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Call for Conversations Introduction

Since its founding in 2010, the *Berkeley Review of Education (BRE)* has committed to supporting an open exchange of ideas regarding the relationship between public education and other pressing issues in society, such as those concerning race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and citizenship. However, publishing a peer-reviewed scholarly journal takes time, and often contemporary political, social, and cultural events—and their impact on public education—warrant a more immediate response.

In 2014, the BRE Editorial Board felt compelled to step outside the structures of traditional academic publishing and provide a space for a wide array of voices—within and beyond academia—to engage in an open and dynamic dialogue. We issued our first Call for Conversations (CFC) to solicit written and multimedia pieces on the intersection between the Black Lives Matter movement and public education. Scholars, practitioners, activists, and students submitted thoughtful and meaningful pieces regarding how the Black Lives Matter movement shaped their work with young people in classrooms and community spaces. Submissions were published on our website and a selection of these were included in Volume 5, Number 2, of the BRE.

Following the 2016 Presidential Election, we revived the CFC in order to provide an intellectual space for individuals to reflect upon and make sense of what the election of Donald Trump would mean for public education in the United States. Again, we were compelled to facilitate a dialogue among individuals from a range of perspectives in order to build community and democratize knowledge. At a time of deep political, cultural, economic, and racial division in our country, we invited the broader education community to exchange ideas and reflections about how we got to this moment and where we go from here. We asked: What does the election of Donald Trump tell us about society in general and education specifically? What can we do in our roles and with our skills to teach, learn, protest, resist, and understand education in the era of Trump?

We received nearly 60 submissions and published 33 pieces on our website between January and March 2017, beginning the day of Trump's inauguration, January 20th.¹ Scholars, practitioners, activists, and students shared critical and reflective essays, poems, sample curricula, and more related to topics such as how to talk to young children about the election, the impact of the election on immigrant and undocumented students, the power of youth activism, school integration as a form of resistance, the election's implications for teacher preparation programs, and the role of scholarship in a so-called "post-truth" era. We are pleased to republish eight of these pieces here, representing just some of the responses evoked among the community of CFC authors.²

¹ <http://www.berkeleyreviewofeducation.com/cfc2016-blog>

² Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the original 33 pieces published online, and the eight republished here, are solely those of the original authors. These views and opinions do not represent those of the BRE, its board, University of California Berkeley Graduate School of Education, University of California Berkeley, other organizations that sponsor the BRE, and/or any/all contributors to the BRE website or the BRE. Please also note that these pieces reflect the authors' reactions at the original time of publication online, January through March 2017.

In “Oklahoma is a Moving Train: On Trump and the (Impossible) Demand for “Neutral” Classrooms in a Red State,” Erin Dyke, Sarah Gordon, and Jennifer Job draw upon survey responses from educators and their own experiences as faculty members to reject the notion of political neutrality in the classroom. They describe how a deep history of racism and conservative politics in Oklahoma render any discussion of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other social issues highly controversial in Oklahoma’s public schools. Yet the authors argue that, by remaining silent on these issues, educators effectively reinforce the legacy of racism, discrimination, and violence long experienced among Oklahoma’s poor students and students of color.

In “Made You Look: Reflecting on the Trump Election and Patterns of False Response,” Adam Freas and Jesus Limon-Guzman focus on the current need to build communities and movements aimed at supporting and empowering marginalized students, particularly undocumented ones. Freas and Limon-Guzman are community college educators and hip-hop scholars, and they draw upon their personal and professional experiences to describe how the 2016 election has generated fear and uncertainty within their communities. At the same time, they argue that current political conditions provide critical opportunities for “radical advocacy paired with action” (p. 100). Written prior to Trump’s September 2017 repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, the authors’ call for advocacy and action is arguably more pressing today than it was immediately following the election.

Cheryl Burleigh’s poem, “Can the DREAM Still Exist?,” similarly focuses on the election’s impact on immigrant and undocumented students. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act provides undocumented youth with a pathway toward permanent residency and citizenship in the United States. Based on conversations with students who depend on DREAM Act grants and programs, Burleigh’s poem depicts the hope these students feel despite anxiety and uncertainty regarding their futures.

In “Understanding and Undermining Fake News From the Classroom,” Adam Rosenzweig calls upon educators to help students navigate the plethora of fake news and unsubstantiated claims made across the Internet. In doing so, Rosenzweig argues, teachers foster students’ ability to be critical readers of online content. These critical thinking and reading skills are foundational to students’ political intelligence and will serve them well as engaged citizens in their communities. In this way, as Rosenzweig describes, teachers embrace a political classroom without necessarily engaging in partisan politics.

Leela Velautham similarly argues for the need to sharpen critical thinking skills among students and the broader public at a time when fake news and post-truth politics proliferate. In “Designing an Intervention to Promote Critical Thinking About Statistics in the General Public,” Velautham describes an intervention that she devised to help individuals differentiate between accurate and misleading statistics more effectively. She argues that interventions like these could help educators teach students the skills needed to distinguish fact from fiction and to recognize when journalists and elected officials misrepresent data for political purposes.

Sixteen-year-old Eleni Eftychiou wrote the poem “For Girls Made of Fire” two days after the election in an effort to express her “[refusal] to be silenced” by those who

supported Trump and fueled his ascent to the presidency. Her lyrical language and evocative imagery illustrate the physical and emotional violence experienced among women and girls. Through the refrain of “i burn,” Eftychiou gives voice to the fury that many women and girls felt after the election.

In “Contextualizing Trump: Education for Communism,” Curry Malott turns to history in order to understand the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Malott argues that the fall of communism paved the way for neoliberalism, leading to wealth redistribution, ensuing economic inequities, and the rise of right-wing political ideologies. According to Malott, these economic and political conditions—more so than racism—led the white working class to overwhelmingly support Trump’s presidential campaign. Thus, Malott claims, resisting Trump requires educating U.S. Americans on the history and logic of communism.

Finally, casting his gaze beyond the United States, Michael Thier argues that global citizenship education can serve as a powerful tool for teaching students to empathize and engage with people and cultures different from their own. In “Curbing Ignorance and Apathy (Across the Political Spectrum) Through Global Citizenship Education,” Thier argues that the narrowly domestic curricular focus across U.S. schools constrains students’ abilities to regard those different from themselves with respect. He maintains that global citizenship education is a key step toward addressing the deep political, social, and cultural rifts afflicting American society today.

We include these eight pieces here to provide readers with a taste of the complete CFC collection. Together, the authors of the 33 pieces published on the BRE website reflect on and analyze public education in the era of Trump through an array of theoretical, empirical, professional, personal, and political perspectives, resulting in a dynamic exchange of ideas. We encourage our readers to visit our website for the full CFC collection, which we hope inspires continued conversation about the role of public education during these uncertain and contentious times.