members who joined out of anticipation of being part of something bigger than themselves, something that could direct their anger towards political action when the unions had been stagnant or too appealing to traditional lobbying tactics. Personal politics oftentimes made organizing a challenge. "We probably have more Republicans on the page than anyone else," Brewer said, "and so we have to be very careful about how we approach certain topics." This process meant that there would be no possibility for members to vote on work stoppages, sickouts, walk-ins, or the like.

Uncertainty around the page's relationship to KEA complicated this issue further. Matilda Burtkas Ertz, a music teacher from Jefferson County, stated, "The local union [JCTA] was not publicly or privately promoting a work

stoppage, though they happily supported us in wildcat ‘sickouts’ after they were initiated organically.” While the unions had believed that these actions had defeated a bad budget, Burtkas Ertz said, “From our perspective, it failed. Many in the groups thought this was weak. Yet, we were not at the bargaining table.” Some counties faced disorganized sickouts in “a poorly organized game of chicken,” and without a plan, these fell through.

Second, the timing of SB151, coincided with spring break and the end of the legislative session. Whatever organization that had been built had to be prepared to mobilize on a moment’s notice. Legislative moves to push SB151 coincided with the budget to keep a check on the potential of a work stoppage. Republican lawmakers witnessed the previous rallies that had occurred and knew that passing the pension bill before the end of the session would force them to confront a mass of angry educators. Something similar had already happened in West Virginia. Educators there had gone on strike with sufficient time left in the legislative session to push for a pay raise. Burtkas Ertz realized that “we could have been organized and made our demands” after the session, “but we would be rallying an empty state house with the only prospect of winning being if the governor called a special session.” It was unclear whether Governor Bevin would be willing to do so. When teachers went on strike again on April 13, 2018, Bevin was quoted saying, “I guarantee you somewhere in Kentucky today, a child was sexually assaulted that was left at home because there was nobody there to watch them” (CNN Wire). Public employees feared that community support would no longer exist if a strike action continued, so the safer route for some was to vote out the bad representatives in November and hope for the best.

○ The Gang Crime Bill

Perhaps the biggest division within the Kentucky strike in 2018, however, was not so much how to continue the strike in opposition of SB151, but how to relate to another piece of reactionary legislation—HB169, also known as the Gang Crime Bill. The bill was designed to increase penalties for offenders if they were known to be affiliated with a gang, or if a gang-related activity could be considered a factor in their crime. Gang recruitment would also be classified as a felony, rather than a misdemeanor charge, with gang members convicted of a crime also required to serve at least eighty-five percent of their sentences. The term “gang” was also redefined. For someone to be considered committing a “gang-related offense,” they had to meet two of the following characteristics: three or more individuals, sharing a common name, symbols, colors, hand signals, and geographic region. Governor Bevin welcomed the legislation at the time, saying, “We can no longer have the welcome mat out for gangs. . . . They are not welcome to prey upon our children” (Bailey).

The overt racism of this bill exposed the fissure within Kentucky’s education strike. It is worth quoting Bhattacharya once more: “Race is not an add-on to the struggle for wages. It shapes the terrain of struggle” (“Why the Teachers’ Revolt

Must Confront Racism”). When the Gang Crime Bill began circulating in state news, many Black educators reacted with alarm. The rise of KY120 appeared to be a chance to bring together disparate teachers from across the state to oppose the pension overhaul and a bill that would effectively expand and strengthen the school-to-prison nexus. Tyra Walker stated in an interview with Brendan, however, that “when we began discussing the Gang Bill that would impact our students of color, and particularly the Black students in JCPS [Jefferson County Public Schools], the conversation [on the Facebook page] changed. I was in the group one minute then out the next. Not just out of the group but blocked.”

In describing her relationship with KY120, Walker explained that its leadership and many other activists who would play a pivotal role in the 2018 walkouts had known each other well prior to the strike. However, during discussions about how to best relate the struggle for racial liberation in the context of the education walkouts, that conversation was muted. “Some of us, like me, were deleted and blocked from the KY 120 page. There was nothing united about those actions.” Walker believed that one of the problems that shifted leaders’ focus from a militant, take-no-prisoners stance at the beginning of the strike to a more acquiescing stance occurred through a series of conversations with KEA leadership who advocated a more gradual, legalistic approach to challenging Bevin’s legislative agenda.

Petia Edison, also a Black educator organizer from Louisville, concurred with Walker’s assessments in her interview with Brendan. Like Walker, Edison also knew many future KY 120 organizers years prior when working on state-level issues. KY120 leaders had become well-versed in the art of lobbying and communicating what legislation was on the table during each legislative session, including “reporting back to the groups all the side deals and legislative moves that were happening (in 2016–2017). So once the legislature in 2018 started, we were already solid and grounded in understanding which legislators were friendly to education and which were not.” Through a series of messenger groups, Edison, Walker, and several others formed what would later become the formal structure of KY 120. However, like Walker, once Edison brought up the Gang Crime Bill, she was also removed from the organizing structures she helped build. “I encouraged my fellow teachers to push our legislators to say ‘no’ to the Gang Crime Bill. I was blocked from the KY 120 page because I was called divisive and a gang bill is not an issue that teachers should address. I am appalled at any educator or non-educator that works in the school system who would not be looking out for the best interests of the students.”

This falling out process took years to develop. Brewer, a KY 120 leader, and Edison met in 2017 during that year’s legislative session. They were in daily communication on Facebook messenger about upcoming bills, discussing strategies for lobbying techniques and identifying potential allies from both parties. They worked to compile and disseminate this information widely and form mass communications with like-minded public employees. Both Brewer and Edison shared a passion for defending public education, as did the JCTA president, Brent McKim.

Both White individuals helped Edison as allies in the struggle for public education, but it was the Gang Crime Bill that separated those bonds. “My relationship with [Brewer] came to an abrupt end when I brought up the gang bill. . . . [McKim] did not help push for the resistance to the Gang Crime Bill. . . . The commonality in all of these relationships is the lack of support towards the resistance of the Gang Bill, and they all have White privilege,” she recounted to Brendan.

Edison’s personal identification with this bill comes from a place of loss and realization. She had to bury a former student in 2015, her school’s neighborhood is ranked nationally as one of the most dangerous places to live. Yet, this bill would only further antagonize the relationship between its mostly White teaching force and its majority students of color. “The gang law is a law that legalizes stop and frisk, and the students that attend my school would most likely be stopped and labeled as gang members, and that follows you for the rest of your life. This law isn’t just a civil rights violation, it accelerates the school-to-prison pipeline at a speed we will not be able to contain.” When teachers walked out again later in April of that year, as we discuss in more depth in Chapter Five, teachers in Louisville were already on high alert not to trust KY120 because of their lack of support during the Gang Crime Bill’s passage.

While both Kentucky and West Virginia share a similar history with respect to the development of race, class, and education in central Appalachia, issues of social justice were more prominently articulated along the lines of economic justice—as working-class educators against a small political elite. Red bandanas that educators began wearing during the walkouts were an homage to the Battle of Blair Mountain, the largest insurrection in the United States since the Civil War. To many West Virginians, this battle signifies the state’s longstanding history of everyday people of all races, working together, to fight back against the elite. The difference between the Battle of Blair Mountain and the #55Strong strike, however, is that race and White supremacy were more critical leverage points that served as a wedge between workers in 1921 than they were in 2018. Indeed, the racial makeup of the southern coal counties of West Virginia during the Mine Wars (1912–1921) were far more diverse between non-White and White miners than a century later (Musgrave). Out-migration of the state’s Black population in addition to West Virginia’s low urban density (no city has more than 50,000 residents) created a vastly different terrain of organizing.

● Conflicts in Understanding Racial Justice Demands as Common Good Demands in Oklahoma and Arizona

A race-conscious approach to understanding educator movements in Appalachia with a longer historical lens illuminates that racism and White supremacy have long served as tools to weaken labor movements historically (e.g., during the Mine Wars) and today (e.g., the Gang Crime Bill and White KY 120 leaders’

lack of solidarity with Louisville teachers and students). Like Appalachia, Arizona and Oklahoma have been significantly shaped by histories and ongoing realities of settler colonialism and White supremacy that shape the educational policies at the heart of educators' grievances.

○ The Race Politics of Austerity in Arizona

In Arizona, disinvestment in public education that precipitated the 2018 strike cannot be read outside the race politics that came to a tipping point a decade prior. In 2004, racial minority students officially became the demographic majority in P12 public education, a ratio that has only steadily grown since then. As of 2014, only forty percent of students were White while forty-five percent were Hispanic, according to the 2016 Arizona Minority Student Report by the University of Arizona (Millam et al.). Despite these shifts, Jeanne M. Powers' research illuminates that Arizona's school segregation during the previous twenty-five years has only intensified. Anti-immigrant sentiments among White residents had been building steadily, urged on by prominent state leaders who stoked racist fears of undocumented immigrants as criminals, job-stealers, and the source of the state's poor economic situation.

In 2010, these sentiments came to a head when two nearly simultaneous legislative efforts sought to make it illegal for educators to teach ethnic studies in the state's public schools (a precursor to more widespread educational gag orders today) and the infamous SB 1070 that legally allowed police to routinely asking for citizenship documentation at their discretion. The ethnic studies ban legislation specifically targeted Tucson Unified School District's successful Mexican American Studies program. Then-State Superintendent John Huppenthal, who led the attack, was an ardent supporter of school choice, vouchers, and privatization and helped to oversee the expansion of charter schools in the state. His argument for banning ethnic studies illuminates the centrality of White fear of loss of power as well as the ongoing centrality of the curriculum in maintaining the racial order:

We are not in the entertainment business. We are in the winning values business . . . This is the eternal battle of all time. The forces of collectivism against the forces of individual liberty and we're a beautiful country because we have balanced those things. Now, right now in our country we're way out of balance. The forces of collectivism are suffocating us—it's a tidal wave that is threatening our individual liberties. And so, we, at the national level need to rebalance this and we need to make sure that what is going on in our schools rebalance this. (as quoted in the *Western Free Press* and cited in Acosta 3)

While state leaders engaged in colorblind language to articulate both the ethnic studies ban and SB 1070 legislation as having nothing to do with race but with individual liberties, Powers argues that "'common sense' indicators

for reasonable suspicion will not make interpretive sense without the common sense of race and the historical and contextual cues it conveys” (200-201).

In the wake of statewide strikes in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma, AEU emerged as a rank-and-file-led organization committed to democratic practices and dispersed leadership (as described in the previous chapter). AEU spurred its state and local mainly NEA-affiliated associations to action. The core group of less than a dozen educator-organizers leveraged the resources of the AEA to build a broad infrastructure of training and communication to more than two thousand AEU school site liaisons across the state. In an interview with Erin, AEU organizer, Vanessa Arrendondo, an elementary school educator in rural Yuma, outside of Phoenix, recounted becoming involved after witnessing year after year of increased class sizes, decreasing resources for everyone, and, in particular, for Yuma’s emergent bilingual students and families. Like AEU organizer Rebecca Garelli’s experience in Chicago, the ongoing, largely bipartisan, efforts to defund public education, implement punitive accountability policies, and expand school choice (for a choice few) is experienced most intensely by Arizona’s urban and rural working class Chicanx, Latinx, Native, and communities of color. Student, community, and educator organizers involved in fighting against a statewide ban on teaching ethnic and Mexican American studies in Arizona’s public schools for more than a decade certainly have a keen analysis of the entwinement of austerity, racism, and xenophobia (Acosta).

Unlike some areas of Arizona, rural Yuma also has many more Latinx educators, many of whom Arrendondo felt were largely disconnected from the early organizing of AEU and what many understood as a largely White teacher-led Red for Ed movement (Karvelis “Rural Organizing”). Through Arrendondo’s organizing efforts and engagement with local community leaders, Yuma became active during the strike and educators rose up to become liaisons and coordinate actions and decision-making across the state. Some of AEU’s liaisons were also building representatives for the AEA who found new purpose and responsibility in their dual roles. As AEU organizer, Rebecca Garelli writes, “The AEA understood that our grassroots group, AEU, included the ‘drivers of the bus,’ and union leadership understood that the educators’ voices needed to be out in the forefront” (108).

In an interview with fellow AEU organizer Noah Karvelis for *Critical Education*, Arrendondo said, “So for me, it was very important to ask, ‘How do I connect with the leaders?’” (“Rural Organizing” 97). Then again, Yuma educators became disconnected as the movement shifted focus toward electing education-friendly political candidates and legislation. In 2018, AEU had around two thousand liaisons across the state. The next year, the number dropped to five hundred. As Karvelis described in discussion with Arrendondo, “these rallies for candidates and the efforts to pass the #InvestInEd ballot initiative to increase public education funding after the walkout. They just didn’t have the same energy.” (“Rural Organizing” 100). For Arrendondo, part of the reason the momentum was lost was because they shifted away from the focus on AEU’s and the state association’s five demands: a twenty percent salary increase, the restoration of

education funding to 2008 levels, competitive pay for all support staff, permanent salary including annual raises, and no new tax cuts (The Republic Staff).

Invest in Ed emerged in the aftermath of the walkouts as an initiative of the AEA. It sought to employ lobbying strategies and rallies to push for the passage of Proposition 208. The proposition, which eventually passed in November 2020, restored hundreds of millions of funding for K–12 public education. However, with this shift away from the original demands and toward legislative advocacy, Karvelis and Arrendondo felt that the movement lost much of the original power. Arrendondo attributed this loss and departure as a shift away from directly engaging rank-and-file members in articulating “what they want” and that a return of this energy would require “going back to the members”:

It didn't matter what political party you were. We all believe in the same thing and look at what we were able to do as a grassroots movement with people that had never, including myself, had never been involved in politics. It didn't matter that I didn't have any experience in anything or even how to freaking work an Excel sheet. When we focused on education, it was so powerful. I just have such a hard time letting go of that. It was so powerful. Oh, how do we get back to that?! Because listen—we were able to do something special. (“Rural Organizing” 101)

Here, Arrendondo describes a value that has become core to the emerging efforts toward social movement or social justice unionism across the nation and transnationally: union democratization.

Scholars of social justice caucuses and social movement unionism have articulated the ways in which union democratization in education exists in tension with social movement unionists' efforts to articulate common good and social justice demands for economic, immigrant, and racial justice, among other issues. Unlike West Virginia and similarly to Kentucky, Arizona educator organizers' efforts to push racial justice demands as common good demands were fraught. In a reflective piece theorizing teacher agency in the 2018 strike, Karvelis writes of this tension:

As one teacher organizer put it during a discussion on centering race, gender, and common good in our demands: “We just can't do that here. Arizona isn't ready for that.” This tacit logic dominated the decisions made in Arizona despite many of the organizers, myself included, stated goal of social justice-oriented movement work. This demonstrates that, despite its initial existence outside of the political logics of Arizona, the movement still embraced the tactics of past movements and the inherently understood political limits that exist in the state. There seemed to be an almost unspoken, self-disciplined understanding among activists that some topics and actions were simply off limits. (“Towards a Theory of Teacher Agency” 3)

In her study of the internal organizing practices of New York's Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE) and Philadelphia's Caucus of Working

Educators (WE), Chloe Asselin describes this as “the extension dilemma,” (24). In their efforts to put forward social justice demands, social movement unionists navigate tensions that arise through fears that both fellow (predominantly White) educators and the wider public may be turned off by racial justice frames, while color-blind economic justice frames seemed more appealing.

In Arizona, and other states, the speed with which educators mobilized did not offer much time for the kinds of political education and community-based organizing undertaken by many groups of educators in union caucuses that resulted in social justice-oriented demands (Maton; Maton and Stark; Nuñez et al.; Stark), as Karvelis and others sought to consider. However, studies of social movement unionism illuminate its critical importance. Evidenced by both the prominent battles for ethnic studies and against the criminalization of undocumented immigrants, the state’s disinvestment in Latinx-majority public education students is inextricably entwined with the stoking of unfounded White fears of minoritization and loss of power. Such fears have been mobilized to justify austerity policies, efforts to criminalize ethnic studies, and increased policing and surveillance of Latinx communities.

○ Oklahoma: Indigenous-led, Latinx-led, and Black-led Movements for Education Justice

In Oklahoma, like in Arizona, instances of more formal rank-and-file organization, like that of OTU, emerged relatively quickly in the months leading up to the statewide strike. Unlike many WE members’ years of engagement in community relationship-building and book studies and inquiry groups, which contributed to many members’ racial justice problem framing and, thus, the caucus’ organizational commitment to racial justice, the predominant problem frame (Maton) that emerged was one that centered on raising taxes on the state’s extractive industries and increasing education funding and resources. Formal efforts on the part of rank-and-file educators and the state’s unions were largely disconnected from both community-based education justice organizations and from the far more racially diverse and working-class support staff.

Without such relationships, the OEA, its locals, and the tenuous rank-and-file organizations continued a history of avoiding/marginalizing the problem frames of BIPOC educators and community organizations. Such problem frames have long existed through the legacies of Black teacher organizing in the OANT and OEA, Native community-based and educator-led efforts for indigenizing education and in undocumented youth-led efforts for racial and immigrant justice in education. Citizens United for a Better Education System (CUBES) offers an important example in the context of Tulsa, one of the state’s two largest school districts. Due in large part to the diligent record-keeping of CUBES leader, Darryl Bright, and the combined cumulative historical and movement knowledge of the predominantly Black elders who make up its leadership, the organization published an extensive report in 2015 documenting Tulsa Public Schools’

“improvement initiatives” for predominantly Black (and increasingly Latinx) North Tulsa schools since desegregation, 1954 to 2013 (Commission on Educational Reinvention). Drawing on oral history interviews, district reports and communications, meeting notes, and other records, CUBES recounts decades of concerted community exclusion from articulating the educational needs and strategies for a just education of the city’s African American students.

CUBES formed in 1987 after then-TPS Superintendent Larry Zenke sought to close and consolidate several North Tulsa schools. CUBES, together with the local chapter of the NAACP, ministers, parents, and students boycotted (a sort of community strike) on April 4, 1988. Ministers organized their churches as “schools for the day” during the boycott (Commission on Educational Reinvention ii). Since its initial formation, CUBES and its webs of community organizations have continued to fight against school closures and consolidations, most recently the 2019 closure of Gilcrease Elementary School and consolidation of Monroe Demonstration Academy (BWST Staff). Such closures, consolidations, and charter takeovers of Tulsa Public Schools have been intensified under the leadership of the current superintendent, Deborah Gist, a graduate of the neoliberalist Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation’s Broad Academy (Casey).

Accompanying this chronology, the CUBES’ Commission on Educational Reinvention report offers a call to reinvent (rather than reform) the education of African American young people. The TCTA has maintained a close working relationship with Superintendent Gist, who has systematically ignored CUBES leaders’ calls for a stop to the closure and charterization of North Tulsa schools. Even so, CUBES articulates a vision for public education that understands the necessity of the pedagogical expertise and (accountable) professional autonomy of educators: “The purpose of education must be defined by a collective process that includes a deliberative discourse by educators, with authentic engagement and input from all levels of the District and from grassroots community groups and individuals” (Commission on Educational Reinvention vi). The report articulates an educational vision that centers “interdisciplinary knowledge,” authentic and student-centered learning, and understands students as capable of “contribut[ing] something of value to their schools and communities now; and realize that they don’t have to wait until they have a college degree, become ‘wealthy’ or become a ‘grown-up’” (ix). CUBES envisions a curriculum that is culturally and linguistically relevant and addresses the “root causes” of racist and systemic inequality (x). Since 1987, CUBES has fought to be heard in the district’s decision-making process and to enact their vision for North Tulsan education.

While problem frames resonant with CUBES were present in many individual Oklahoma educators’ analyses of the intertwinement of race, school funding, and de-professionalization issues, these frames were absent in the unions’ or emerging rank-and-file groups’ official problem framing. For example, Oklahoma has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the nation and globe at 1,097 people incarcerated for every 100,000 people, with Black Oklahomans imprisoned at a rate nearly four times that of White residents (Prison Policy Initiative).

On signs at the rallies and all over the movement's Facebook pages, educators called on the state to "fund schools, not prisons" (Blanc, "Rank-and-File Organizing"). The sentiment makes important connections between the rise of prisons and policing and the decline of public education funding. However, the phrase can also mask the ways in which educational policy and practice is enmeshed with the policies and practices of policing and prisons (Meiners, "Right to be Hostile"). As CUBES demonstrates, community-based movements in North Tulsa do not want just any public education, they want to realize a specific vision that values and centers North Tulsa communities' visions and desires rather than systematically exclude them in favor of profitable education management organizations and private curriculum companies. Unions' and educators' lack of engagement with community-based organizations like CUBES or others in the formulation of demands have alienated many of Oklahoma's educators of color from their unions.

Stephanie Price's story offers an illustrative example of how anti-racist organizing is necessary to strengthen educator labor movements. Prior to the walkouts, Price, a speech-language pathologist in Moore Public Schools (at the time), had little involvement with her union local, The Education Association of Moore (TEAM). She recounted experiencing racism often in her work:

Personally, I felt that people made comments that were very insensitive, that were racist. Dealing with micro aggressions, things like, "I saw the movie,"—not me, but a co-worker telling me they had seen the movie, *Selma*, and knowing that some of that had happened, but not realizing the entirety of it. And then proceeding to tell me that they weren't sure why Black people needed African American History Month because it was a long time ago, and we should just get over it. Things like when people were protesting in the streets of Ferguson over police brutality, being told Black people are always overreacting. So comments like those over the span of several years that I just kind of took on and never said anything about, and when I did ask for help, I didn't feel that I got the response that I needed or wanted.

These experiences encouraged Price to join TEAM's Committee for Racial and Ethnic Minorities (CREM). In CREM, Price found mentorship and community with other Black women educators who had similar experiences.

CREM was formed initially as a joint minority issues committee within the union to bring issues of racial and cultural diversity to light in the district. Price said, "Essentially a group of people recognizing that there were inequities, and that things could be better, and coming together to figure out how to make that happen. At some point before I became a member of the group, CREM started to do work that was focused on primarily racial justice."

For Price, CREM was an initial steppingstone, the walkouts were another. Price's experience illuminates that rank-and-file-led unionist efforts toward anti-racism can be a way in for many BIPOC and otherwise marginalized educators

to become active participants in their unions. “It was because of the walkout and the steps leading up to the walkout that I became involved in the union,” Price said. She was energized by the uprising and found meaningful community in left-leaning educators she met, locally and beyond. After the walkouts, Price became the vice president of TEAM during the 2019/2020 school year, continuing to work with CREM to push for racial justice issues in Moore Public Schools, including culturally relevant and anti-racist trainings for district administrators and educators. Through her connections and relationships with educator organizers across the nation, Price became an organizer with National Educators United (NEU), which seeks to cohere and support statewide rank-and-file educator organizations that emerged out of the spring 2018 walkouts.

Price was one of several urban metro area educators galvanized by the strike who attempted to build something like an urban educator caucus across the Oklahoma City and Tulsa areas via the NEA’s National Council of Urban Education Associations. However, internal dynamics and territorialism from existing unions stalled the effort. One of the reasons Price was drawn to organize for NEU was because the group centered issues of racial and justice in their work—in fact, it is the first set of three broad demands they list in their literature and website (NEU Website). Finding little support, for more justice-oriented approaches to organizing, and continuing to experience racism on top of many other workplace issues compounded by the pandemic, Price eventually left the state of Oklahoma altogether.

● Conclusion

West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arizona have vastly different political geographies and histories that inform responses to social and scientific efficiency movements in education. Even as the contemporary rank-and-file movements have won widespread attention through their militant actions, it is important to understand these as one part of a broader terrain of movements that seek to address historical and complex injustices wrought on communities by and through the education system. Conservative legislators’ efforts in each of these places to implement educational gag orders that censor and whitewash classroom texts and curricula (PEN America) have created a culture of fear and surveillance for all educators in recent years. The fervor to implement these laws should be read as, in part, a response to and an effort to dampen the resurgence in educator militancy in recent years.

Price’s story, the exclusion of Louisville educators and anti-racist issues from KY 120, and the resistance Arizona’s educators experienced in trying to center social justice issues illuminates that colorblind approaches to organizing serve to weaken contemporary educator movements, in practice and analysis. White supremacist and settler colonial logics are at the heart of the states’ most oppressive efforts to disinvest in its public education system. While colorblind approaches may (at least temporarily) draw in the support of White educators, it

alienates many BIPOC and justice-oriented educators. Educator movements lose out on the rich knowledge, passionate commitments, and relational resources of community-based movement organizations, like CUBES, Yuma's community leaders, or Kentucky's BLM-related organizations. Further, colorblind approaches to unionism obfuscate how White supremacy and settler colonialism operate in, through, and against the public education system in ways that disproportionately effect BIPOC teachers, students, and communities *and* depress all, including White educators', wages and working conditions.