A Return to Educational Apartheid?
Comments from the Series Co-Editor

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Part of the Critical Education series: A Return to Educational Apartheid? Critical Examinations of Race, Schools, and Segregation

Abstract

Selwyn, co-editor of the “A Return to Educational Apartheid?” series, pays tribute to Critical Education Associate Editor Adam Renner and introduces the latest in a special series of articles focusing on the articulation of race, schools, and segregation. Each of the articles in this series analyzes the extent to which schooling may or may not be returning to a state of educational apartheid.

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Remembering Adam Renner

There is no easy way with hard news. We have lost our friend, colleague, and series co-editor Adam Renner. On a Sunday evening in mid December he was coordinating a phone call of the Rouge Forum steering committee, helping lead a conversation focused on the upcoming Rouge Forum conference to be held in Chicago in May. Adam was, as always, engaged with plans and ideas, while gently and consistently moving us towards productive conversation. He was fully engaged in his teaching work, his organizing, his writing. He and I made plans to talk later in the week about the next essays we hoped to bring to Critical Education. Two days later his wife Gina discovered him unconscious, and rushed him by ambulance to the hospital. Two days after that he was gone.

There are no words for loss this deep and sudden. Shock, disbelief, a sense of the seeming senselessness that allows a young man in his prime, doing extraordinary work, to simply stop. Adam’s passing pits reason against our faith and beliefs, whatever they may be, and there is no way that we can find sufficient answers in reason.

What Adam would be the first to agree to is the notion that our work is larger than any one person, and that our task, our challenge is to continue on with our work. Adam lived a life as full and committed to justice as possible, as a teacher, organizer, writer, editor, musician, husband/partner, and friend. While he could not have known that his time would be so short, he lived his life knowing that there was no time to waste. His sudden passing offers us a reminder that at each moment we have the opportunity to do our best work, to live it as fully as possible, and that we’d best do our good work now. So, with a nod to Joe Hill, we mourn, we organize, and we go on. And, as Adam would say, peace.

Introduction to “Meaningful Social Contact” by Kelly Norris

Most articles in Critical Education focus on the bigger picture, helping us to understand that what we see and experience on a day-to-day basis takes place in a larger, deeper, and historical context. Institutional racism, sexism, classism, and other -isms are rarely visible on a day-to-day basis to most of us. What is visible are the ways in which we have been taught to see, and not see the world. We live out the cliché that we fail to see what constrains our environment: fish don’t see the water in which they swim, and we, at one time, failed to see the atmosphere that sustains us.

This second essay in our series, "A Return to Educational Apartheid?" helps us to human-size the struggle, the work, and the world in which teachers and students spend their lives.

Kelly Norris, as a teacher determined to help sharpen her own vision, and to help her students to begin to see the pond in which they swim, reflects on the tentative steps she and her students took into (or out of) the muck of racism. While it is possible to focus on the historical and theoretical underpinnings of these classroom moments, it is also important, and instructive, to see them as they happen, to see them as human interactions guided by an instructor willing to take a risk, with the courage to be honest, and to act.

Kelly’s essay highlights the complexities of moving theory into practice. Working with students who have spent years in a system often teaching them away from honest dialogue and reflection, working within a system that has placed enormous pressure on teachers to
compromise, to switch our allegiance from the students to the corporate state, how do we bring real change to our classrooms, to our children? Kelly Norris offers us a compassionate, honest look at her first steps, and as the title of her piece makes clear, the focus of those first steps are through the relationships she has formed with her students, and they with each other. These are only first steps, and many more are required, but her essay presents a snapshot of a door opening...
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