TEACHING FOR JUSTICE & BELONGING

A JOURNEY FOR EDUCATORS & PARENTS

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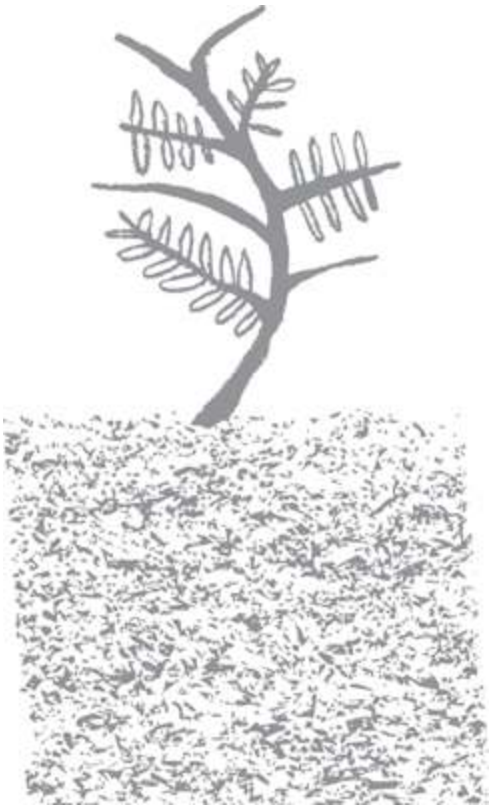

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For our ancestors and parents, who walked us from their past

For our children, who are guiding us to their future

About the Authors

Tehia Starker Glass, PhD (pronounced Tee-ah; she/her/hers) is the Cato College of Education Director of diversity and inclusion and award-winning Associate Professor of Educational Psychology and Elementary Education in the Department of Reading and Elementary Education at the University of North Carolina (UNC) Charlotte. Dr. Glass is also the Inclusive Excellence Executive Fellow for faculty development in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UNC Charlotte. She is a Student Experience Research Network (SERN) fellow and uses her research and expertise to inform education policy. Her research and publications include preparing preservice and in-service teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy, culturally responsive teaching in teacher education, racial identity development, anti-racism curriculum development, and exploring how caregivers and teachers discuss race with children. She is a proud graduate of Bethune-Cookman University (BS in elementary education), University of Northern Iowa (MA in educational technology), and University of Nebraska–Lincoln (PhD in educational psychology).

Dr. Glass is a former elementary school teacher who now consults nationally with educators, schools, districts, companies, and organizations to be more anti-racism oriented. She is a TED speaker (Cultivating Seeds of Curiosity), and educational advisor and certified trainer with Brownicity. She cofounded and is the co-director of the Anti-Racism Graduate Certificate Program at UNC Charlotte. She lives in the Charlotte area with her partner and two boys.

Lucretia Carter Berry, PhD (she/her/hers) is founder and president of Brownicity, an agency committed to making important, scholarly informed, antiracism education accessible, and director of its online membership platform. With the tagline *Many Hues, One Humanity*, Brownicity's mission is to foster education designed to inspire a culture of justice and true belonging for all.

Berry earned her PhD in curriculum and instruction and MA in English from Iowa State University and her BA from South Carolina State University. A former college professor, Berry's research, experience, and accomplishments lie at the intersections of curriculum and instruction, multicultural and antiracism education, and instructional technology. She contributed to the design of and was an instructor for the *Carver Academy Multicultural Learning Communities Project* (Iowa State University), which was nationally recognized for increasing the retention rate for underrepresented students. A leader in her field, Berry was the vice president of the Equity and Social Justice Committee for Society of Information Technology in Teacher Education (SITE). She served on the steering committee for the Social Justice and Digital Equity Pre-conference Symposium, where she had the privilege of working with colleagues from around the world to grant the Outstanding Service to Digital Equity Award.

As a wife in an interracial marriage and mom of three multiethnic children, Berry brings her personal and professional experience to the public sector, where she is passionate about serving children and their adult decision-makers. In 2015, she synthesized a multitude of consultations with children, parents, teachers, and leaders to launch a grassroots education agency, Brownicity. Berry designed curricula and other learning experiences to onboard and support learners of all ages by partnering with individuals, churches, schools, and companies.

Berry designed Brownicity's flagship course and study guide, *What LIES Between Us—Fostering First Steps Toward Racial Healing* (2016), and authored *Hues of You—An Activity Book for Learning About the Skin You Are In* (2022). She is a TED speaker (*Children will light up the world if we don't keep them in the dark*), a course designer, a curriculum specialist for Community School of Davidson (NC), and a contributor for (In)courage.me, a DaySpring online community.

Berry and her husband, Nathan, have three daughters and two Aussiedoodles, and live in the Charlotte, NC area.

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This work is not only dedicated to but also made possible by the thousands of children, families, educators, schools, leaders, churches, companies, and communities who believe in the future that we see and have aligned themselves with the vision to manifest justice and belonging for all. We are extra appreciative of those who lent their voices and stories to these pages to offer our readers additional support and encouragement—especially those from our Brownicity Team, who have been collectively and actively forging a way forward since 2015. We must acknowledge and express gratitude to our parents, who were our first teachers and who taught us to navigate, with style and grace, a society that often devalues its Black daughters.

To our husbands and children: without your consistent support, we would not have been able to commit to and persist in this journey.

And we are especially grateful to the colleagues, friends, and our crew who honor us by choosing to love, learn, and lead with us.

CHAPTER 1
Welcome to Our Garden

> *A garden requires patient labor and attention. Plants do not grow merely to satisfy ambitions or to fulfill good intentions. They thrive because someone expended effort on them.*
>
> *—Liberty Hyde Bailey, Country Life in America*

Welcome to our garden.

We are Tehia Starker Glass and Lucretia Carter Berry. In 2016, we were e-introduced to each other by a mutual colleague who, due to our commitment to antiracism, children, and the adults who care for them, believed that we could potentially make a great team. We met up at Panera for lunch and have been cultivating a friendship and scholarship ever since. We have so much in common. We both earned our undergraduate degrees from HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities). We earned our graduate degrees from HWI's (historically White institutions) in the Midwest. We earned our doctorates in education before we married our extroverted husbands. We. Are. Introverts. And we both taught in classrooms before we had our own children.

Our lunchtime meetup was somewhat out of the ordinary. We arrived with the expectation of learning more about each other, to test the waters. However, as we shared our personal stories, our hearts, and our motivation for supporting educators and parents, we felt as if we had already known each other for years. Before our lunch was over, we had forged our superpowers. We assigned each

other projects, responsibilities, and goal dates. We trusted each other!

As scholars, creatives, advocates, and mothers, we are deeply rooted and invested in cultivating a just and belonging culture in our homes, classrooms, and communities. In fact, we've had the privilege of embodying this practice for years. It has been and continues to be a journey for which the destination is secondary. We've experienced clear pathways (our first meeting), winding roads (the bureaucracy that tends to value performance over embodied transformative practice), and a few potholes (some well-intentioned folks who simply can't connect to the vision). But mostly, our journey has afforded us the opportunity to support parents and teachers—preservice and in-service—as they begin to navigate the terrain of truly caring for the children in their spaces.

The order of the words *justice* and *belonging* is intentional. We have observed that while the idea of belonging is widely accepted and celebrated, the idea of a just home, classroom, or learning environment remains somewhat elusive and abstract. However, we understand that where justice is prioritized, belonging exists and persists.

We are witnessing masses of teachers, teacher leaders, college professors, and parents awaken to the value of cultivating justice and belonging in classrooms, homes, and communities. You are probably one of them. We sincerely appreciate your courageous curiosity and want to offer you support, wisdom, and guidance for your journey. As a parent, educator, or teacher-leader, you are positioned and advantaged to strategically foster learning that inspires a culture of true belonging, liberation, and justice for all.

Dear Parents and Educators,

Allow us to offer you support as you shift your teaching, curricula, instruction, pedagogy, and policies to center antibias and antiracism practices. We will demonstrate how to explore personal and collective racial identities to learn more about self and others. So that you can learn from practical experiences, we share real stories and testimonials from parents and teachers. Because the fear of messing up is real and has paralyzed some people on this journey, we want to help you shift from reservation to results-oriented action. And of course, we share resources and practices for a healthy journey. Essentially, amid these pages we disclose a growth map for a healthy antibias, antiracism journey.

We understand that you want to raise racially literate children and have classrooms and schools that reflect the just, creative, life-giving, hope-filled, connected community that we long for and know is possible. That's why we wrote this book for those who are newer to understanding how race/ism operates in predominantly White schools, and in schools where the population is majority students of color. We want all students—students of color and White students—to have a healthy awareness of self in relation to a racial, ethnic, and cultural group membership and to understand the social and political implications of their racial and ethnic identity. This book is also for parents, caregivers, and guardians who want to help foster a healthy racial and ethnic identity for themselves and the children for whom they are responsible.

In these pages, we discuss our own experiences in raising racially aware children and teaching adults to become racially literate inside and outside of schools to position themselves to create justice and belonging. Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz and the National Council of Teachers of English (2021) defines racial literacy as “a skill and practice by which individuals can probe the existence of racism and examine

the effects of race and institutionalized systems on their experiences and representation in US society. Students who have this skill can discuss the implications of race and American racism in constructive ways.” Similar to language literacy or mathematical literacy, racial literacy affords fluency in helpful dialogue, vision casting, and solutions. Racially literate parents and teachers are able see and dismantle obstacles embedded by racism—institutional, structural, interpersonal, and internalized—that impede our children's potential and aspirations.

Before We Begin

We want to set you up for success. We have witnessed many people forfeit themselves, stall, and even retreat due to disappointments they encounter along the way. Metaphorically speaking, journeys—especially lifelong ones—are wrought with detours, delays, and disappointments. And this journey is no different. We've observed that the most injurious disappointments are contrived by unmet or unrealistic expectations. Cultivating homes, classrooms, and communities for justice and belonging requires a commitment to a steady process—one that demands our informed intention, our full attention, and our greatest engagement.

So that you experience more victories than defeats, we list some common misunderstandings and missteps we've observed along with our recommendations for establishing realistic expectations and an informed intention.

1. ***I simply need to sprinkle a few diverse books, videos, websites, and lessons about Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx people into my curriculum.*** Diversifying content is essential, but it does not address or change the root structure that

excluded the diversity in the first place. Including diverse books and lessons should be consequential instead of peripheral. Simply adding diverse books and lessons is performative. For example, if you want a multifruit tree, would you glue apples and oranges to a lemon tree? No. You would plant a multifruit tree seed and help it grow.

Cultivating justice and belonging must be an embodiment or expression of its core constitution rather than simply tacked on or completed. Think about how over time laws and policies have been amended to reflect justice, but society has been slow to shift. For example, though the Supreme Court banned school segregation in 1954, it took another 10 years to implement desegregation, and even now schools remain heavily segregated by race and ethnicity. The roots of segregation continue to produce its fruit. Episodes 562 and 563 of the podcast *This American Life* and the podcast series *Nice White Parents* examine the current consequences of racial and economic inequalities derived from school segregation and desegregation.

Antiracism is a journey that requires heart work, which we share more about in Chapter 3. At some point along the way, performative actions falter and revert to their origins. Performance is not sustainable. The lemon tree will continue to grow lemons, while the apples and oranges—unrooted—fall aside. No one can afford or deserves a performance. Trying to be someone other than yourself is exhausting and counterintuitive to the work of antiracism.

2. ***I will focus only on my family or classroom***. We've heard only a few people actually say this out loud, but we've observed many parents and schools attempt to do

this work in factions or as a solo project. We know it may feel easier to go at it alone, but as the African proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

It is not only beneficial to you but also imperative to our children that we work together in community. Think about it: If you are the only one in your house or school on a growth journey, you will lack support, feel isolated, and may experience frustration. This work cannot be done in a vacuum. You begin this work first on yourself, which takes a while, but you must also involve the circles of people who are a part of your world. Think about the people with whom you work, spend time, and interact daily. The people you are around form a mirror of yourself. Begin in your home with a partner or children. Then extend the work into the workspace with colleagues, students, administrators, and so on. Ultimately, you don't operate in the world alone, and you cannot do this work alone.

3. ***I am a White person who does not have permission or credibility to do this work. I must rely on BIPOC, especially Black people, to teach me how to do this.*** BIPOC is an acronym for Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color used to acknowledge that not all people of color face racial injustice in the same way. For example, Black and Indigenous Americans are more severely impacted by systemic racial injustices than Asians and White-appearing Latinx. Nevertheless, there is a false pretense that only BIPOC—especially Black people—can be or are naturally qualified to teach for justice and belonging.

   We do not know where this idea originated, but this fallacy sets us up for failure. BIPOC didn't create the

issues that exist in our world due to racism, and BIPOC cannot bear the burden of repair. We should not and cannot rely on BIPOC to do all the work. White people must pull their weight as well. We all have been racialized, and therefore we all need to examine how this socialization has propagated disconnection, injustice, and inequities. Just because someone is racialized as White does not mean they are incapable of becoming racially literate and engaging in constructive problem-solving. White people are not automatically disqualified. Becoming antiracist to foster justice and belonging in schools, homes, and communities is attainable by *anyone* who remains committed to the journey.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), about 80 percent of public school teachers are White, and the remaining 20 percent are teachers of color. It cannot be expected that 20 percent of teachers will bear 100 percent of the load. White teachers can take on the responsibility, embody antiracism, and create just and belonging schools and classrooms. However, we encourage White parents and educators to value and learn from BIPOC antiracists. One of our colleagues who is White told us that when she began her antiracism journey, she skipped over all the resources by BIPOC to find books written by White authors. Fortunately, she realized her error right away. By overlooking BIPOC voices, she unconsciously prioritized comfort and familiarity. She valued what White authors had to say about racial injustice over BIPOC perspectives. While you should not expect BIPOC to do all the work by themselves, you should definitely value and prioritize our work.

4. ***Antiracism centers Black people. I am a person of color who is not Black, so antiracism excludes me.***

The toxicity of racism has impacted all of us. In the construction of race, we all have been assigned a social rank and role in the hierarchical caste system. Within these social rankings and roles, we have *all* been dehumanized. Therefore, we all need to detox and deconstruct from the social and economic stronghold racism has on our lives. We all need to become antiracist. Antiracism is the practice of identifying and opposing racism. We can all learn to do that well. Perhaps because you have been exposed only to Black leaders in the movement, you assume that antiracism centers Black people. First, don't assume that a Black antiracist is concerned only with Black liberation. We understand that none of us are free until we all are free, as Maya Angelou shared. Antiracism centers justice and belonging for all.

Second, don't feel excluded by the so-called Black–White binary. Originally, during the founding of the United States, race was constructed into two-ish categories: enslaved Africans subsequently designated "Black" (Negro); and European colonizers and settlers allowed to profit from land ownership designated as "White." So, when structural and systemic racism is explored in historical contexts, its binary foundation remains central to the conversation. However, after the Civil War, immigration policies played a significant role in redefining and expanding the racial caste system to include all non-White Anglo-Saxton Protestants.

Finally, if you have made the choice to opt out of the opportunity to become antiracist and cultivate justice and belonging in your sphere of influence, please do not criticize the people who take on that responsibility. Regardless of your race and ethnicity, choose to support and work in solidarity with those who are

making pathways in the movement for collective liberation. Bear some of the load. Many hands make light work.

5. ***My children or students are too young for antiracism. Young children don't see skin color. I don't see skin color.***

   Often used by someone who is attempting to sound nonracist, race-based “colorblindness” is the idea that you do not *see* skin color or notice differences in race, or if you do, you do not treat people differently based on race. Colorblindness ideology is problematic in that it suppresses public discourse on race and masks discrepancies in decision-making.

   Unfortunately, we've witnessed parents and educators emphatically profess colorblindness—that is, until their child or student exacts racial prejudice, shows signs of internalized racism, or experiences racial *othering*. Othering occurs when an individual or group attributes difference as negative to set themselves apart as an *in-group of belonging* from an *out-group of not belonging*. Othering legitimizes the marginalization, exclusion, and sometimes even violent extinction of out-groups (Marti, personal communication, 2020 [Slack]). Because silence and pretending to not notice phenotypic differences seems easier, many adults want to believe that children do not see skin color and are too young for antiracism. However, the colorblind approach inadvertently teaches children that noticing phenotypic differences (or talking about race/ism) is taboo, bad, or shameful. Generally when children ask questions about skin tone or race, adults delineate to abstractions like, “We are all equal,” “We treat everyone the same,” “We see only people; we don't see skin color.” *Color shaming*, or

being racially colorblind or *color mute,* does not give adults or children the skills or language to understand race.

A child's curiosity about phenotypic and social differences is not quenched with “we are all equal.” Children see differences in skin color and want to talk about these differences—especially with their peers. In *Rubbing Off* (Greater Good Magazine, Parenting & Family, 2008), Allison Briscoe-Smith, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the Wright Institute, sheds some light on the developmental process of children:

For years, studies have found that children who recognize these [skin tone or racial] differences from an early age show a stronger general ability to identify subtle differences between categories like color, shape, and size—which, in turn, has been linked to higher performance on intelligence tests… . Children between the ages of 4 and 7 who show this advanced ability to identify and categorize differences are actually less prejudiced. So parents, rest assured: When children notice and ask about racial differences, it's a normal and healthy stage of development.

It is natural for children to make distinctions and categorize. But parents and teachers who have ascribed to being racially colorblind have little experience talking about skin tone and race without feeling like they are somehow being racist or contributing to race problems.

Babies notice skin tone differences as early as 6–18 months. By age 3, preschoolers group themselves based on differences like race and sex and make decisions to associate with friends who look like them. By age 5, even when it is not discussed, children see