

**BUILDING SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIONISM:
RANK AND FILE TEACHERS' STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL AND
EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN CHICAGO**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers' experiences combining their activism for education and racial justice can inform social justice unionism theory in practice. To explore this topic, this study examined the lived experiences of 13 rank and file teachers in the Chicago Teachers Union as they engage in education justice work and the broader Movement for Black Lives in the city. The research questions were: 1.) How do rank and file teachers in a social justice union engage with racial justice movements? 2.) What types of tensions, conflicts, or moments of dissonance emerge in this engagement and how do teachers deal with those? 3.) How can teachers' lived experiences in this context inform theory around building social justice unionism in practice?

This study employed thematic narrative inquiry and utilized ethnographic data collection methods to examine participants' storied experiences of union activism, racial justice struggle, and personal struggle to balance both. Data collection involved one year of on the ground field work in Chicago where I engaged in participant observation of teachers in their activism. In addition to participant observation, 13 semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers, all whom identified as active in the work of their union and broader social justice struggles.

The results of my data analysis are presented in the form of an ethnographic performance text called ethnodrama. Selected narratives from interviews, participant observation, and document analysis were edited and adapted into a play script which allowed me to engage a plurality of voices and capture multiple aspects of teachers' experiences in the struggle for racial and educational justice in a dynamic way.

Findings suggest that the teachers experience internal union tension and disagreement on the topics of race, police violence, and the definition of social justice unionism itself. Moreover,

in addition to struggling with colleagues on the above topics, teachers also struggle personally to maintain their commitment to their activism amidst ongoing attacks on their profession and working conditions. Findings illustrate that social justice unionism is as an ongoing, dynamic process that is continuously unfolding and in the making.

Lay Summary

This research looks at how rank and file members of a social justice teachers union combine their activism around issues of educational justice and equity with movements for racial justice. To explore this topic in a specific context, this study examined how 13 rank and file teachers in the Chicago Teachers Union engage in education justice work and the broader Movement for Black Lives in the city.

Findings suggest that the teachers experience internal union tension and disagreement on the topics of race, police violence, and the definition of social justice unionism itself. Moreover, in addition to struggling with colleagues on the above topics, teachers also struggle personally to maintain their commitment to their activism amidst ongoing attacks on their profession and working conditions. Findings illustrate that social justice unionism is as an ongoing, dynamic process that is continuously unfolding and in the making.

Preface

This thesis is original, independent work by the author, Michelle Gautreaux. I designed the research process, conducted all data collection and analysis, and wrote this dissertation following guidance from my supervisor and other committee members. This research received a certificate of approval from the University of British Columbia, Office of Research Services on May 11, 2017. The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board certificate number is H17-00534.

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List of Abbreviations

AFL- CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
ATA	Atlanta Teachers Association
BLM	Black Lives Matter
CORE	Caucus of Rank and File Educators
CPAC	Civilian Police Accountability Council
CPD	Chicago Police Department
CPS	Chicago Public Schools
CTU	Chicago Teachers Union
FOP	Fraternal Order of Police
MBL	Movement for Black Lives
TSJ	Teachers for Social Justice
UFT	United Federation of Teachers

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pouring me a glass of wine when I needed, lending me a listening ear, and helping me to ‘get out of my head’ when things got too stressful. I could not have done this without you.

Dedication

To the teachers on the ground in Chicago struggling for a better world, you are an inspiration to so many.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout my doctoral studies in the Faculty of Education at UBC, my driving interest has always been concerned with understanding why progressive social movements often times operate in isolation (or in some cases, opposition) to one another, and what might bring them together to forge greater collective unity for social change. The grassroots movement to resist corporate education reform is one progressive movement that has gained important momentum in the United States over the past decade. This movement lies at the intersection of many other social movements, one of them being the struggle for racial justice. As my interest is in understanding how movements connect, I went back to my home city of Chicago to better understand how these two movements were intersecting.

Soon after arriving in Chicago, one of the first events I attended was a city-wide “Day of Action” called by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), along with other unions and members of the Fight for \$15 and Black Lives Matter movements, to show cross-movement solidarity, bring awareness to the key issues facing the city’s workers and communities of color, and expose the city’s elected officials who were refusing to take any meaningful action to address them. During the afternoon rally where all attendees were gathered downtown, something took place that indicated some important underlying tensions exist between movements. One of the final speakers of the rally expressed with strong language her frustration with the ongoing experience of police violence in Chicago and a reluctance on the part of other movements present at that rally to address that as part of their racial justice work. The resulting backlash to the speaker’s comments in the days that followed further illustrated the ongoing tensions between movements. This moment sparked a question: Why do movements, which in theory should be in alliance with

one another, experience these moments of tension and how might we better understand those in our work moving forward? This question served as an important starting point for my research.

1.1 Research Purpose

This study is driven by three inter-related aims or purposes. One purpose is to examine teachers' lived experiences combining their activism for education and racial justice in a specific context. For this reason, this research explores the lived experience of thirteen rank and file members of the Chicago Teachers Union, a union that has emphasized the connection between racial and education justice in its work. The second purpose is to contemplate how understanding teachers' lived experiences in this movement work can inform social justice unionism theory in practice. Finally, a third related purpose of this research is to explore in more detail the process of organizing to build a larger anti-racist, working-class movement and understand factors that can impede such efforts. As discussed more below, while a growing body of scholarship has emphasized the potential role of social justice unionism in the labor movement's revitalization, few studies focus on challenges and internal movement tension.

1.2 Scholarly Contribution

This research seeks to contribute to the fields of social movement theory and labor movement scholarship in two primary ways. The first is to contribute to social movement theory by providing a less common account and examination of a concrete struggle on the ground, one that centers the lived experiences of teachers involved in movement work rather than abstractly examine pre-determined factors from theoretical models. The second is to contribute to labor movement scholarship by providing a more detailed, nuanced examination of the experience of practicing social justice unionism to help inform greater theoretical development of the concept and help bridge the gap between theory and practice that currently exists. Moreover, by focusing

on a concrete example of the tensions that can arise between social justice unionism and racial justice movements, the hope is that such an account—one that is closely connected to a concrete struggle ‘on the ground’—will contribute to a larger ongoing conversation around the role labor can have within larger struggles for racial justice.

1.3 Research Questions:

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do rank and file teachers in a social justice union engage with racial justice movements?
2. What types of tensions, conflicts, or moments of dissonance emerge in this engagement?
How do teachers deal with those?
3. How can teachers’ lived experiences in this context inform theory around building social justice unionism in practice?

1.4 Research Context

1.4.1 Corporate education reform in Chicago

This research explores how rank and file teachers in Chicago, Illinois engage in the fight for education and racial justice in their city. All teachers interviewed are active in movement work and the work of their union. The city of Chicago has served as a key experimental city for corporate education reform. The “Renaissance 2010” plan announced in 2004 advocated the closing and/or turnaround of ‘underperforming schools’ and re-opening them as charter schools and with non-unionized teachers (Lipman & Haines, 2007).¹ Then, in 2013, the plan to close

¹ Charter schools are publicly funded but privately-operated schools in the United States. Charter schools are promoted to “inject market competition and “choice” into the public sector” (Saltman, 2009, p.53). They have been an integral part of the corporate education reform movement in the U.S., which has

schools accelerated with the shutdown of 50 schools in one go (Lipman, 2011). The 50 school closings were *in addition* to the more than 40 previous school closings since the early 2000's (Lipman, 2011). These school closings were concentrated in poor black and brown communities on Chicago's south and west sides.

Moreover, as public education in the United States suffers from draconian budget cuts, along with mental health clinics and other social services, Chicago spends \$4 million a day on policing (Kaba & Edwards, 2012). This spending on policing in Chicago does not take into account the growing amount of money paid to families in lawsuits with the city's police department, as Chicago has a long history of police torture and misconduct targeted primarily against poor people of color (U.S. Dept of Justice, 2017). Chicago, along with other cities in the United States, has been under serious scrutiny and national outrage recently over its historically violent and corrupt racist police force (Taylor, 2019).

1.4.2 Grassroots organizing in Chicago

Over the past decade, grassroots community organizations and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) have mounted a strong resistance movement to not only stop the main features of Chicago's corporate school reform (closings, starving schools of resources, pitting charter schools against public schools, etc.) but to also put forward a vision of what public education could look like for Chicago's students ('A Just Chicago', 2015; Lipman, 2017). This grassroots resistance encompasses many different organizations, such as community organizations, neighborhood associations, non-profits, the CTU, among others. Some of the most prominent

advanced a reliance on market-based approaches to education policy. For a more detailed analysis of charter schools and their impacts on public education in the U.S. see Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2009; Scott, 2009).

examples of the strength and militancy of this grassroots resistance has included the 10-day Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike in 2012, the 34-day hunger strike by African American parents, grandparents, community members, and teachers to re-open the formerly closed Dyett High School, the campaign to get an elected representative school board for the city of Chicago, to name just a few of the most prominent examples.²

1.4.3 The movement for black lives

As the grassroots movement against corporate education reform has grown over the past decade in Chicago, it coincided with the emergence of the Movement for Black Lives (MBL) across the country in response to state sanctioned violence—in all its forms—against people of color (Heatherton, 2016). Chicago serves as a solid base for the MBL struggle nationally. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, Chicago’s militant organizing scene of today—in particular, the Black liberation struggle—has developed in a context that has a rich history of radical and militant organizing. As these struggles develop, the connections between struggles for racial justice, education justice, and the need to confront state violence continue to be made and feature prominently in grassroots resistance to Chicago’s corporate ruling class elite on the rest of the city’s population.

#Black Lives Matter emerged in 2012 and took hold more broadly in 2014, after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri to protest the violence that communities of color experience at the hands of police (Ransby, 2015). Now referred to broadly as the Movement for Black Lives (an umbrella term used to collectively refer to all of the various organizations and

² For a detailed analysis and explanation of the Dyett hunger strike, see Lipman, (2017), as well as the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett video <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/publiceducation/film/dyett-hunger>

people that work under the broader MBL banner), the work of the movement is grounded in a critical analysis of state violence, anti-black racism, economic injustice, and heteronormative patriarchy and has “embraced a radical Black feminist praxis as its ideological bedrock” (Ransby, 2017). The MBL is not just about fighting against police violence but all violence against Black communities—i.e., economic violence, systemic and historical underinvestment, lack of equitable education funding, mass incarceration, among others.

As the Movement for Black Lives continues to develop and grow, connections are being made to many issues, and one of those is the issue of education. The various groups and organizations that make up the larger Movement for Black Lives take an intersectional approach to their work and connecting the deleterious effects of corporate education reform on black and brown youth has been an important component of their work and policy demands.

For example, in the summer of 2016, the Movement for Black Lives issued their policy platform, which included a critique of the corporate education reform movement. The movement collectively called for a halt to charter school expansion and demanded full funding of public schools. The Movement’s policy platform also called for divestment from policing and incarceration and, instead, investment in education, jobs programs and restorative justice approaches, among other areas. Furthermore, the call for the removal of police from schools and the implementation of positive approaches to deal with student behavior are clearly stated in the MBL policy platform (<https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>).

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Marxist conceptualization of capitalism

My theoretical framework for this research draws on both Marxist and critical scholarship from various academic fields. My analysis is firstly informed by an overarching Marxist critique of capitalism. Employing Ford's (2015) definition of capitalism,

Capitalism, as a social and economic system driven by the production and accumulation of (surplus) values, predicated upon the rule of private property, and maintained through the reproduction of the capital-labor relation...seeks to privatize and commodify not only goods but also social relations and subjectivities... (p. 98).

This research, then, is grounded in an understanding of the capitalist system as a whole—as a social, political, and economic system—and the manners in which it influences and shapes all aspects of human life (Barker, 2011; Cox & Nilsen, 2014; Ford, 2015, 2016; Marx & Engels, 1845, 1848). The production and accumulation of surplus values in capitalism is foundationally exploitative in nature (Marx & Engels, 1848; Malott & Ford, 2015). Moreover, capitalism relies upon the oppression of particular groups in society as a way to maintain this exploitation. Sexism and gender oppression, racism, the oppression of LGBTQ people, and ableism are intrinsic to capitalist, patriarchal society (Camp & Heatherton, 2016). Furthermore, colonial conquest, imperialism, and state violence are fundamental to capitalism's growth, spread and survival on a global scale (Camp, 2016; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Lenin, 1916/2015).

1.5.2 Racism and capitalism

As this research specifically examines how teachers struggle for racial and education justice, an understanding of the functions of racism within capitalism, as well as the role of corporate education reform within broader changes in global capitalism over the last several

decades are an indispensable part of my conceptual framework. To understand racism in US society at large and within the education system, requires an understanding that capitalism is rooted in racial oppression. Racism and slavery were the foundation upon which U.S. capitalism was built (Caceres, 2008; see also Davis, 1981; Marx, 1867 among many others). Capitalism as a system of exploitation has a “systemic imperative... to sharpen inequality” (Puryear, 2013, p. 87) and maintain segments of the working-class population divided. Moreover, as capitalist economies cannot ever achieve full employment and are prone to cyclical crisis, it’s necessary for capitalism to maintain a “reserve army of unemployed” (Puryear, 2013 p. 87; see also Ransby, 2015). Racism, then, serves a key function in the production and maintenance of the ‘reserve army’ of workers. It essentially serves to hinder solidarity and unity amongst the multi-racial, multi-gendered, multi-national working-class, which helps maintain the system’s exploitation (Davis, 1981).

1.5.3 Interlocking oppressions within capitalism

Delineating the relationship between race and capitalism does not mean to suggest that the sole oppressions under capitalism are racial and class oppression alone. As Black feminist scholars and organizers such as Anna Julia Cooper, Claudia Jones, Frances Beal, the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, and Kimberle Crenshaw (to name just a few) have all articulated in various ways, within capitalism “multiple oppressions reinforce each other to create new categories of suffering” (Taylor, 2017, p. 4; see also Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991; Jones, 1949; Lorde, 1982 to name a few).³ The experience of Black women,

³ For a detailed analysis of the relationship between women’s exploitation and capitalism, see Davis, 1981; Federici, 2004. For an analysis of the intersections between race, class, gender, and disability see Evevelles, 2013. For an analysis of the relationship between colonial conquest and capitalism in the US,

for example, cannot be analyzed, understood and resisted in terms of racism or sexism alone (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991; Taylor, 2017). Or the experience of a person identifying as transgender and Latinx cannot be analyzed or understood solely in terms of heteronormativity/LGBTQ oppression alone; identifying as a person of color within a heteronormative white supremacist society means experiencing oppression along the lines of race, gender, and sexual orientation simultaneously. In short, not everyone in the working-class experiences oppression within capitalist society in the same way. As I discuss in more detail below (section 1.5.6), understanding the ways in which various oppressions intersect and reinforce each other within capitalism has important implications for social struggle and working-class organization.

1.5.4 State violence

Racialized state violence has been a fundamental component of U.S. capitalism since its inception. From the codification of slavery into law, continuing through Jim Crow segregation leading up to the present day, racialized state violence has persisted, albeit in altered forms throughout generations (Alexander, 2010). The modern forms racialized state violence takes are through policing, surveillance, mass incarceration, inhumane immigration policy, and the erosion of key components of the social safety net via neoliberal social policies, to name some of the most prominent examples (Alexander, 2010; Kelley, 2016).⁴ As Alexander (2010) astutely

see Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014. For a critical analysis of the limits of legal reform within capitalism and an alternative path for queer and trans liberation, see Spade, 2011.

⁴ In this research, I employ the term neoliberalism to be understood not as separate or distinctly different from capitalism, but rather, as the current form of capitalism in which we are currently living (Ford, 2015, Malott & Ford, 2015). Neoliberalism constitutes a cultural, social, political, and ideological as well as economic project of ruling class restoration whereby the logic of the private sector is transferred to public services and there is a drive to subsume everything to the rules and dictates of the market (Ford, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010; Peck & Tickell, 2007; Screpanti & Zamagni, 2005). Neoliberal reforms have

observes, “We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it (p. 2; see also Puryear, 2013).

Racism and state violence are co-constitutive; racist ideologies about certain groups of people undergird a particular logic that justifies excessive policing and punishment by the state for the sake of maintaining ‘safety’, or social control (Alexander, 2010; Camp & Heatherton, 2016). Critical scholarship from the fields of sociology, political science and criminology have documented the increased role that policing has played in “race-class subjugated communities” (Soss & Weaver, 2017) across the United States, especially since the turn towards neoliberal economic policies in the late 1970’s (see also Puryear, 2013). Within this time, as cities have been plagued by disinvestment, the punitive role of the state—in particular policing—has played an increasingly prominent role in dealing with the social consequences of capitalism (brought on by neoliberal social policies) through a crime and punishment approach (Puryear, 2013; Soss & Weaver, 2013). This has extended and deepened the reach of policing (and surveillance) into pretty much all facets of the day to day lives of communities of color, including schools (Kaba & Edwards 2012; Soss & Weaver, 2017; Taylor, 2019).

1.5.5 Corporate education reform

Grounded in an understanding of the relationship between racism and capitalism, my conceptual framework also draws on critical educational scholarship to examine how corporate education reform fits into the picture. My framework is rooted in an examination of how

consisted of lowering taxes for corporations and the rich, cuts to social programs and the gutting of the welfare state at large, deregulation of business, attacks on unions, and the privatization of formerly public goods and services.

corporate education reform is connected to broader changes in global capitalism, as well as the racial impact of education reform policies, particularly in urban contexts. With regards to the first point, as Ford (2015a) explains, “The demands of the international global capitalist economy dictate the necessity of the reorganization of domestic education along privatized (and therefore commodified) lines” (p. 101). Such reorganization of domestic education has been the hallmark of U.S. education policy for the past 35 years and consists of both a ‘business agenda for education’ and a ‘business agenda in education’ (Hill, 2004; Hill & Kumar, 2009).

The ‘business agenda for education’ sees educational achievement as connected to the continuation of U.S. economic and political hegemony in the world. Corporate education reform efforts reflect business interests and needs to ensure quality human capital for corporations and governments and prepares students for new types of work in an ever changing, volatile global marketplace (Hursh & Martina, 2004; Kumar, 2014; Lipman 2011; Mathison & Ross, 2004; Saltman, 2009, 2014a, 2014b). The ‘business agenda in education’ sees public education as a lucrative profit making industry that includes everything from textbook publishers, testing and test preparation companies, and curriculum developers who are capitalizing on standards and testing accountability, to educational technology companies who develop curriculum and ‘personalized learning’, to for-profit schools and charter franchises, to real estate companies who profit from renting and selling school buildings, among others (Au & Ferrare, 2015; Burch, 2009; Hill, 2004; Saltman, 2009). U.S. Philanthrocapitalists like the Koch brothers, Bill and Melinda Gates, Eli Broad, along with the current U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, see education as a “private consumable service” (Saltman, 2009) and are particularly interested in using their influence and money to push pro-voucher, pro-charter school schemes to provide ‘choice’ to parents and families (Greenhouse, 2018). While these schemes are promoted, state

governments across the United States have decreased funding to public education, increased class sizes and denied salary increases to public school teachers (leading to the wave of teacher strikes across the country in 2018 (Sainato, 2019)).

In sum, the following features characterize corporate education reform efforts: the standardization and narrowing of curriculum to emphasize math, science and technology (at the expense of social sciences, philosophy and humanities), the expansion of test-based accountability policies to measure student learning and hold teachers accountable, the promotion of school choice via charter schools and voucher programs (whereby parents and students are positioned as consumers of educational services), the borrowing and implementation of corporate management models to improve education and train school leaders, teachers and administrators, and the expansion of fast-track, alternative teacher education programs, to name a few of the most prominent of these reforms (Au, 2011; Au & Ferrare, 2015; La Londe, Brewer & Lubienski, 2015; Sahlberg, 2012; Saltman, 2014a; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

1.5.6 Race and corporate education reform in urban contexts

As this research centers on teachers in the Chicago Teachers Union and their activism for both racial and education justice, an understanding of how corporate education reform plays out in urban contexts and the racial impact of its policies are key components of my conceptual framework. Urban school districts in particular have been the testing ground for corporate education reform experimentation in the United States. In urban districts, such as Chicago, school closings and charter expansion are key features of the corporate reforms. As critical scholars and public school teachers have argued, school closings, often justified due to a need to cut expenses and plug the ‘budget gap’ in urban school districts (due to regressive tax policies and austerity politics), disproportionately affect African American and Latino students and

teachers (Jack & Sludden, 2013). School closings and charter school expansion are also justified as ways to address and improve low-performance and induce ‘choice’ and competition into the educational market as ways to improve student achievement (Jack & Sludden, 2013; Means, 2014; Saltman, 2014a).

As critical scholars and teachers have argued, however, corporate education reform in urban contexts is not just simply about the economic potential that injecting privatization schemes into public education has to offer. The features of corporate education policy in urban settings must be understood within a broader framework of white supremacy, capitalism, and state violence, as discussed above. As Kelley (2016) explains, “the toxic mix of privatization, free market ideology, and a ‘punitive state’ come together in our schools” (p. 30). In addition to the growing police presence in schools (as mentioned above), the defunding of education, school closings, and punitive disciplinary policies that lead students—particularly students of color—into the criminal justice system (also referred to as the ‘school to prison pipeline’⁵) are all examples of modern forms of state violence as well (Kaba & Edwards, 2012; Kelley, 2016; Lipman, 2017). Furthermore, while schools are staffed with police officers, they do not have counselors, psychologists, nurses or librarians (Kaba & Edwards, 2012). In other words, another aspect of state violence in terms of education in urban contexts has been the massive expansion of funding of policing and a steady decrease in funding of social services and education.

⁵ As Kaba & Edwards (2012) explain, “The “School to Prison Pipeline” describes the reality that many young people are being pushed out of school and into the juvenile and adult legal systems because of harsh discipline policies, high stakes testing, and social oppression” (p. 3).

1.5.7 Resistance under capitalism: Marxism, interlocking systems of oppression and social struggle

A final important component of my conceptual framework centers on collective resistance to capitalist exploitation, racialized state violence, and corporate education reform. My analysis is concerned with exploring the possibilities and potential various movements have to join efforts towards resisting various forms of exploitation under capitalism and creating broader social transformation (Malott & Ford, 2015). It is only from the present set of circumstances and practices that we can begin to discern potentialities and possibilities for the future and as such, in this research I am interested in exploring the ways that movements can connect in struggle and understanding reasons for why movements may connect well theoretically but in practice experience tension and disconnection.

Two key struggles are central to this research, that of the labor movement (teachers' unions) and the Movement for Black Lives (MBL). A Marxist analysis of capitalism together with an intersectional lens provide the foundation upon which to analyze, theorize, and strategize ways collective resistance under capitalism may take. Recognizing the various ways that multiple oppressions intersect under capitalism is both a lens to expand political analysis and an organizing principle (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Taylor, 2017). It's meant to guide how social movements take on the task of (re)orienting their organizing. Understanding how various oppressions intersect and connect can create greater political clarity of how various struggles connect under capitalism as well as to create deeper commitments of solidarity to organizing on a broad scale. It's an answer to the reticence that some groups may have around 'what does that struggle have to do with us?'. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 5, this is an important organizing principle that organized labor can and should adopt to break beyond its limitations of

classifying issues into ‘bread and butter’ issues on the one hand and ‘social justice’ issues on the other. An intersectional lens illuminates how such a distinction is not possible under capitalism and also points to how single-issue frames are ultimately insufficient to end racism, class exploitation, gender oppression, etc. Because racism and other forms of oppression under capitalism are so deeply rooted in capitalist society, any movement to end racism (or gender oppression or other forms of oppression) must also be an anti-capitalist struggle (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Davis, 1981; Malott & Ford, 2015; Puryear, 2013; Taylor, 2015).

1.6 Researcher Positionality

Reflecting on my positionality as a researcher was a central part of my research journey. As a scholar whose research is grounded in radical, critical perspectives concerned with ending oppression in all its forms, I take seriously the responsibility to examine and understand how my racial and gender identity as a white cis-gender female, my working-class social background and upbringing in Chicago, as well as my professional background as an educator all impact and shape my thoughts, reactions, and interpretations in the research process (Diangelo, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2007; hooks, 1993; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). My upbringing in Chicago and my experience as an educator informed my decision to choose Chicago as a place to carry out research. I was born and raised in a predominantly white, working-class neighborhood on Chicago’s southwest side, a neighborhood where many City of Chicago employees, such as firefighters, teachers and police officers live (I elaborate more on this in Chapter 5). Chicago is a hyper-segregated city. While I have a grounded understanding of what day-to-day life is like for many people in the city (and the problems and struggles the city’s working- class population experience), my understanding has been shaped by my identity as a white woman living in a patriarchal white supremacist society, and more specifically, living in a city segregated along

race and class lines, where most of my neighbors, childhood friends, and co-workers have the same racial, cultural, and economic background as me. Critically engaging with and interrogating the limitations of my understanding around the lived experiences of Chicago's residents of color were central to my research journey.

Throughout my time in the field conducting research (and continuing through data analysis), I strove to listen and learn as much as I could about the lived experiences of my research participants—many whom are women of color—and the key topics that are foundational for understanding my research context; these include the history of Black organizing in Chicago, the brutal repression Black organizers have and continue to suffer at the hands of the state, a structural analysis of state sanctioned violence in all its forms, what it means to understand the world through the lens of those most marginalized in society, and the revolutionary aspiration of “...the reorganization of society based on the collective needs of the most oppressed” (Taylor, 2017, p.5). As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2017) further explains, “...if you could free the most oppressed people in society, then you would have to free everyone” (p. 5).

In addition to my upbringing, my interest in and connection to the education justice movement in Chicago is informed by my background in education (my Bachelor's degree is in K-12 Education with a focus on Spanish Language and Literature), my teaching experience as a K-12 English teacher overseas (where I experienced the global manifestation of corporate education reform), and my teaching experience as an adjunct instructor at various community colleges in the Chicago area. Through the precarious work of being an adjunct, I experienced the increasing disregard, disrespect, and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession, a profession made up of mostly women. As critical feminist scholars have demonstrated, it is not a

coincidence that a profession made up mostly of women is consistently under attack and disrespected, plagued by extremely low wages and an overall disregard for all that goes into teaching (so much of the labor performed in educational work is the labor of care, work that has historically been expected to be provided by women without compensation or acknowledgement) (see Grumet, 1981; Lather, 1987 for a fuller discussion). With the neoliberalization of higher education, the disrespect is especially acute for adjuncts, who receive extremely low pay, no healthcare benefits (I was only able to access healthcare through being on Medicaid), and no job security (Kezar, DePaola, & Scott, 2019). At the same time, while adjuncts receive poverty wages, students are charged exorbitant tuition fees for simply trying to access higher education and continue their learning. Through this lived experience of precarious adjunct labor at a public state college, I increasingly understood how my experience and struggle was connected to the fight for quality public education and overall working-class struggle that the Chicago Teachers are waging.

My experience as an adjunct educator in Chicago coincided with my initial participation in grassroots education justice organizing in the city. I became involved in education justice organizing in Chicago through participation in a grassroots organization called Teachers for Social Justice. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, my participation consisted of attending rallies, protests, and marches, helping organize events (carrying out logistical duties, flyering for the event, sending out email reminders, and being on ‘clean up duty’ the day of an event). As an active participant observer in the movement context in Chicago, I navigated the tension between actively supporting and being an ally in the struggle of the movements for educational and racial justice, while at the same time maintaining a researcher lens so as not to take the research context

or events that occurred for granted (Agostine-Wilson, 2013). In Chapter 3, I take up this concept in more detail as it relates to my time in the field collecting data.

1.7 Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the research problem, questions, theoretical framework, research context, and researcher positionality. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant for this study. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological framework of this research, data collection methods and data analysis approach. Chapter 4 presents research findings in the form of an ethnodrama. Chapter 5 presents a fuller discussion on the themes addressed in the ethnodrama.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter consists of a critical engagement with scholarship from several different fields to serve two purposes. The first is to provide a critical review of the literature from the fields of labor studies scholarship and social movement theory in which I identify the gaps and limitations of the scholarship in each field. The second purpose is to provide a discussion of related literature that I draw upon to ground my conceptual framework in this research.

This chapter begins with a discussion on unionism from a Marxist perspective. Drawing on labor movement scholarship, I then provide an overview of dominant trends in unionism and focus specifically on the recent efforts to theorize union revitalization in response to the neoliberal onslaught against unions. This section examines the concept of social justice unionism while offering a critical assessment of its treatment in the literature. Next, I turn to literature from the field of social movement theory to critically discuss the absence of scholarship on trade unionism within the field at large. I then draw on Marxist social movement scholars to discuss the field's overall myopic approach to analyzing social movements. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I turn my attention to recent scholarship analyzing labor's relationship with the Movement for Black Lives (MBL). I provide a brief historical discussion of teachers' unionism and racial justice with the goal contextualizing the work of teachers' unions and the Movement for Black Lives today. Within this conversation, I discuss the challenges to making the relationship between the MBL and labor unions stronger as well as draw on radical black labor organizers and Marxist scholars to elaborate on my conceptual framework for analyzing my research data (presented in Chapter 5).

2.1 Unionism: A Marxist Perspective

Depending on one's political orientation, unions serve different functions in society and have differing political and social aims. As discussed in Chapter One, this dissertation is grounded in a Marxist conceptualization of unions. For Marxists, trade unions are one of the ways that workers can slow down and limit the exploitation of capitalist control of the economy. As Martin (2018) argues,

Under capitalism, there is a constant cycle of struggle between classes. It is through organization in unions, and the ultimate weapon of organized labor—the strike—that workers can defend and improve their standard of living against the relentless push of the capitalist class to increase profits at [workers'] expense (para. 18).

Unions are the means through which workers can be a collective force. In other words, achieving less exploitative working conditions and increasing worker pay cannot be achieved by individual workers alone, but rather, only when workers unite and form a collective body.

While unions work to defend and improve the standard of living of workers, their role does not have to be (and Marxists argue *shouldn't* be) limited to only fighting for better pay and benefits (although these are very important and a necessary part of union struggle). Rather, union struggles can and should take on a wider scope and connect to broader social struggles (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Lenin, 1970/1902; Malott, 2016). Furthermore, taking an even more radical approach, the role of unions can be conceptualized within a broader framework of their potential role in helping to cultivate critical consciousness and a mass movement of workers and the oppressed to fundamentally challenge capitalism as the economic, social, and political system governing our lives (Lenin, 1970/1902; Malott, 2016).

The debate about the role of unions within the workplace and the broader society—in other words, around their role in organizing workers and for what purposes and towards what ends—is not a new topic. This has been debated and discussed since the emergence of unions in the 19th century, although different terminology has been employed to analyze the various iterations of the labor movement over the past few centuries. From the Marxist perspective, trade unions are “focal points for the organization of the working class” and furthermore, “they are even more important as organized bodies to promote the abolition of the very system of wage labor” (Lozovsky, 1935, p. 16).

While Marxists theorize unions as having great potential for developing working class organization and political consciousness, Lenin (1970/1902) pointed out that unions do not automatically radicalize workers and that dominant trends in trade union practice often only allowed workers to develop what he called “trade union consciousness” that differed from a deeper, revolutionary class consciousness. Lenin’s identification of the limitations of trade union consciousness can be seen in most examples of unions in the United States and more specifically, the ones embracing bureaucratic unionism.

2.2 Resisting Dominant Trends in Unionism: Theorizing Labor’s Revitalization

The type of unionism that is dominant today, and that has dominated the U.S. trade union movement since the end of World War II, is bureaucratic unionism (Fantasia & Stepan-Norris, 2004).⁶ Rather than see the union struggle as connected to larger social struggles against

⁶ Although bureaucratic unionism has been the more dominant trend of unionism within the United States for many decades, this has not always been the case and there is an important radical history of unions. For a more detailed exploration, see Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Gautreaux, 2019; Johanningsmeier, 2004; Korstad, 2003; Korstad & Lichtenstein, 1988; Stepan-Norris & Zeitlin, 1989; Taylor, 2011, among many others who have written on radical, anti-capitalist tendencies within organized labor in the 20th century.

oppression under capitalism, the bureaucratic unionism that has become most dominant today reduces the union struggle to "... a business that exists to provide services to members, including lower rates for auto insurance; benefits from a welfare fund; pension advice; negotiating a contract, and perhaps filing a grievance" (Weiner, 2013, p. 268; see also Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Weiner, 2012).

Over the past few decades, as neoliberal economic policies have resulted in increasingly worse conditions for workers and as the crisis of global capitalism has worsened, growing attention has been focused on how to rejuvenate unions to become a force to fight back. Within labor movement scholarship, a growing number of scholars have worked to theorize and explore possibilities for revitalizing the declined labor movement (see Aronowitz, 2014; Fletcher, Jr. & Gapasin, 2008; Gindin, 2016; McAlevery, 2016; Moody, 1997; Scipes, 2014; Silver, 2016; Tattersall, 2005, 2010; Turner & Hurd, 2001; Waterman, 1993; Weiner, 2013; Wilmott, 2012 for some examples). Within this broad body of literature, scholars have sought to identify and develop a theory of unionism that can push back against the narrow focus of bureaucratic unionism, and its entrenchment within establishment/status quo politics, and begin to rebuild a labor movement that not only can challenge the austerity politics of neoliberalism, but can also put forth a new vision for labor and working class organization in the 21st century (Fletcher, Jr. & Gapasin, 2003; Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Uetracht, 2014; Weiner, 2013). Scholarship on this topic has emphasized the integral role of labor-community alliances and coalitions in the rebuilding of the labor movement (Heery, Williams & Abbot, 2012; Peterson, 1999; Tattersall, 2005, 2010; Waterman, 1993; Weiner, 2013). A common idea that runs throughout the literature on union revitalization is the need to embrace a union agenda that is

broad and fights for the working class as a whole (Fletcher, Jr. & Gapasin, 2008; Lier & Stokke, 2006; Peterson, 1999; Tattersall, 2005, 2010; Weiner, 2013).

2.2.1 Differing approaches to theorizing social justice unionism

The notion of ‘social justice unionism’ has been theorized as one form of unionism that has this broader agenda that can revitalize unionism. Within the quite extensive scholarship on social justice unionism, there are various interpretations and explanations of what ‘social justice unionism’ is. For some scholars and activists, social justice unionism names a type of unionism that seeks collaboration with community groups to work toward equity and justice, broadly defined (Ashby & Bruno, 2015; Peterson, 1999; Weiner, 2012). From this perspective, social justice unionism seeks to connect trade union struggles with community struggles outside the workplace. For example, Peterson (1999), former president of the Milwaukee Teachers Union, defined social justice unionism as calling “for participatory union membership, education reform to serve all children, collaboration with community organizations, and a concern for broader issues of equity” (p. 11). Weiner (2011) explains that social justice unionism is when the union’s interests go beyond economic concerns and the contract to “struggle for its members’ stake in creating a more democratic, equitable society and the union allies itself with other movements that are working for social justice, peace, and equality” (p. 36). Ashby and Bruno (2016) in their book about the Chicago Teachers Union strike of 2012 explain the union’s ‘broader vision of labor’ as “simultaneously defend[ing] their members and assertively speak[ing] out and organiz[ing] for social change on behalf of all workers and the poor” (p. 235). While these conceptualizations of social justice unionism contrast greatly with the dominant approach to unionism in the United States discussed above, they remain broad and general in their definition of social justice unionism. Emphasizing ‘collaboration’ and ‘concern’ for social issues,

referencing ‘social change’ are all important, but the above definitions assume that the above concepts have a universality in meaning, when in reality, they do not (more on this below). Furthermore, vague references to concepts like ‘social change’ can easily be co-opted by organizations and people in positions of power that may give the appearance of taking action to improve people’s lives, but in actuality, may not be very effective.

Others, in contrast, conceptualize social justice unionism as a type of unionism that challenges the larger system of capitalism. For example, according to Fletcher and Gapasin (2003),

Social justice unionism will require more than inclusive unionism in the sense of finally recruiting individuals of all races. It must go beyond this to ally and actively collaborate with – become an organic part of – the community organizations fighting against the oppression inherent in America’s racially structured capitalism (p. 261).

In Fletcher and Gapasin’s theorization, social justice unionism goes beyond collaboration and allyship between unions and community towards deeply connected integration of labor with the broader community struggles against capitalist oppression. Their conceptualization is more closely aligned with a more radical approach to unionism, what some scholars call ‘social movement unionism’, to distinguish more radical approaches from reformist approaches to unionism (Scipes, 2014).

While some scholars use social justice unionism and social movement unionism interchangeably, others emphasize social movement unionism’s more radical history and agenda (Scipes, 2014; Wilmot, 2012). In radical social movement unionism, the lines between ‘community’ and ‘union’ become less defined and the union struggle becomes organically and integrally part of the broader social and community movements. As Wilmot (2012) argues, social

movement unionism takes a “transformative orientation to social change” and “actively involve[s] the broader working class, not just unionized workers, and not just in order to unionize workers” (p. 119). Those who practice this type of unionism see themselves as co-struggling together with oppressed communities. In other words, the work of the union and movements are conceptualized as being part of the same movement but coming to the movement work from different angles.

2.3 The Need for a More Robust Theory of Social Justice Unionism

As the various definitions of social justice unionism mentioned above illustrate, one is hard pressed to find a clear explanation in the literature of what exactly social justice refers to in this type of unionism. Across the literature, which is filled with similar definitions as the ones above, it is assumed that everyone agrees on what terms like ‘social justice’, ‘peace’, and ‘social change’ mean. These concepts are written about with a universality in which the authors assume that these concepts mean the same thing to everyone, and hence, no definition is required. The result is a concept that has a general framework at best, but “has not yet come together as a coherent program with the requisite solid underpinnings of theory and practice” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 166).

In addition, while the literature espouses the potentialities of union-community partnerships to revitalize unions to become a strong force to fight back against the neoliberal offensive, what are less explored are the challenges and obstacles to realizing a social justice unionism, which are often neglected or marginalized (Lier & Stokke, 2006). For example, analyzing the South African context, one of the places where social movement unionism originated, Lier and Stokke (2006) illustrate that the building of working class unity on the model of social movement unionism in present-day post-apartheid South Africa departs from the

‘ideal type social movement unionism’ that gained prominence during the 1980’s. Lier and Stokke (2006) emphasize the political and organizational barriers to enacting social movement unionism in a particular context; not only are there differences in terms of organizational composition between the union and community groups, there are also differences in their approach to action, with some groups or individuals pursuing more militant, direct action tactics and others preferring a more technical or juridical approach. Moreover, they note that there are divergent political positions between the unions and community groups; trade unions are generally committed to the African National Congress (ANC), which prevents them from wholeheartedly supporting and developing deep and effective alliances with the post-apartheid social movements that are challenging the hegemony of the ANC and the neoliberal policies imposed over the last several decades. In the Canadian context, Wilmot’s (2012) analysis of the living wage campaign in Toronto in 2007 problematizes the notion of labor-community alliances for transformative change. Her analysis illustrates that rather than transformative social movement unionism, what took place is better understood as “mobilization moments” where the union and community members come together but in ways that do not produce the “sustained momentum needed to build broad-based workers’ movements” (p. 113).

In the context of education, challenges to practicing social justice unionism, such as tensions and conflicting agendas that arise between groups or individuals, for example, are not reflected in the majority of the educational literature on teachers’ unions fighting against corporate education reform. Some exceptions do exist, however. Maton’s (2016) study of how teachers in the caucus of Working Educators (WE) in Philadelphia confront questions of race and racism internally within their union and caucus, as well as how they deal with the challenge of

connecting the internal work of the caucus to external community-based organizations is an example.

Apart from a few exceptions, however, most of the literature does not attend to the contradictions and challenges that arise in union-community collaboration. This is peculiar, since divisions within unions are not unique or uncommon. As McQuade (2015) explains, “Organized labor is not a monolith. There are often real divisions and conflicts: between rank-and-file workers and union leadership, between union locals in the same region, between union locals and the international union” (para.13). Research that marginalizes conflicts or tensions can lead to a distorted understanding of the reality of building movements. Furthermore, tensions are not only inevitable but are also necessary to push movements and conversations forward. They can serve a generative purpose in movements (Barker & Krinsky, 2016).

2.4 Social Movement Theory: Fragmentation and Abstraction

Whereas social justice unionism as a concept is not well developed in the literature, the other large body of literature I drew on to conceptualize my research—social movement theory—does not include much attention to labor movements in its scholarship (see Barker et al, 2013; Fantasia & Stepan-Norris, 2004; Mann, 2014 for a similar observation and critique). Some scholars have attributed the dearth of labor movement research within the field of social movement scholarship to unions’ embrace of the status quo within capitalism and their turn towards business unionism, as discussed above. For example, Fantasia and Stepan-Norris (2004) argue,

Part of the difficulty in analyzing the labor movement as a social movement has to do with the heavily institutionalized character of certain of its dimensions and practices...

Unions... bargain and negotiate with employers, they help to regulate economic activity,

and they serve a brokerage function as employment agents, stabilizing labor markets on behalf of their members. In these ways unions restrain social combat and collective action, and thus a significant part of the labor movement can be seen as not only institutionalized but institutionalizing (p. 557).

While the institutionalizing aspect of unions has been well-documented and critiqued (and resisted by rank and file members in many unions), more recent shows of labor union militancy (i.e., the Wisconsin uprising in 2011, the CTU strike in 2012, and the most recent teacher union strikes across the US in 2018) do not receive much, if any, attention in current social movement research. Therefore, it cannot only be labor's accommodation with capital that is to explain for social movement scholars' lack of engagement with labor struggles.

Another explanation for the scant attention social movement scholars pay to labor struggles could be the myopic lens through which the field examines social movements. As Marxist social movement scholars have observed, social movement theory has tended to analyze movements as separate, bounded entities, and has paid less attention to understanding and exploring their interrelations or connections to other movements (Barker, 2011; Barker, Cox, Krinsky & Nilsen, 2013). Moreover, social movement theory often fragments thinking about movements into small areas of focus (i.e. paying attention to resources or seeking to identify political opportunities). As a result, those aspects or variables become the focal point of analysis which fails to understand the movement in a more holistic way.

Furthermore, as this research study is particularly interested in understanding how education justice and racial justice movements intersect, although there has been a general move towards understanding "movement dynamics" and scholars have begun to take a more relational approach to movements (see for example, Diani & McAdam, 2003) within the literature on

social movements, as Beamish and Luebbbers (2009) have pointed out, there has been relatively little theoretical and empirical analysis on cross-movement alliances and coalitions in the literature on social movements. In addition, there is a small (but growing) body of literature on cross-movement alliances and, on a global scale, transnational alliances, this literature tends to primarily focus on factors or elements that either facilitate or hinder successful collaboration and alliances, across movements, reflecting the overall trend within the literature at large (see Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Hewitt, 2011; Lichterman, 1995; Obach, 2004; Rose, 2000 for examples of research on cross-movement alliance and collaboration). Focusing on organizational components or aspects to movements, such as factors and reasons that impact alliances and allow them to develop or hinder their formation, while these are important, overemphasis on these factors at the expense of asking larger questions around what these alliances mean in terms of movements challenging power severely limits the analytic usefulness of the broad body of social movement theory research (see Choudry, 2015; Cox & Nilsen, 2014 for a similar critique).

2.5 The Movement for Black Lives (MBL) and the Labor Movement

While social movement theory does not provide any sustained engagement with or rigorous analysis of recent labor struggles, similarly, there is a dearth of analysis within labor movement scholarship on the topic of the Movement for Black Lives and what it can or could mean for labor. There is a small body of academic scholarship that looks at the relationship between the U.S. labor movement and the Movement for Black Lives (see Larson, 2016; McQuade, 2015; Rickford, 2015; Weiner, 2015). Of the few analyses that currently exist, studies indicate that while there is great potential for an allied relationship between the MBL and labor, those relationships and coalitions are not yet developed (see for example, Larson, 2016;

McQuade, 2015; Rickford, 2015). As these scholars have noted, labor support for the MBL has been limited in scope.

One of the major reasons for this reluctance to fully embrace the MBL is the reality that “the livelihood of some workers (e.g., prison guards) depends on the carceral state” (Rickford, 2015, p. 38; see also McQuade, 2015). Labor remains ‘split’ on this issue of supporting unions and organizations of workers whose labor is related (directly or indirectly) to law enforcement, from police unions to prison guards to custodial workers in prisons, to name a few. Some unions, such as the UAW Local 2865, have taken a clear stance and called on the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) to break their relationship with the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) (Rickford, 2015).

2.6 Teacher Unions and Racial Justice: Historical Legacies Shaping Teacher Unionism Today

In addition to the issue of law enforcement workers organized in unions, another factor impacting the relationship between the MBL and labor is the need to come to terms with the historical legacy of racism in the labor movement. While this chapter does not provide an in-depth study of the history of racism within the US labor movement, a brief discussion historicizing teacher unionism and its relationship to racial justice struggles in the U.S. can help illuminate the evolution and trend of teacher unionism over the past 80 years with the goal of understanding how this past legacy informs and shapes current teacher unionism and helping to point to some ways of moving forward in our current context (which I theorize and discuss in more detail in Chapter 5) (see Fletcher, Jr. & Gapasin, 2003, 2008; Foner, 1981/2018; Honey, 1993, 2000; Kelley, 1999, to name a few, for a history of racism within the U.S. labor movement).

As scholars of teacher unionism in the U.S. have pointed out, teachers' unions (as well as the labor movement as a whole) have a contradictory and checkered past when it comes to supporting racial justice. Bitter racial tension has defined key periods in teacher union history (Golin, 2002; Perlstein, 2004; Taylor, 2011; Weiner, 2012). Some examples include American Federation of Teachers (AFT) locals, such as the Atlanta Teachers Association (ATA), disaffiliating themselves with the AFT in the late 50's for refusal to desegregate, the racial conflict between teachers and the black community (especially black parents) at the center of the 1971 Newark teachers strike, the refusal of the National Education Association to desegregate until well into the late 1960's, and New York's United Federation of Teachers (UFT) launching a strike in 1968 opposing black community control of schools, to name just a few (Golin, 2002; Perlstein, 2004). As Perlstein (2004) examines, in the late 1960's the majority white membership of New York's United Federation of Teachers (UFT) was engaged in a bitter racial conflict with black community activists who were struggling for community-controlled schools after the touted promises of racial integration were not realized. Perlstein's account chronicles how the UFT led by Albert Shanker ultimately took a reactionary, oppositional stance to racial justice, refusing to support integration in any meaningful kind of way and seeing calls for black community control over education and self determination more broadly as not only a threat to their profession, but at its core, a threat to white superiority.

However, while the reality of this history has left deep marks upon teachers' unions, and the labor movement more broadly, there are also important historical examples of teachers' unions centering the struggle for racial justice in their work. One such example is the New York City teachers' union. As Taylor (2011) argues, the New York City teachers' union, led by radicals and communists, was at the forefront of the fights for racial and educational justice and

black civil rights during the 1930's and 40's. The teachers practiced a unionism that sought to transform society as a whole and their organizing model was grounded in “strong alliances with unions, black and Latino parents, civil rights and civil organizations, and political parties in order to gain greater resources for the schools and communities in which they worked” (p 3). In many ways, the approach of the New York City teachers was a precursor to what more current scholarship defines as ‘social movement unionism’ in the U.S. context today.

A key question—and in many ways, a key tension—for teachers in unions in the 20th century centered on: Do we think of ourselves as working-class or do we define ourselves as a group of professionals demanding dignity in our work? (Perlstein, 2004; Taylor, 2011). Those who identified with the former saw their struggle connected to the broader struggle of the working-class and involved themselves in social struggles beyond the school. Those who identified with the latter sought recognition and focused on better teaching and classroom conditions (Perlstein, 2004). The thread of this tension can be seen today in the ‘bread and butter’ working conditions discussion versus the broader social justice unionism struggle.

A brief discussion of this historical legacy has been important because it helps further contextualize the struggle today between labor and the Movement for Black Lives, in many ways showing how the sources of tension are not new, but rather, a continuation from the past. Many progressive unions today, especially those who are seeking to embody a social justice approach to unionism discussed above, are dealing with this contradictory past and recalling these historical examples can provide an opportunity to reflect on past successes and mistakes, and make connections to theorize what this legacy may mean for today's struggle (I take this up more in Chapter 5).

2.7 Racialized State Violence is a Labor Issue

In addition to the small body of academic scholarship that examines the MBL and the labor movement, the most robust theory around the connections between the MBL and labor—and paths forward—comes from movement activists and radical black trade unionists organizing their fellow workers. For example, as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists argue in their report titled *A future for workers: A contribution from black labor* (n.d.), racial justice must be a central focus of any labor revitalization efforts. As the report argues, the challenge that unions must understand is that

What befalls the Black worker inevitably confronts the bulk of the U.S. working class. However, there is a failure in both much of academia as well as within the ranks of organized labor to recognize that the Black working class is, indeed, a component of the larger working class and not some marginal category. The problem is that when the U.S. working class, and organized labor in particular, fails to respond to the toxicity of capital's eternal search for greater profits irrespective of consequences as it impacts Black workers, it inevitably is incapable of withstanding the assault when it expands (p. 3)

In the context of mass incarceration and state violence against people of color, labor unions must support the MBL and all efforts to resist state sanctioned violence, since, labor cannot sufficiently organize the masses of workers and withstand attacks from employers when a huge segment of the working-class—workers of color—are incarcerated (see also McCoy, 2015). My analysis of research data collected in this study (see in Chapter 5) is grounded in the above perspective, which centers racial justice in any struggle for union revitalization and emphasizes the connections between mass incarceration, police violence against people of color as key concerns labor can (and should) be taking up.

2.8 Examining How Struggles Connect Under Racial Capitalism

This study, then, is grounded in a Marxist approach to conceptualizing capitalism and examining social struggle, emphasizing the importance of understanding how different struggles are connected under capitalism. It is also grounded in a radical approach to labor organizing and, as discussed above, centers the fight for racial justice as central to any discussion or theorization on labor revitalization. This research is also grounded in an understanding that central to the fight for racial justice is the fight against state violence—mass incarceration and police violence. This means that for a labor movement to center racial justice, it must therefore center a fight against state violence in that work. Without fighting state violence, a movement cannot meaningfully advance in the struggle for racial justice (Alexander, 2010; Carruthers, 2018; Puryear, 2013).

2.9 Summary

In this chapter, I provided a critical overview of relevant labor movement scholarship and social movement theory, identifying and discussing the limitations of the literature and gaps to explore. Social justice unionism as a concept was explored and social movement theory's approach to analyzing social movements was critiqued. In addition to providing a critical review of the literature, this chapter also elaborated on my conceptual framework. I provided a discussion on unionism from a Marxist perspective and provided an argument for centering racial justice in the work of union revitalization.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 2 provided a critical discussion of the relevant literature that helps contextualize this research study and informs my conceptual framework for analyzing and making sense of research data. In this chapter, I discuss my methodological approach to data collection and analysis, as well as data representation. In this research, I employed thematic narrative inquiry and utilized ethnographic data collection methods, such as participant observation and interviewing, to examine research participants' storied experiences of struggle. In what follows, I locate myself within a critical research tradition, provide an overview of narrative inquiry, present my rationale for taking a narrative approach, and provide a detailed account of how I went about collecting and analyzing research data. Then I present an overview of ethnodrama, why I decided to represent my findings through ethnodrama, and a detailed explanation of my playwriting process.

3.1 Research Tradition

As a researcher, I locate myself within the broad field of critical research. More specifically, my research is within the tradition of dialectical materialist inquiry (Agostine-Wilson, 2013; Malott, 2018; Ollman, 1993). Dialectical materialist inquiry is a mode of investigation that understands “reality as an ongoing social process; nothing is ever static or fixed” (Malott, 2018, para.5; see also Ollman, 1993; Ross, 2018). Contrary to many approaches to research that take the current state of the world as “the way it is” and thus limit their scope of analysis to describing what is, dialectical materialist inquiry examines how ‘things’ come to be the way they are in the world (uncovering the social processes and relations behind what appear as ‘things’), and more importantly, how they can be changed (Ollman, 1993; Ross, 2018). In other words, dialectical materialist research critically examines sources of power, domination

and social oppression within capitalism and explores the potential for societal change. Through such examination, dialectical inquiry uncovers and illuminates the seemingly permanent, unchangeable nature of things as able to be changed. Dialectical materialist research is concerned with unification of theory with action towards progressive social change and ultimately liberation from oppression in all its forms (Agostine-Wilson, 2013; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

Researchers working within a critical, dialectical materialist tradition employ many different methodologies and methods. In this research, I'm employing narrative inquiry.

3.2 Narrative Inquiry

One of the fundamental ideas of narrative inquiry is that stories are integral to how people make sense of lived experience (Bruner, 1991; Freeman, 2017; Riessman, 2008). There are numerous and diverse approaches to conceptualizing and carrying out narrative-based research (Riessman, 2008; Thomas, 2012). As such, there are many ways to define narrative inquiry. For this research, I drew on Thomas' (2012) definition to guide my approach:

In its most simplistic representation, narrative inquiry is the study of story, interpretation and discourse (Leggo, 2008). In other words, narrative inquiry investigates what happened, the significance or meaning of that, and how it is told or shared (p. 210).

Narrative describes both an approach to research as well as a phenomenon of study (Clandinin, 2007; Freeman, 2017; Mumby, 1993). While the field is broad, some scholars have identified major approaches that narrative research can fall into, which include thematic, structural, dialogic/performance and visual (Riessman, 2008).⁷ In this research, I took a thematic approach.

⁷ Within narrative inquiry, Riessman (2008) indicates three uses of the term 'narrative'. Narrative can refer to the act of telling a story, the research data and the systematic study of the research data (p. 6).

Broadly speaking, researchers that take a thematic approach focus on the content of *what* is said in a narrative (Riessman, 2008).

With its emphasis on understanding lived experience, narrative analysis is a way to understand the ‘particular’ and its relation to society (Riessman, 2008; Thomas, 2012). A focus on the particular—that of an individual or group’s lived experience—does not mean that broader, social phenomena are ignored. Rather, narrative research emphasizes that individuals’ lived experiences must always be examined and understood *in relationship to* others and the broader social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Freeman, 2017; Thomas, 2012). As Freeman (2017) explains,

The focus on narrative detail provides researchers a unit of analysis that allows them to examine human meaning-making in context, while also providing the theoretical basis for considering that the narrative form taken encompasses, or puts into actions, values and meanings that are considered variations of a broader shared human existence (p. 35).

In other words, the individual or particular is intimately linked to the social context in which it exists. Narrative research engages both the ‘particular’ and the ‘general’; by examining the lived experience of individuals, narrative research contributes to making sense of larger social phenomena (Chase, 2003; Freeman, 2017; Thomas, 2012).

3.2.1 Narrative and social movements

Teachers, activists in movements, and social movements at large all tell stories of what their movement is about, who they’re up against (who’s the antagonist), what their journey has

Moreover, narrative can refer to the story an interviewee tells a researcher, the account that the researcher constructs based on that data, and the interpretation of what is written by the reader.

been, victories and losses they've experienced, and where they see themselves going. Making the case for narrative in social movement research, Barker (2010) argues,

Contrary to 'natural history' or some 'protest cycle' theories, movements follow no inevitable sequence of stages... Because revolutionary developmental trajectories are contingent and 'eventful', they require narrative forms of understanding that catch both 'flows' and 'crystallizations', and their internal contradictions. (p. 80)

Approaching the study of social movements through narrative, then, can lead to important understanding and insight about a movement's emergence and development, internal dynamics and contradictions, and its relationship to other social movements and broader social forces in ways that are often not represented in research on social movements (see also Davis, 2002).

In this research, I focused on narratives of different types and at different levels. My analysis of narratives was not restricted to individual participants' interviews alone. In addition to individual interviews, I also examined narratives at the movement level. These were found at rallies and protests (the stories speakers tell about their movement on the mic at a rally, for example) as well as throughout the literature (documents, pamphlets and leaflets the movements produce) and online media (blogs, online newspapers, Facebook groups, etc...). Moreover, my analysis of narratives during data collection also included an examination of the larger, social narratives that serve as a "cultural backdrop against which activists' stories (as well as the claims they advance by way of stories) are heard" (Polletta & Garnder, 2015, p.2; see also Loseke, 2007; Shenhav, 2015 for an analysis on social narratives). For instance, when analyzing how the topic of police violence plays out amongst teachers, I brought in an analysis of the larger cultural narrative of police violence as the result of a "few bad apples" to not only make sense of some

teachers' perspectives, but to also ground those perspectives in a larger social and political context (more detail on this in Chapter 5).

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Gaining access: Getting acquainted with the movement scene in Chicago

For this study, I carried out one year of field work in Chicago, officially from May 2017-May 2018, although I had been in Chicago since July of 2015 to informally become involved in the movement context in the city. Introducing myself into the education justice and broader social movement context in Chicago required considerable time, thought and strategy. Although I was born and grew up in Chicago, I was not well acquainted with the social movement scene in the city prior to embarking on this research.

Not long after I arrived back in Chicago, I learned quickly that the social movement scene in the city can be tricky to navigate. While Chicago has a rich social movement scene, it is also marked by territorialism and a skepticism of anyone deemed to be an outsider. I needed to navigate this terrain carefully and intelligently, and before reaching out to anyone for an interview, I made sure I had spent a considerable amount of time on the ground, getting to know people, organizations, and the issues at hand. Activists and potential research participants needed to see that I had a connection to a Chicago-based organization, that I was not a 'fly in researcher' and that in some way, I could demonstrate that I "put in my time" to prove that I was serious about understanding the struggle on the ground. Simply being from Chicago was not enough on its own to build trust. I kept those sensitivities in the back of my mind as I began my participant observation.

Prior to (and throughout) fieldwork, I prepared for participant observation in a number of ways. Firstly, I read previous research published about Chicago and its racial and education

justice struggle (i.e. Lipman, 2004, 2011), as well as union documents (i.e. issues of the Chicago Union Teacher magazine, the CTU publication ‘A Just Chicago’’) to name a few. Through this background reading, I became familiar with the key issues and policies being struggled over, as well as important organizations, places, and activists who had been leaders in the resistance. This background information helped me to better understand the context of my research participants. Secondly, I began to follow key organizations and people I had identified as leaders in the struggle on social media. This helped me to stay informed on the latest happenings, since social media is used by so many organizations as a way to get the word out about events, rallies, protests, etc.

Attending events posted on social media was one way I introduced myself into the research context. From there, I began to meet teachers and movement activists and would find out about other events via word of mouth, email, as well as social media (which remained the principal way). To help immerse myself in the context even more, I decided to informally join the organization Teachers for Social Justice (TSJ), an organization composed of Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) members and pre-service teachers that has been a leading grassroots organization resisting corporate education reform in the city since the days of Ren 2010.⁸ I say informally joined, because the organization is volunteer run and there is no official membership process. People flow in and out of the organization, helping and volunteering when they can.

⁸ As mentioned in Chapter 1, “Renaissance 2010” (often referred to as ‘Ren 2010’), was a plan announced in 2004 by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley to restructure public education and advance the school choice agenda, which advocates providing parents ‘choice’ (i.e., the creation of charter schools) and creating competition and ‘market pressure’ as a way to improve what are deemed to be ‘failing’ schools (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). The plan advanced a corporate style governance to schools and consisted of closing selected public schools deemed ‘failing’ and in place, opening charter schools (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). For a more detailed analysis on the impacts of school closings on Chicago’s students of color, see Ewing, 2018.

While I needed to be involved to gain trust and build relationship with teachers in the movement, I also wanted to remain at a distance to be able to keep a critical researcher lens on what I was seeing and experiencing. I did not want to get overly involved to the point where my involvement overtook my purpose, which was to carry out research. For this reason, my involvement would consist of things like helping organize the annual TSJ Curriculum Fair, a day-long event where social justice minded teachers come together to share projects, curriculum, and teaching resources grounded in an anti-racism, anti-sexism, gender-affirming perspective. The tasks I undertook consisted of carrying out logistical duties, such as flyering for the event, sending out email reminders, and being on ‘clean up duty’ the day of the event. My time on the ground, involved in TSJ and getting acquainted with teachers facilitated their openness to speaking with me and agreeing to be research participants in this study.

3.3.2 Participant observation

I carried out participant observation in a variety of settings over the course of my time in the field. I consulted social media pages, such as the CTU’s Facebook page, to find out about events to attend as a participant observer. I was also placed on email lists for the CTU and TSJ, which served as another way of keeping informed about events for participant observation. Lastly, at times I would become notified about an event through word of mouth. The types of events I would go to included marches, rallies, and protests that were organized by the CTU, local racial justice groups (such as Black Lives Matter Chicago) and community organizations (such as the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization). I also attended events like community meetings, forums, book events, teach-ins and any other public events where both education justice and racial justice were central topics. I attended key events that are included in the ethnodrama, such as the Black Friday protest of 2015 and the April 1, 2016 day of action.

3.3.3 Field notes

When possible, I would bring a notebook to an event to take down field notes. A brief excerpt of my written field notes is presented in the image below:

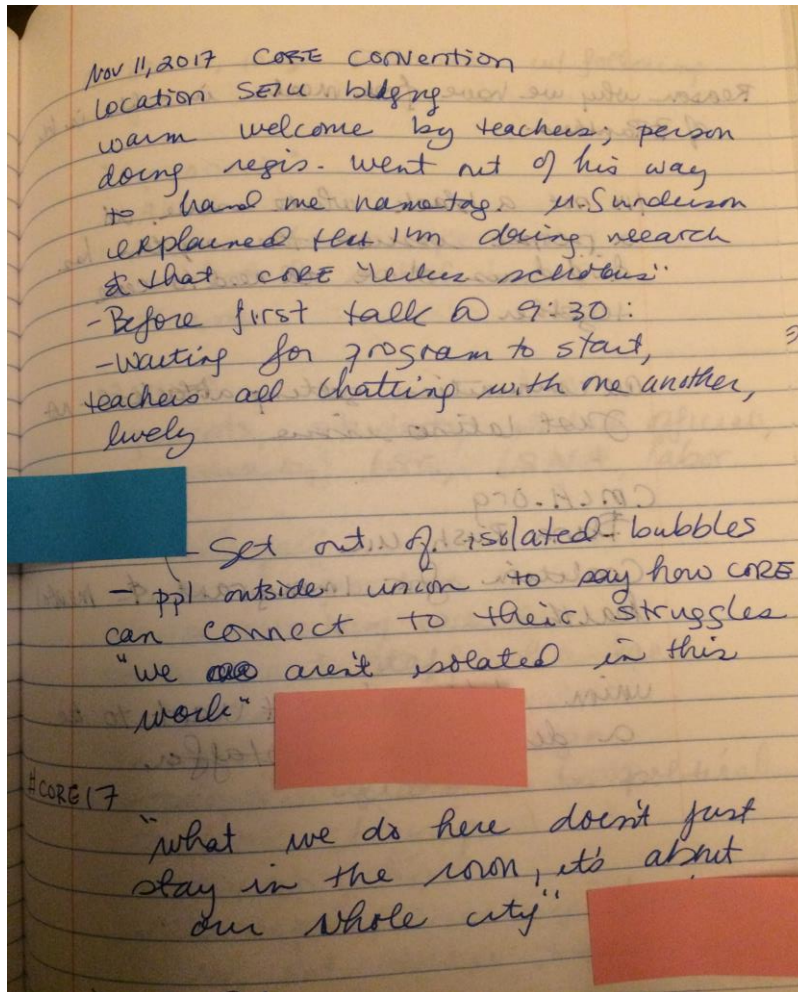


Figure 3-1. Excerpt of author's field notes.

The excerpt of field notes in the image above is from an event sponsored by CORE (the Caucus of Rank and File Educators) that I attended on November 11, 2017 as noted in the entry. At the beginning of each field note entry I would note down basic information like date, location, and title of event. I would then jot down a few sentences about what I observed from the overall

atmosphere and environment. I would also keep environment in mind throughout the field notes as well, although I found it quite challenging at times to keep track of what was being said amongst various speakers while simultaneously keeping detailed explanations of the environment. It was particularly challenging at times to be both ‘participant’ and ‘observer’, especially when trying to balance engagement with people at an event while also taking down observational notes of all that was around me at a particular time and place. As the notes from the excerpt above show, I tried to jot down the important ideas of what was being said. I’ve placed paper over the names of people quoted in my field notes excerpt above to maintain participant anonymity.

For participant observation at rallies or marches, the nature of the event did not allow for me to carry a notebook or have time (or room) to stop and write down notes in my notebook. In those cases, I would write down key ideas of what I noticed when I returned home later that day. As I describe below, I did not code my field notes in NVivo, but instead, used them as way to contextualize the interview data. Because maintaining consistently detailed field notes throughout every aspect of participant observation was a challenge I encountered, I also sought to supplement my field notes by taking pictures at events (if allowed) to help refresh my memory of an experience or time spent in the field. In addition, if I attended an event, I also consulted social media hashtags of it to provide myself with additional data and not rely solely on my own notes from an event.

Throughout my data collection during participant observation (as well as in interviews), I examined how teachers talked about their struggles. Questions guiding my observations and analysis while I was on the ground included:

- What is the story that this person/group is telling? What is the central conflict of this story all about?
- Who are the characters? Who is cast as the protagonist, antagonist, victim, ally, enemy, etc...? Why are people cast in this way?
- Where is this taking place? What significance does this setting have?
- What are important events, turning points, etc...in the story?
- If similar events were mentioned and talked about extensively, how did different teachers experience those events? Why might that be?

3.3.4 Research journal

I kept a researcher journal throughout data collection and analysis. I used the research journal as a place to write down and contain my thoughts about what I was observing or experiencing, possible avenues to explore in my research, as well as to keep track of potential answers or explanations for the questions listed above. In contrast to the field notes that I kept in a notebook and brought with me to participant observation, I kept the researcher journal on my laptop computer and would write entries on a consistent basis. I thought of my researcher journal as a ‘free space’ for me to explore ideas. The image below is an excerpt from a researcher journal entry from August 4, 2017.

August 4, 2017

Some ideas and topics that are coming up in my research so far:

Conflicts (or maybe better to frame as challenges?)

- Being member driven and wanting consensus.
Some participants have talked about the presence of conservative members and how that has conservatizing effect on union and impacts how to the left they can go.
***Important question to ask: are more militant strategies necessary although that may alienate people?
- Solidarity:
Where do organizational solidarities lie?
Some teachers felt that April 1 impacted solidarity with police rather than mentioning BLM → (this seems like a pretty big conflict)
Allegiance to another union over another organization?
- Where is the “red line”?
I’m getting the sense from participants that the union is trying to be a broad tent, but when there are real contradictions that become a challenge.
Is it similar to democratic party and their strategy of appealing to more conservative republican voters to win them over?
Problems with this approach? How does union negotiate that?
- People don’t change their minds because they are told they are wrong → link to what Participant 11 said in interview. It makes me think about how shaming people doesn’t lead to them to join the fight/struggle...
- Coming out for a strike → pulling off a successful strike vs. sustaining a movement. There’s a difference as one participant explained.

Place (or setting?)

- I’m also thinking about geographical questions....It’s not a coincidence that northwest and southwest sides are “cooland” —perhaps connect this to critical geography and thinking about the spatial component to all this?

Figure 3-2. Excerpt from researcher journal

As the above excerpt shows, I used bulleted points to organize entries in my journal. By posing questions and notes to myself in parenthesis, the researcher journal served as a type of internal conversation with myself as researcher and allowed me to see how my thoughts and ideas about my research were developing over the course of my data collection and analysis. Neither my research journal nor field notes were coded. Rather they were used as a source of triangulation in my data analysis (more on coding below).

3.3.5 Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I carried out in-depth interviews with 13 rank and file CTU members. All interviewees were identified as actively engaged in the work of their union and its involvement in the broader movement for racial justice in Chicago. Apart from meeting research participants during participant observation, I also identified potential teachers to interview through social media (Facebook and Twitter) as well as the snowball technique. I was able to recruit 3 research participants via the snowball technique. All interviews were carried out with consent from participants.

Once identified, I reached out and sent an initial message to contact potential interviewees. I would explain who I was, my research and if they agreed they were interested in participating in my research, I then proceeded to send them a letter of consent (see Appendix A), which outlined my research and explained what participation would entail. Once I received consent, I would proceed to arrange a date and time for the interview.

All except one interview took place in person, usually in a coffee shop of the participant's choosing. One interview was carried out over the phone due to scheduling challenges with the research participant. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. I recorded and transcribed each interview. Each research participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Once transcribed, each interview was uploaded into the NVivo data analysis program. Interview questions are included in Appendix B.

3.3.6 Document and social media analysis

Finally, data collection consisted of ongoing analysis of media, both news media and social media, as well as key documents that were produced and circulated by teachers and movement activists (i.e., the CTU's document "The City Chicago's Students Deserve, the M4BL

policy platform, among others listed in Appendix C). As I describe in more detail below regarding my document analysis, selected documents were read, marked for relevant information and uploaded into NVivo to code and analyze alongside interview transcripts. I did not code all documents. I did not code any social media or news media in NVivo. Social media, such as relevant Facebook pages, Twitter handles and hashtags, were reviewed and analyzed with the purpose of providing further contextualization of my data.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

Participant interviews were the main focus of my coding. Selected movement-produced documents (that I discuss more below) were coded as well to provide further contextualization of my data. With regards to interview data, I worked with the interview data in two ways. The first way was through a grounded theory approach with in-vivo coding and the generation of larger thematic categories (Charmaz, 1996). The second was through the creation of participant profiles (more detail on this process below).

After uploading interviews into the NVivo software, I did an initial read through of all interview transcripts. As I was doing the initial reading, I began to code by employing ‘in vivo’ coding, where I stayed very close to participant data and maintained participants’ own words in the codes I created. Once I did this initial read-through and coding process, I did 2 more rounds of reading and coding where I placed the in-vivo codes, along with codes generated from my analysis of selected movement-produced documents, into larger thematic categories.

The movement- produced documents that I uploaded into NVivo and coded are listed in Appendix C. One of those listed, *The Chicago Union Teacher* magazine is a publication that is published 8 times a year. In an effort to keep my data amount manageable, I did not upload and

code every issue of the magazine. To place some boundaries, I read through issues dating back to September of 2015 until the November- December issue of 2018. I chose September 2015 because that coincided with the time that I arrived back in Chicago after having completed my coursework at UBC. It was part of my process of becoming familiar with the research context before I officially embarked on my research. Then, I selected and uploaded and coded articles that were relevant to my research and that specifically dealt with the topics of the connection between racial justice and education justice, any articles specifically on social justice unionism, union activism, to name a few. For example, I uploaded the January 2016 issue titled “Teaching Laquan McDonald in context: the social justice issue” and coded the article titled, “In Response to the Shooting Death of Laquan McDonald (p. 6) found here: <https://www.ctulocal1.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2016-01.pdf>). I also uploaded the January-February 2017 issue titled “And justice for all...” (which can be found at <https://www.ctulocal1.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2017-01.pdf>) and coded the one article titled “Should I apologize for my belief in social-justice unionism?” of that issue (p. 8). Finally, although I selected which articles I specifically coded, keeping up with and reading each issue also helped to contextualize my other data and provide a more holistic understanding of the context I was researching (Mathison, 1988).

From this iterative process encompassing 3 rounds of coding (initial in-vivo codes plus two more rounds of re-reading and solidifying coding), three larger thematic categories were created: 1.) racial tension amongst the rank and file, 2.) balancing activism and personal care, 3.) social justice unionism in theory vs. in practice. In other words, each of these larger thematic categories contained many individual codes within them. To provide some examples, the codes “demoralization”, “fear of repression”, “exhaustion”, “burn-out”, “keep pushing” were all

individual codes that fell under the larger thematic category of “balancing activism and personal care”. The codes “disconnection”, “connecting issues and struggles”, “teachers’ lived experiences in classroom” were all individual codes that fell under the larger thematic category of “social justice unionism in theory vs. practice”. Codes such as “discomfort naming police violence”, “support for MBL”, “teachers married to police” were individual codes that fell under the broader thematic category of “racial tension amongst the rank and file”. All codes were kept in a codebook (generated by NVivo) that I referred back to consistently as I was building my analysis.

The second way I worked with interview data was by examining each participant’s interview holistically on its own with the final result being the creation of participant profiles. This second approach to working with interview data served two purposes. One, it allowed me to cross-check the codes I had created in my rounds of coding using the NVivo software, thereby helping to ensure trustworthiness in my data interpretation (Riessman, 2008). Second, working with each interview at a time allowed me to really immerse myself in examining each participant’s words. Working with interview data in these different ways facilitated a nice combination of taking all the interview data together and teasing out themes complimented by zooming in and focusing on the particular of individual research participants.

3.4.2 Participant profiles

As Freeman (2017) argues, “Who we are and where we are located historically, culturally, and geographically shapes the story that is being told as well as the way the story is read and interpreted” (p. 34). On this point, the creation of participant profiles allowed me to better understand who research participants were, where they are located historically, culturally, geographically and how that impacts their perspectives on events and issues they are confronted

with. They also facilitated the creation of characters in the ethnodrama (more below). To create the participant profiles, I re-read each interview several times and created ‘interpretive summaries’ of each participant’s interview. The interpretive summary encompassed writing a description of who each participant was as a person, which consisted of an explanation of their values and beliefs about teaching, education, racial and educational justice and any other key issues or topics that were salient in their interview. Examining not only what each participant said but how they said it (language they used), I was able to get a good sense of who each person was and reflect that in each participant profile. Each profile I created is about 500 words in length. During the ethnodrama process, I consistently referred back to these profiles to help ensure that the character representations in the ethnodrama were consistent with the participant profiles from the interviews.

3.5 Ethnodrama

While I did not carry out focus groups, as I analyzed each participant’s interview, it felt as if they were in conversation with one another, or at least could have been. I decided an appropriate approach to data representation would be to do just that. Extending this idea further, I decided to write a complete screen play to represent my data.

The results of my data analysis are presented in the form of an ethnographic performance text, also called an ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2005). Simply put, ethnodrama is the dramatization of research data. The written script that is ultimately produced by the researcher in ethnodrama “consists of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts, such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles and court proceedings” (Saldaña, 2005, p. 2). Ethnodrama is particularly suited for research that seeks to “challenge privilege, silencing,

misrepresentation, inequity, and help incite people to engage difficult questions” (Ares, 2016, p. 603), as well as convey complexity, tension, and the rich human experience of research participants (Adams et al., 1998).

Over the past two decades, a growing number of educational scholars have employed arts-based research using dramatic and/or performative components to present research findings (Finley & Finley, 1999; Freeman, Mathison & Wilcox, 2006; Goldstein et.al, 2014; Goldstein, 2000; Gouzouasis, Henrey, & Belliveau, 2008; Pifer, 1999; Mienczakowski, 1995, 2018; Saldana, 2005a; Teman & Saldaña, 2018; White & Belliveau, 2011, among many others). Topics and approaches to research-based theatre vary greatly among scholars in the field (see Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011 for a discussion on the spectrum of research-based theatre). For example, Finley and Finley (1999) represented their ethnographic research on the experience of homeless youth in New Orleans in the form of a readers’ theatre. Freeman, Mathison and Wilcox (2006), constructed 4 ‘dialogic acts’ based on focus group interview data with parents to explore parents’ perspectives on the topic of high stakes testing. Gouzouasis, Henrey, and Belliveau (2008) presented their research around the reasons for why elementary students in a band class move on (or not) to band in high school in the form of a research script.

As a way to capture the multiple voices and perspectives of my research participants, as well as the multi-dimensionality of their experience, constructing dialogues and engaging in screen-play writing as a way to represent my data allowed me the most opportunity to represent the multi-faceted ways that political struggle and conflict are lived and experienced in my research participants’ lives and do so without flattening participants’ voices.

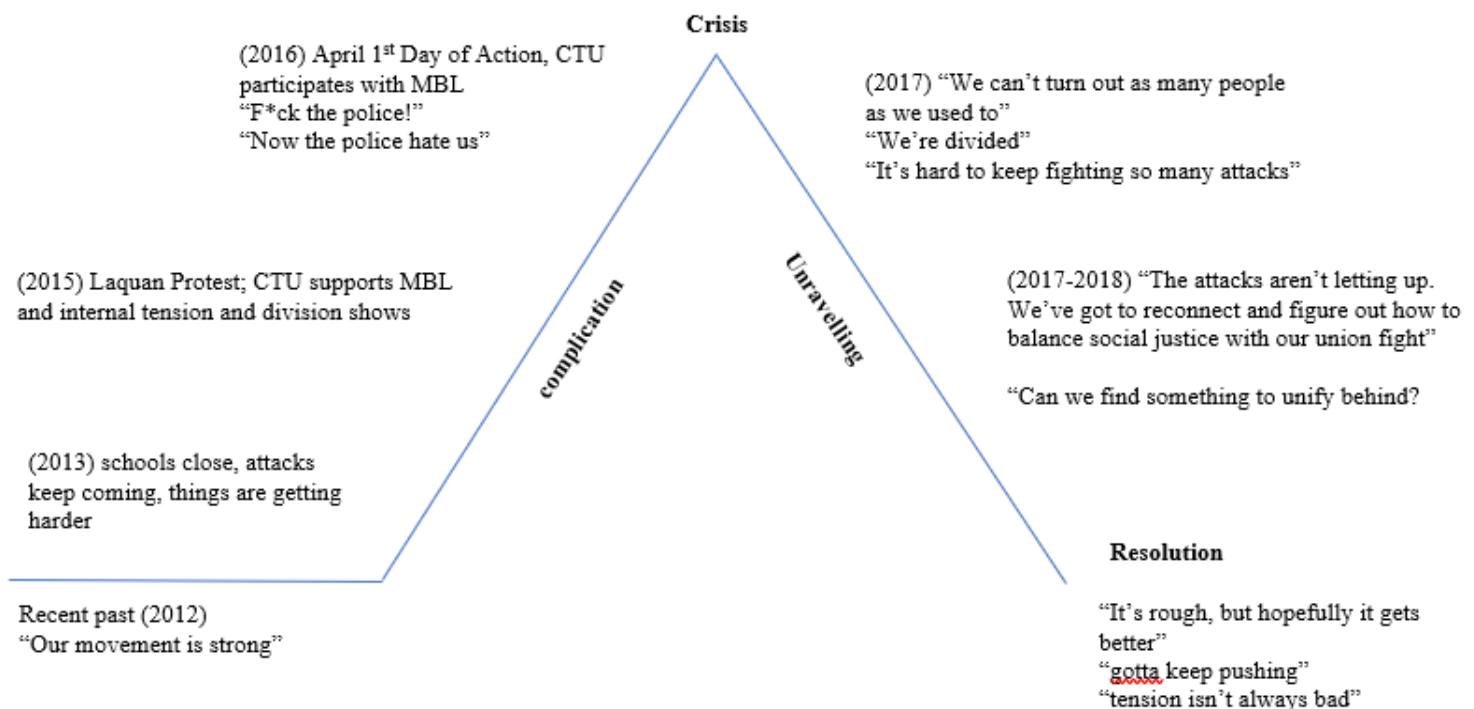
3.5.1 Ethnodrama writing process

After I completed the coding of my data and created the participant profiles, I was then familiar enough with my data to begin creating the script for the ethnodrama.

3.5.1.1 Plot

In writing an ethnodrama, as in writing any story, there are key elements that form the foundation. These include the plot, which is the overall structure of the drama, and the storyline, which are the events that take place within the overall plot of a story (Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2005). I started off with these key elements. Based on my analysis of the key themes of my data, I decided on a chronological plot and sketched out a basic storyline that in many ways mirrored the narrative arch of participants' stories. The general story arc is as follows:

Figure 3-3 Visual representation of story arc of ethnodrama



While the image above illustrates the overall plot of the ethnodrama, each character is simultaneously dealing with their own personal struggle, which also follows a particular trajectory concurrently alongside the overall plot. Both the overall storyline and each character's trajectory are explorations of the three large themes that emerged in my data analysis mentioned above.

3.5.1.2 Characters and setting

The characters featured in the ethnodrama are all representations of research participants I encountered. As mentioned above, I interviewed 13 teachers in total, although the ethnodrama features 11 characters. Two characters are composite characters and another character was completely fictionalized, meaning I did not interview her, but since her perspective was mentioned as being a rather salient one amongst some teachers, I decided on the need to create her and include this character in the ethnodrama. The setting for each scene is meant to be representative of places where I carried out participant observation. Some scenes are set at large rallies, and others take place in teachers' classrooms, or a coffee shop, while one scene takes place 'online' and represents a Facebook chat.

3.5.1.3 Script writing

The dramatization of data comes about through the creation of monologues and dialogues amongst characters. As Saldaña (2005) explains, "a monologue showcases a character through a snapshot portrait of his/her life taken from a particular angle" (p. 21). In the ethnodrama, monologues presented opportunities for me to introduce different teacher personas that I encountered in my research. The scenes with dialogue allow me to develop in fuller ways the dynamic interaction and interplay between characters, as well as moments of tension and conflict by juxtapositioning characters with starkly contrasting perspectives.

Once I decided on an overall storyline, setting, and characters, I moved to creating the dialogues and monologues. Drawing from my different sources of data explained above, I first started by copying and pasting into a Word document relevant excerpts of interview transcript data around the 3 larger thematic categories I had identified. Then, I consulted other data sources (i.e. news media about key events featured in the ethnodrama, my field notes, coded documents) to add to what I had already outlined. This process took much time, and involved many rounds of cutting, pasting, and editing (especially interview transcripts) to position (and re-position) lines into a plausible dialogic exchange that followed the overall plot I had decided on.

With regards to the range of perspectives of participants on each of the three larger thematic categories, I attempted to represent the breadth of perspectives, not only capturing the wide range of perspectives, but also the nuance of perspectives as well.

To provide more detail around how I went about creating the script, below I include two color-coded annotated excerpts from the ethnodrama. The first annotated excerpt is from Act I, scene 12 of the ethnodrama, titled “Post-rally beers”. In this segment (which appears on the next page), I have annotated how the themes from my coding were presented in the ethnodrama. The second annotated excerpt (appears on page 51) is from that same scene and illustrates the ways I incorporated various data sources in my script writing.

KAYLA

(sensing tension)

If I can jump in here. I think some people feel ignored. Some, like myself, are overwhelmed and want to try to put our energy towards dealing with important issues we're facing, and we can't be at all places involved in all things. And I think other people probably don't feel comfortable with the social justice direction of the union and prefer it to be about workers' rights and job security and that's it.

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Balancing activism and personal issues

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Social justice unionism in theory vs practice

ALANA

Look, I'm hearing what you're saying, Mel, I am. And I do think we need to find that balance otherwise the bread and butter stuff could come back to bite us. But we also gotta understand some of the reactionary elements of this too. Just look at the racial component of the folks and groups opposing our strong social justice message.

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Social justice unionism in theory vs practice

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Racial tension within the union

SAMANTHA

(interjects, with a bit of a sassy tone)

You mean the "white people's caucus"? That's what I call 'em!

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Racial tension

ALANA

Absolutely. You know, we're an unabashedly anti-racist union. We've sent shock waves through this city in our fight against racism and that may not sit will with some folks who feel threatened by our work so I think we're also looking at reaction to that.

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Racial tension

KAYLA

Yeah, I mean I see it. A lot of teachers don't acknowledge their own privilege and their own struggles with racism, that's true.

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Racial tension

(puts hands up, as if anticipating a defensive reaction by someone in the group)

And I'm not trying to make excuses for racism, but like we aren't given opportunities really to reflect on those things, ya know?

MG Michelle Gautreaux
Cross-coded: racial tension in union, social justice unionism in practice (i.e., providing opportunities for reflection)

Figure 3-4. Annotated segment illustrating themes represented in the ethnodrama script. From Act 1 Scene 12.

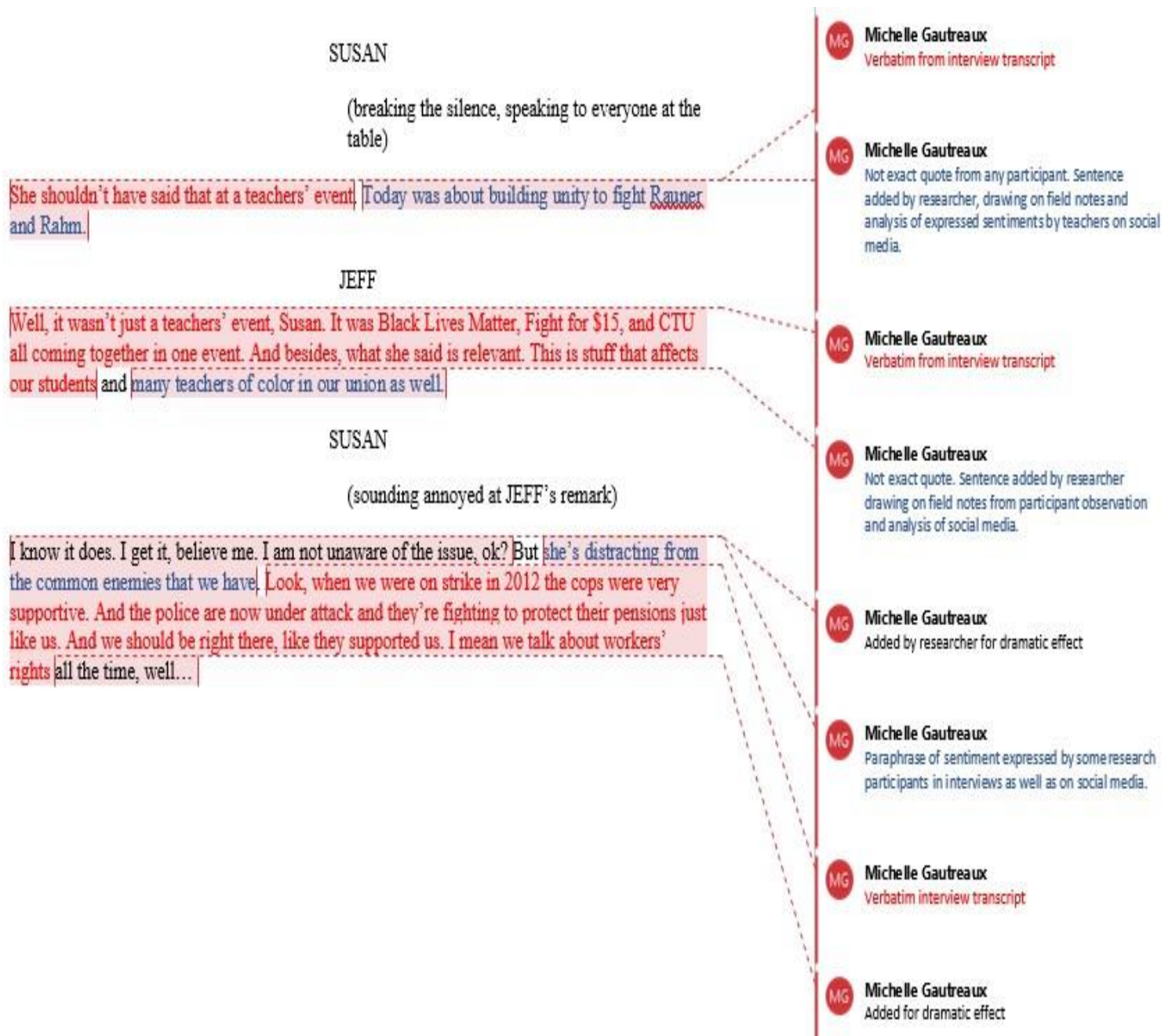


Figure 3-5. Annotated segment illustrating sources for ethnodrama script. From Act 1 Scene 12

As figure 3-5 shows, I drew on a variety of sources to write the ethnodrama. For some scenes, such as Act 1 scene 1, which is a representation of a rally that took place, I consulted news media articles to create a fuller representation of a scene. For those scenes, I specifically

indicate that in a footnote in each scene where it applies. To provide another example, when I re-created the scene of the ‘April 1st Day of Action’ featured in the ethnodrama, (Act 1 Scene 11), that was in large part based on the one-day CTU strike on April 1, 2016. As I was at the back of the rally that day, I couldn’t hear what exactly was said at the podium and thus relied on news media and videos posted on social media to write the lines for both the union president and the activist speaker in that scene. Although I included footnotes for some specific scenes, I generally did not include any other citations within the ethnodrama script. As Saldana (2011) notes, writing arts-based research is a “completely different genre of writing” as compared with the more conventional modes of academic writing. As such, in-text citations, quotation marks and the like are usually not included in ethnodrama scripts. For purposes of clarity and transparency in my research, I have included in-text citations in a very limited capacity.

Once I had excerpts of transcripts and other data all positioned more or less the way I wanted them to appear in the ethnodrama, the last round of work to complete the ethnodrama involved wordsmithing and either adding or modifying character lines to make the ethnodrama flow better and increase its dramatic quality and effect.

3.5.2 Trustworthiness of research

As Riessman (2008) notes, the concepts of validity and trustworthiness in interpretive social science—what makes research results ‘valid’, how a researcher can demonstrate trust in their interpretation and presentation of data—has a long history in the field. To respond to these concerns in narrative research, I have sought to be detailed and transparent in discussing my data collection methods and data analysis process. To provide a more robust, holistic analysis, I sought to incorporate several data collection methods (Mathison, 1988). In addition to providing excerpts from my field notes and researcher journal, I have attempted to be clear in my

explanation of how I worked with interview data, went about coding, and ultimately constructed the ethnodrama. Moreover, by attempting to present a variety of teacher perspectives on key issues—many of which are sources of internal tension—I sought to eschew simplistic narratives and instead contextualize my data representation in ways that “maintain the inherent complexity of an individual’s or a group’s understandings” by focusing in many ways on key sources of internal tension and various perspectives (Freeman, 2017, p. 43).

3.6 Summary

In this chapter I have presented my methodology, explained how I went about data collection and analysis. I provided a description of my research participants and gave a detailed explanation of my data analysis and ethnodrama screenplay writing process. The next chapter consists of the entire ethnodrama.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

What follows is the ethnodrama, *Shifting Grounds*.

SHIFTING GROUNDS:
MOVEMENT STRUGGLE AMONGST TEACHERS IN CHICAGO

An Ethnodrama in Two Acts

By Michelle Gautreaux

CHARACTERS

- MELANIE:** A white female, between 30 and 40 years old who teaches Special Education at a “high needs” school on Chicago’s far south side. Melanie is a union delegate⁹ for her school building, one of the co-chairs on the special education committee¹⁰, as well as a member of the special education taskforce.
- ALANA:** A black female between 30-40 years old. She’s an active member of CORE and she holds a leadership position within the Chicago Teachers Union. She is a trained history teacher and before taking on a leadership position within the union, taught history on Chicago’s west side.
- SAMANTHA:** A white female between 50-60 years old, who has been teaching for over 25 years. She currently teaches first grade at a school in an affluent neighborhood on Chicago’s northside. She also leads a committee and holds a leadership role in the union.
- SUSAN:** A white female between 50 and 60 years old who teaches elementary school in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in Chicago. Susan is a member of CORE and credits the CTU to encouraging her activism in the struggle for education justice in Chicago.
- SOFIA:** A Latina female, between 30 and 40 years old who teaches Ethnic Studies on Chicago’s southside. Sofia is an active rank and file member of the CTU, a member of her school’s Local School Council, and a lead teacher organizer of a parent- community organization in the neighborhood where she teaches.
- JEFF:** A white male, between 30-40 years old, who teaches history/social studies at a high school on Chicago’s southside. Jeff writes on race and education justice on his personal blog, and occasionally Huffington Post.

⁹ A delegate is a building representative for the CTU. As Melanie explains, “we bring the concerns and questions and needs of our members to the House of Delegates, which is the bigger democratic body within the CTU, and hold monthly meetings. And we also disseminate information to our members and make sure they are kept up to date with what’s going on”.

¹⁰ The CTU special education committee is made up of teachers who work on making sure to get language in the contract that specifically advocates for special needs children as well as makes sure that within school buildings special education teachers are advocating for their students.

- REGINA: A black female between 50 and 60 years old who has been teaching elementary school on Chicago's West Side for over two decades. Currently, Regina is a special education teacher. She is also a member of CORE as well as a leading member of CTU's Black Teacher Caucus.
- ALAN: A white male, between 60 and 70 years old who has a long history in the CTU. He has taught high school English for many years. He was a founding member of CORE and participated in the well-known CTU strikes of the 80's as well as in 2012.
- AMY: A white female, between 50 and 50 years who has taught high school English on the southwest side for more than 2 decades. She is not a member of CORE, but was supportive of the union's decision to go on strike in 2012.
- KAYLA: A white female between 30 and 40 years old, who teaches at a predominantly black high school on Chicago's south side. She is a member of CORE and a union delegate. Kayla has spoken on behalf of the union in front of the Board of Education, as well as to other teachers' unions throughout the US.
- RICKY: A Latino male, between 30 and 40 years old who has become a prominent voice in the fight to get charter school teachers unionized and join the CTU.

Prologue:

The following prologue is to be shown scrolling on a screen to the audience:

It is a period of intense and sustained political struggle between the grassroots resistance movements and the corporate ruling class in Chicago. Chicago is a city with a rich history of militant working- class resistance and a pivotal place in the Black liberation struggle. It is also the place where the ruling class has met the working-class resistance with force, repression, and disdain, through its armed agents (the police forces), as well as its austerity informed economic and social policy.

In the most recent years of this long, protracted struggle, the ruling class has sought to undermine and destroy public education and repress the burgeoning reiteration of the Black Liberation movement in the city known as the Movement for Black Lives.

In the fight to protect public education, the Chicago teachers have re-emerged as important members of this resistance over the past decade, rejuvenating the role of labor in the city's resistance struggle and launching a bold offensive against the mayor and his handpicked corporate board of education.

But the corporate ruling class does not back down easily and have fought back, closing schools and working to undermine and weaken the teacher resistance movement. Attempting to push forward to sustain their militancy amidst the chaos and attacks launched by the ruling class, the teachers are rallying again.

(Projector screen pulls up and the curtain opens.)

ACT I

SCENE 1

“The education our students deserve”

June of 2015. All characters are on stage and assembled in downtown Chicago outside the Thompson Center for a rally. ALANA and SOFIA are standing next to one another, closest to the podium for the union president to speak. JEFF, SAMANTHA, and MELANIE are all next to one another, to the right of ALANA and SOFIA. Then, to the right of them is KAYLA, followed by SUSAN, along with ALAN and AMY. In the backdrop, behind the speaker’s podium, there is an image of the Thompson Center. All characters are wearing their ‘CTU red’. Each character is holding a banner with the following messages: ‘CPS: Broke on Purpose’ (ALAN), ‘Support Public Education’ (KAYLA), ‘Black Educators Matter’ (ALANA), ‘CPS Students Deserve: more school nurses, more counselors, more services’ (SUSAN and MELANIE), ‘Fund Schools, Defund the Police’ (REGINA) ‘Tax the Rich’ (SAMANTHA), ‘We <3 our teachers’ (AMY). SOFIA is holding a blowhorn. The Chicago Teachers Union president is addressing the characters

UNION PRESIDENT

Brothers and sisters, our unity is our strength! We’re here today, strong and united, to send a message — loud and clear — to Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his handpicked Board of Education that we reject their lies! We reject the austerity that they’re forcing onto the working people of this city!

(Characters and crowd applaud loudly.)

UNION PRESIDENT

Walk a block in any direction from where we are gathered right now, and you will see unimaginable wealth. Yet we’re told we don’t have the money for a social worker and nurse in our school buildings!¹¹

¹¹ Source for quote: Kugler, J. (2015). “Union rally sets the stage against CPS’s sabotage of Chicago’s public schools as school board’s credibility is in tatters”. Substance News. <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=5692>

VARIOUS CROWD MEMBERS

Boo! / Lies!

UNION PRESIDENT

When the wealthiest in our city tell us that our schools are broke, we say that our schools are broke on purpose!¹²

(Cheers and clapping from the crowd.)

VARIOUS CROWD MEMBERS

Woohoo!! / That's right! / Speak the truth!

UNION PRESIDENT

Brothers and sisters, we've got a mayor who has a demonstrated lack of will to support public education.

CROWD MEMBERS

Boo! / Rahm doesn't give a damn about us!

UNION PRESIDENT

We've got an unelected school board who is taking marching orders from this neoliberal mayor who wants to run this city like a business! He wants to gentrify this city and push out our students and their families! The Chicago he envisions is very glossy. It's got luxury housing, but it doesn't serve the people of this city!

CROWD MEMBERS

Boo!

UNION PRESIDENT

And we've got Billionaire Governor Bruce Rauner who is in a headlock with the state legislature and won't provide the funds our public schools and universities desperately need to remain open! He's holding us all hostage!

CROWD MEMBERS

Boo!

UNION PRESIDENT

Brothers and sisters, instead of the rich paying their fair share, they're asking students, teachers, and working families of this city to pay the price and take on the burden by doing more with less and making us fight for every crumb they throw us!

CROWD MEMBERS

¹² Source for quote: Kugler, J. (2015). "Union rally sets the stage against CPS's sabotage of Chicago's public schools as school board's credibility is in tatters". Substance News. <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=5692>

Boo!

MELANIE

(Screaming)

We've had enough!

KAYLA

(Screaming)

We've had enough!

(The union president continues to speak, but her speech fades into the background and the focus turns to Kayla, who makes her way through the crowd and sees Samantha and Melanie and approaches them.)

KAYLA

(To SAMANTHA and MELANIE)

Hey! So great to see you both!

(KAYLA gives each a hug.)

SAMANTHA

Yeah, same here! I see you brought your crew!

KAYLA

Yeah, we have a great turnout today! I think the entire teaching faculty is here, which is amazing!

SAMANTHA

Well, that's why you're a star delegate! Way to get your school involved! You know, the more folks we get to turn out for these rallies, the bigger impact we have!

KAYLA

Oh, believe me, Mc Robinson teachers know how to show up and turn it up! Just look at Sofia holding that blowhorn.

(They turn to look at SOFIA.)

KAYLA

She can't wait to start yelling into that thing!

(All laugh.)

MELANIE

Wish I could say the same about my school! I tried getting everyone down here today, but a lot of folks haven't shown up. I dunno. We're not turning out as many people as we used to at these rallies, not like in 2012, that's for sure.

SAMANTHA

Oh, don't be too hard on yourself! You guys have definitely represented today!

MELANIE

Yeah, well, thanks for the compliment but it could be better. I think we're going through a bit of a downturn in momentum these days. But maybe that's just how movements go, you know, ebbs and flows.

(Shrugs her shoulders a bit. They turn back to face the union president, who continues to speak and whose speech now becomes focus of scene again.)

UNION PRESIDENT

So we're not asking- no, we're demanding smaller class sizes, school libraries, art classes and in-school counselors for every single school in the city of Chicago! For far too long, we've gone without what we need in this city and we've had enough. We demand progressive taxation, resources for our communities, and an end to the educational apartheid in the city of Chicago! We're demanding the schools and city that students in Chicago deserve!¹³

(Crowd cheers, claps and whistles. Characters begin to march across stage and in backdrop, the image changes from the Thompson Center to the streets of downtown Chicago.)

SOFIA

(Chanting into a blowhorn.)

Hey hey, ho ho, Rahm Emanuel has got to go!

ALL CHARACTERS

(In unison.)

¹³ Source for quote: Kugler, J. (2015). "Union rally sets the stage against CPS's sabotage of Chicago's public schools as school board's credibility is in tatters". Substance News. <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=5692> and Perez, Jr., J. (2015, June 9). Chicago Teachers Union marches in Loop, slams CPS as 'broke on purpose'. Chicago Tribune. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/ct-chicago-teachers-rally-met-0610-20150609-story.html>

Hey hey, ho ho, Rahm Emanuel has got to go!

(Repeat 3 times.)

SOFIA

Education is our right, that is why we fight!

ALL CHARACTERS

(In unison.)

Education is our right, that is why we fight!

(Repeat 3 times.)

SOFIA

Get up! Get down! Chicago is a union town!!

ALL CHARACTERS

(In unison.)

Get up! Get down! Chicago is a union town!! Get up! Get down! Chicago is a union town!! Get up! Get down! Chicago is a union town!!

(Characters continue chanting and begin walking with their signs off the stage.)

(END OF SCENE.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

“Why I march” (Part 1)

The rally has just ended. SOFIA enters stage, holding her blowhorn, and addresses the audience directly.

SOFIA

Why did I march today? I march because we’re fighting against so many things: school closings, racist testing, police violence in our communities. During the past 10 years I’ve been involved with a lot of the community fight back. I’m not only a teacher in the classroom. I also see myself as a popular educator, helping parents and the community find their voice in this system. But unfortunately, bad things still happen even with the fight back.

(With emotion.)

Fifty schools still closed in 2013, despite us raising hell to try and stop them!

(Takes a short pause.)

But what has come out of that fight back? Our communities have realized how much power we can have to get the movement going in the direction we want! And so that’s why it’s important to keep taking to the streets, keep the movement going and that’s why I march!

(takes a short pause.)

I’m working class and I grew up like that. My parents came here as undocumented immigrants and I still live paycheck to paycheck. And I may be a little bit more radical than what the union would like on stuff, but I just think there’s so much that we need to be standing up against and I’m gonna keep pushing!

(SOFIA exits, SAMANTHA enters the stage and begins addressing the audience.)

SAMANTHA

Why do I march? Actually, people often ask me that because I teach at a privileged school with many upper class children, not like most of the other teachers. When people see me or my colleagues out at protests and rallies, they’re like, “but your school is so nice. You have no reason to be upset”. But I march because it’s not ok to have one kind of education for rich kids and another for black and brown poor working class kids. It’s systemic racism and classism that’s the cause. I march because the CTU has a lot of power in this city- we’re the big union in town and we can use our power to also fight for what the community needs. And if you look around, you’ll see lots of us marching because Rahm is a huge uniter. He’s actually organized us really well because he’s such an easy person to hate.

He does such terrible things to our children. So coming out to march against Rahm and his billionaire friend governor Rauner is a no-brainer, really.

(SAMANTHA exits. MELANIE enters holding a sign and addresses the audience.)

MELANIE

Why do I march? As a special education teacher, I march because we're not providing special education services the same way in our black schools as we do in our whiter and wealthier schools.

(With a bit of attitude.)

You know, Naperville provides like 3 or 4 more times as many services for kids with special needs and we know who lives in Naperville, right?

I march for the things that we used to have but now don't. Every year, we have less money in our budgets. We used to have reading specialists, we used to have smaller classes, and we used to have money to buy resources and supplies and that's gone.

(Takes a short pause, looking as if she is reflecting on something.)

I march because to me, unionism is about connecting our issues with the broader community and broader needs, and when we march in unity with others, that's one way we do that.

(Noticeable frustration and concern in her voice.)

But lately, I've been getting concerned because I'm not sure everybody in our union understands how the issues we're facing as teachers connect with the issues and struggles other communities are facing in our city. And I'm concerned that is impacting our turnout at rallies and our overall movement. Like back in 2012, the notion of social justice unionism, our type of unionism, really resonated with folks. 2012 was a big year for us. That's when the union published the report 'The Schools Our Students Deserve', which directly tied all the social justice issues we're facing in Chicago back directly to our schools and our classrooms and our everyday lives. It was a very clear connection to people how these things directly tied back to us.

(Voice loudens with excitement.)

And we launched a successful strike with huge community support!

But I think that we're losing that connection a bit with our own folks as the union is branching out into tackling other issues, ya know, issues not so directly linked to education and teaching. And so if you ask me, one thing we need to do is we actually have to intentionally make the connection between issues for folks, spell it out if you will.

ACT I

SCENE 3

“Organizing struggles” (Part 1)

The day after the rally. MELANIE and JEFF are at school. They run into each other in the hallway during their break time.

JEFF

Hey Mel. That was a pretty good rally yesterday, right?

MELANIE

Hey, Jeff! Yeah, it was great to see so many folks out there with us! And it was awesome that so many organizations and community members came out to support us. But I was kinda disappointed in our school’s turnout. Lately it just seems like we try to do the big rallies and stuff, you know, and it’s getting harder to turn people out.

JEFF

Yeah, I’m noticing it too actually—with others and myself to be honest. I mean, I’m definitely scaling it back a bit. I went yesterday cuz that was a big one, but there’s been a few this year that I haven’t gone to.

MELANIE

And it’s like, I’m the union delegate and so it’s my job to get folks out when we need them to be, ya know? Lemme ask you, what do you think is going on?

JEFF

That’s a big question.

(Lets out a sigh.)

I dunno. Speaking for myself, it comes down to picking and choosing my time, ya know? With Jimmy being only 4 months old, I just can’t go to as much stuff.

MELANIE

Yeah, I get that, for sure.

(in a jovial way)

You’ve got new dad responsibilities!

(switches back to a more serious tone)

But yeah, I think folks are feeling tired, exhausted really. We’re like always fighting something, and it’s wearing people down. And if I’m gonna be completely honest with you, I think people are feeling like their needs are not being met. I pick up on it when I talk to folks—more and

more mention things like “oh the union doesn’t care about our everyday lives in the classroom. It cares more about how we present in these movements and rallies as the CTU”, ya know?

JEFF

Yeah, I’ve heard that too. Folks are tired of fighting about stuff—especially if it’s not directly education related. On top of all the crap we’re already dealing with, it’s just overwhelming. And it’s hard to keep a balance for sure.

MELANIE

Yeah, and leadership needs to be reminded that when we’re fighting so much and folks are overwhelmed, like sometimes you have to have a certain level of stability to then be able to get involved with other stuff.

JEFF

Absolutely! And CPS keeps things so chaotic, it’s hard to get to that stability.

MELANIE

(Takes a deep breath in and sighs)

Well anyways, this is definitely something that we’re gonna have to work on but not now- I gotta get to class. Nice talkin to ya, Jeff!

JEFF

Anytime.

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT 1
SCENE 4

“Can I take on one more thing?”

JEFF is in his classroom. The school day has just ended. He’s thinking about the conversation he had with Melanie in the hallway earlier. He is standing in front of his desk and speaks directly to the audience.

JEFF

For 5 years I was my school’s union delegate. And during that time, I was obviously very involved in union stuff—more than I am now. But two years ago, I switched schools. And recently my second child was born, and so I struggle with finding the time to keep up with everything that’s going on in the union, let alone attend all or most of the rallies. So I get Melanie’s struggle and frustration.

(Paces back and forth in front of his desk, as he continues to speak to the audience)

Part of me also struggles with like why aren’t all 30,000 CTU members upset about what’s happening to our students and getting more involved with stuff? But then another part of me understands. You know as teachers, we have a lot of things that are asked of us.

(Puts left hand out as he is explaining his ‘case’ to the audience)

So it’s like, first of all, do you want to spend the time to learn about these other things that are going on outside of education? And then do you want to spend time to get involved with them?

(Puts right hand out)

And then, on the other hand, do you want to put yourself out there in a way that’s gonna make you a target or get you in some sort of trouble at your school?

(in a very serious tone)

You know, CPS targets people. CPS has a very corrupt system and it does not respect or appreciate people who are willing to try and bring about change. And so they will find ways to get rid of you and they’ve been doing that forever.

(throws hands up in air)

And some of it’s just about- I don’t have the time. Teaching is stressful enough and I just can’t focus on other stuff, ya know? And that’s legitimate. There are just all these different things for why teachers aren’t more involved or why they’re not pushing the union and it’s just-

(takes a short pause, looks down and then up)

There's a lot of attacks and it's like, can I take on one more thing?

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT 1

SCENE 5

“Organizing struggles “(Part 2)

The following September. A community organization that is an ally of the union is calling an emergency rally later in the afternoon, after school. REGINA and SAMANTHA are going into different teachers’ classrooms to try to get teachers to attend the rally. The first teacher approached is KAYLA, who is in her classroom during her planning period. KAYLA is sitting at her desk, lesson planning and REGINA and SAMANTHA walk into her classroom.

SAMANTHA

Hey Kay, how’s it going?

KAYLA

(on her laptop, looking frustrated, typing loudly)

I’m trying to finish this proposal to leadership to get some union resources for helping members deal with trauma. It’s taking me longer than expected. What’s up?

REGINA

Wow, that’s great. I think it’s a really important thing you’re working on. So tonight there’s gonna be a rally with community groups to protest the deportation of parents of students at Juarez school. Can you make it? We’re trying to get a big turnout.

SAMANTHA

It would be really important to the community if us teachers showed up-

KAYLA

Tonight? I don’t think so.

SAMANTHA

(with a look a disappointment)

OK, that’s fine. Just thought we’d ask.

KAYLA

(picking up on SAMANTHA's disappointment)

Look, I'm exhausted. This year has just begun and I'm already overwhelmed. Once I finish this proposal, I'm gonna set up a Go Fund Me to get new computers for my class cuz I don't have enough and the ones we have are shit. I've got 7 more kids in my class this year.

SAMANTHA

Yeah, no, I get it. It's also just really important that we show up for our community allies cuz this fight is not just ours, you know?

KAYLA

(gets up from her seat. She is annoyed and speaking forcefully)

Look, I'm trying, but seriously, I'm drowning here. We just found out they are making more cuts to Special Ed, so I'll have to do more with less, like I do every year. Not to mention all the red tape and paperwork I've got to fill out just to get my kids basic services.

(throws hands in air)

Oh and I've got to clean my own classroom, which is filthy since CPS has privatized the custodians. Look at the floor!

(points to a corner on the floor full of dust and particles)

Aramark is getting paid and look at that filth!

(in a slightly calmer tone)

So I'm sorry. I get that it's important for us to show up for the community. I wanna be here for the social justice work, but I spend all day every day fighting with CPS, dealing with all this shit and on top of it I've gotta be all ready to go out and protest when I finish here? I just can't do it today!

REGINA

(speaking in a calm tone to show KAYLA she understands)

Yeah, we get it, we do. No worries, Kay. There will be other rallies in the future. Let us know how the proposal turns out. If you need people to help out in any way, just let me know.

KAYLA

Thanks, I appreciate it.

(SAMANTHA and REGINA leave KAYLA's
classroom.)

ACT I
SCENE 6

“CTU is still the star, but we’ve got a lot going on”

KAYLA is still in her classroom and addresses audience directly while standing in front of her desk.

KAYLA:

I got quite involved in the union in 2012. I come from a union home, but in addition to that, CTU’s social justice vision really resonated with me. The fact that the CTU was out there protesting and being an ally in community was very important. The strike and all the other rallies that CTU calls really helped reinvigorate the labor movement and got folks out to march and protest who had never done so before. And I still think we’re the star of the labor movement, but as you can also notice, there’s a lot going on right now. I support the union’s social justice vision. And I go to most the rallies. My school definitely has a strong social justice faculty and we know how to bring folks out to union actions. But the truth is, it’s hard to do it all.

(takes a short pause)

I’ve had 13 students of mine get killed since I started teaching. Thirteen.

(Puts head down, takes a moment of pause, then lifts it up and continues to address the audience.)

You know, you have to love your students to do this work, and if one of them is killed, it impacts you. And none of this is getting addressed. So I’m really trying to get this trauma support project going cuz we as teachers need it. And the union needs to be supporting its members on this.

(KAYLA goes to sit down at her desk.

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT I

SCENE 7

“Justice for Laquan”

Two months have passed. It’s now Black Friday, 2015. The dashcam video of 17-year-old Laquan Mc Donald being shot by Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke has just been released to the public a few days prior. The video shows Van Dyke firing 16 bullets into Laquan Mc Donald’s body within seconds, as the teen was walking away from the officer. It is also exposed that Mayor Rahm Emanuel, his entire staff, State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez and many other city officials knew about the video and suppressed it so as to not impinge upon Emanuel’s 2015 re-election campaign. The mayor’s office only released it, reluctantly, after a judge ordered so. Black Lives Matter Chicago, Black Youth Project 100 and many other community organizations call an emergency protest to be held to block Michigan Avenue and prevent ‘business as usual’ on the busiest shopping day of the year in one of Chicago’s most expensive areas, the ‘Mag Mile’, filled with high-end shopping, hotels, and restaurants. Characters ALANA, JEFF, KAYLA, SOFIA, SUSAN, REGINA and SAMANTHA, wearing their ‘CTU red’, are assembled in front of Water Tower Place. They are holding signs that say, “Black Lives Matter”, “Justice for Laquan” and “CPAC Now”! ALANA, REGINA and SOFIA are holding blowhorns. The Chicago Teachers Union president is addressing the other characters who are facing her, with their backs to the audience.

UNION PRESIDENT

Brothers and sisters, it is time to turn our pain into power, and today, along with the community, we are expressing our outrage at this horrific event! We’re here to show this mayor that we cannot have business as usual when one of our students was killed by a Chicago police officer

and it was covered up! Chicago Teachers are here calling for justice for Laquan and all other victims of questionable and unjust police shootings in our city¹⁴!

(Cheers from the crowd.)

ALANA

(into a blowhorn)

16 shots and a cover up! 16 shots and a cover up!

VARIOUS CROWD MEMBERS

(In unison. Repeat 3 times)

16 shots and a cover up! 16 shots and a cover up!

REGINA

(into a blowhorn)

Indict, convict, send those killer cops to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell!

VARIOUS CROWD MEMBERS

Indict, convict, send those killer cops to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell!

(A youth protester stares down a police officer who is in a row of police blocking the protestor from marching any further.)

PROTESTOR

(very close to officer's face)

We're not afraid of you! Your time of terrorizing the community is up! We're gonna get justice for Laquan!

ALANA, REGINA, AND SOFIA

(together into the blowhorns as the crowd marches, leading the chants)

CPAC Now! We're not waiting, we demand CPAC Now!

¹⁴ Source for quote: <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20151126/streeterville/teachers-union-join-black-friday-mag-mile-laquan-mcdonald-protest/>

SUSAN

(to SAMANTHA, while crowd continues to chant
and march in the background)

What's CPAC?

SAMANTHA

CPAC is the Civilian Police Accountability Council. Next week at the House of Delegates meeting we're going to take a vote on whether we will support it as a union or not. Will you be there?

SUSAN

Oh. Yeah, I'll definitely be there. Are we going to have the vote the same way we voted to endorse the union's involvement in the march today? Cuz that was a pretty intense meeting.

SAMANTHA

Yes, and so be prepared. I'm sure there is going to be lots of debate and some strong opposition, especially coming from the Mount Greenwood bunch, ya know, the Pro-cop caucus!

(She laughs.)

It won't be an easy or smooth vote, but it's important for us to take a vote and try to get as much support as possible for it. A lot of our community allies support the CPAC.

(The crowd continues chanting and marches
offstage, except JEFF who stays back.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT I
SCENE 8

“Why I march (part 2)”

The ‘Justice for Laquan’ rally has just ended and
JEFF, who stayed back, directly addresses the
audience.

JEFF

Why did I march? I marched because I can’t sit back and witness the continued murder of black people in this country, while far too many white people sit back and say nothing at all about it or even worse, blame the victims themselves!

(speaking passionately.)

If Laquan just put his hands up, or if Eric Garner just would’ve given up those cigarettes to the officer when asked—No, fuck that!

I’ve taught in black schools for 10 years and I’m telling you, if you create a safe classroom, your students are gonna talk. And they’re gonna share lots of stories of police abuse and injustice. It’s in everything that they write and talk about. You just have to listen. More teachers need to be addressing this. I’m one of the many teachers who support the Movement for Black Lives and joined the Black Friday protest because, honestly, how could you not as a teacher in Chicago?

(JEFF walks off stage and SUSAN enters back on
to stage)

SUSAN

(directly addresses the audience)

Why did I march? I marched because it was important to me, as a teacher and as a human being, to express my solidarity with Black Lives Matter, with young people and young African Americans and to be there for our students! As a teacher I feel a moral responsibility to protect our kids, and Laquan Mc Donald was one of our kids!

(takes a short pause)

You know, we have a real problem in this city, a real sickness of anti-black racism and it manifests itself through the police violence we see in our students’ communities. And I’m just so outraged that my students have to live in fear every day, especially from the very people who are supposed to protect us! The police are sworn protectors. We pay taxes for the police to protect us and serve us. And I don’t want to see them killing our youth!

(Takes another short pause)

And I just think we need to unite as Chicagoans to make changes to this city. We need to treat each other with respect and kindness! And I think by going to rallies we can unite people who are so divided right now and we can bring awareness to the problems of racism in this city. That's why I march.

(Walks off stage.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT I

SCENE 9

“Online discussions on offline struggles”

The Wednesday after the Black Friday protest. On stage, characters are sitting in a row in front of audience with their phones. In back of them, a screen is projected, displaying an ongoing online chat on the Chicago Teachers Union Facebook page. Comments scroll slowly so that audience members can read what it being written, but it also conveys the idea that the online discussion is happening in ‘real time’.

Sofia

25 min

Here’s a nice write up of yesterday’s protest!

<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20151127/streeterville/laquan-mcdonald-protest-take-over-mag-mile-during-black-friday-shopping/>

Good work, folks! #unionstrong #blacklivesmatter #blackfriday #justiceforlaquan



11 comments 50 shares

Amy I can’t believe my CTU brothers and sisters supported this! I’m appalled at the anti-law enforcement sentiment this union is showing! Sends a terribly dangerous message to our students that we are supporting these groups who hate the police!

Like Reply 24 min



Alan Couldn’t agree more with you, **Amy**! Why is the CTU presenting ourselves at these rallies that are anti-cop? I wish they put some of that organizing energy into securing a decent contract for dues-paying members!

Like Reply 24 min



Jeff It’s pretty obvious if you listen to kids, police are an issue. Not sure why there’s so much uncomfortableness with teachers speaking up about it? Also, suggesting that we need to worry about the contract and not about the social stuff is what jacked up unions in the first place, so not sure we want to go back to that strategy...

Like Reply 21 min



Regina If some folks would listen to what their very own union members are saying! Those of us who live in the communities being gentrified! We're the ones whose kids are getting harassed and killed by the CPD! And somehow it's a problem that we're going out to protest?

Like Reply 19 min



Sofia You know, **Regina**, a lot of folks work in these communities under heavy police surveillance, but then go home to their own neighborhoods and out of sight, out of mind!

Like Reply 17 min



Alan The police are not the problem, the gangs are! Trust me, I know, I was head of school security for years! The police were the ones helping us in the schools keep a handle on the gangs and keep our schools safe. Say what you want about it, but the fact remains that the vast majority of those killed on Chicago's streets are killed in gang shootings, not in Laquan McDonald police shootings! And **Jeff**, you gotta have good business unionism in addition to social justice unionism- one can't control the other!

Like Reply 15 min



Sofia So we should trust you **Alan**, but not what our students tell us or what teachers of color are saying about their own lived experiences with law enforcement in this city?????

Like Reply 14 min



Samantha You may not like it **Amy**, but we've taken a principled stand on this one and we can't go back on it. Teachers showing up to the march shows our black and brown students that we support them. As a union we've made our support for Black Lives Matter and CPAC very visible because it's the right thing to do. Laquan was our student! He was shot 16 times and then it was covered up!

Like Reply 11 min



Amy What happened to Laquan is terrible, but that doesn't mean we should turn our backs on our police, the ones who keep our streets and schools safe! We should be united with all the unions in Chicago, not a chosen few. Many of our spouses, neighbors and friends are police officers and we should always support one another!

Like Reply 7 min



[Susan](#): Supporting Black Lives Matter doesn't mean that we're 'anti-police'. We can show our support to our students of color and we can also talk about what police departments need cuz I think they're hurting in a lot of ways...we as teachers get trained to work with students and I think the police need better training to interact with communities. But we can't act like the problem doesn't exist, [Amy Alan](#).

[Like](#) [Reply](#) 5 min



[Alana](#) How is it that we go from Black Lives Matter- elevating the need to address the ills against Black folks to saying I hate police? I don't understand how we went there that fast. How is self- preservation automatically "I'm against you because I love me"?

[Like](#) [Reply](#) just now



(Conversation finishes and all characters stand up, continue looking at their phones and walk off the stage.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT I
SCENE 10

“Carrying our own experiences and baggage”

AMY comes back on to the stage. She is holding her cell phone. She directly addresses the audience.

AMY

I’ve been a teacher in CPS for 25 years. My husband is a Chicago Police Officer and has dedicated 25 years of service to this city! We are hard-working residents of this city! I live on the southwest side, in a neighborhood where a lot of police and firemen are my neighbors and family friends. How do you think it is for me every day being a member of this union and seeing all the police-hating stuff that they’re promoting lately? The whole narrative has really painted the police out to be the bad guys when that’s not true!

(passionately)

My husband never killed anyone! And I know a lot of police officers who feel bad about what happened to Laquan, but let’s not let this get out of hand and punish everyone for the actions of a few bad apples! And the union has just become so political about everything. I mean, why are they getting into issues that really don’t concern us?

(her tone and expression convey bit of nostalgia)

When we went on strike in 2012, we were calling for more resources for our students, better teaching, learning and working conditions. And we were all united with the other unions in this city! Now, our teaching and working conditions have gotten way worse and our union is using its energy and money to go after cops, instead of fighting for its members!

(AMY walks off and ALAN walks on to stage and directly addresses the audience.)

ALAN

I’ve been a militant union activist for decades. I actually helped invent CORE¹⁵. And I also helped put them in power! But boy am I disappointed with the direction this is all heading.

¹⁵ The Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) was formed in 2008 by a group of progressive, radical teachers in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). CORE was elected to lead the CTU in June of 2010 and has held leadership of the union since then. Under CORE’s leadership, the CTU has embraced a social justice unionism model, where teachers form relationships with parents and the community to fight for broader social needs (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Brogan, 2014; Gunderson, 2018).

You know, we didn't have an organizing department in the union until CORE got elected. And I wasn't against it at first, but I'm way against it now because what's happened is the union has gone off the deep end into this social justice stuff.

They're not focused on winning us a strong contract let alone enforcing the one we've got!

Look, I'm not against social justice unionism. Like I said, I'm a militant unionist. I was organizing against racial segregation in the union in the 70's!

But in order to have social justice unionism, you gotta have effective business unionism! They're not in opposition; one builds on the other!

Business unionism means you negotiate a strong contract and you enforce it with vigor. Those are the two criteria. Contract is wages and benefits, hours of work, working conditions, job security. Those are the boxes to check. Everything else is bullshit!

And for saying this, they think I'm some some kind of insensitive racist, deviationist when I'd much rather prefer the label of anarchist -syndicalist- deviationist!

But I guess it depends on which church you go to, who gets expelled for heresy.

(ALAN shrugs his shoulders and walks off stage.
As he walks off stage, ALANA walks on stage
and shakes her head in frustration to what ALAN
just said and looks at audience.)

ALANA

(Directly addresses the audience. Speaks with a
tone of exhaustion in her voice.)

I would be lying if I said that this work isn't frustrating and often exhausting. We're dealing with systems that are paternalistic and racist. Period. And the fact is that we are also imperfect individuals in this movement, and in this union, who are all coming at this with our own experiences and baggage. So it's gonna take time for us to figure it out. I often hear people talk about the

(does air quotes as she's talking)

quote 'racial justice' and quote 'education justice' movements as if they were two separate movements that we like need to bring together. But I don't see them as two movements. I don't. Cuz that's not my experience.

Fighting for public education in Chicago *is* (emphasis on the word 'is') the fight for racial justice!

If we just had white kids with well-funded schools, ain't nobody sayin' anything! Think about it. They would have issues I'm certain, cuz you know, there's always dysfunction in any system, but they wouldn't have closed 50 schools! There wouldn't be so many homeless students!

The fact of the matter is, we wouldn't talk about dirty classrooms, we wouldn't talk about 50 school closings, we wouldn't talk about the hyper-privatization of school spaces if the kids weren't black or brown and poor, right?

So what I want to say to my fellow union brothers and sisters who are upset about the union taking a lead role in the social struggles of our city and actually fighting for black lives, which

are our students' lives is this: If you're a teacher in Chicago and you're not fighting for racial justice, then what the hell are you doin'? Which side are you on?

(ALANA pauses for 30 seconds looking at audience after she poses her question, which is meant to signal that she wants them to reflect on that question. Then she walks off the stage.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT I
SCENE 11

“Fault Lines”

April 1, 2016, Downtown Chicago. The CTU along with community organizations, Black Lives Matter, Black Youth Project 100, in addition to other unions, are gathered at a rally at the culmination of a CTU one-day strike and day of action throughout the city. Characters in the crowd are holding banners saying, "Fund Education, Tax the Rich," "Fund Black Futures" and "Community Control: Elected School and Police Boards Now”

UNION PRESIDENT

Brothers and sisters, we’re outside the State of Illinois building. Why? Because the governor has decided to hold everybody hostage. But you know what? Rauner can’t stop us teachers! Rahm and Rauner know, Chicago’s a union town! Those who run this state also need to understand that we’re not just fighting for education, but we’re also gonna Fight for \$15, so that all our parents can have a living wage¹⁶!

(crowd erupts in cheers.)

CROWD MEMBERS

Yeah!/ That’s Right!

UNION PRESIDENT

We’re fighting with our brothers and sisters who drive the buses and operate the L’s. For every single working person in this state, somebody’s got to lead the way! It happened to fall to CTU! So here we are!

(crowd cheers.)

UNION PRESIDENT

Brothers and sisters, I am so humbled by the turnout today. This is what happens when we all decide to come together and stop fighting each other! We’re here united demanding that the rich pay their fair share and fund our schools and all that we need to live in this city!

¹⁶ Source for speeches in this scene from: <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/liveblog-april-1-ctu-strike/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5WIpoAzmIc>

(as the UNION PRESIDENT is talking, stirring
and people speaking can be heard from one area
in particular within the crowd)

PERSON FROM THE CROWD

Get the cops out of schools! Police out of schools!

UNION PRESIDENT

(turns to address the area where the voices saying
“cops out of schools” was coming from)

Let me tell you what, the cops are not our enemies.

PERSON FROM THE CROWD

Cops out of schools!

UNION PRESIDENT

(looking generally in the direction of the area
where voices are coming from, but cannot see for
certain who it is; with a tone of annoyance and
impatience in their voice)

Don't start that! No, don't start that! The police have been helpful! And if they give us the
opportunity, we will help them be more helpful.

(turns back forward facing the whole crowd and
begins speaking again)

Look we don't need occupation in our schools and we don't need to criminalize our children
either! And we don't need to criminalize bad behavior. So what I'm saying is we should have
restorative justice so that children who make mistakes know how to fix them. Children need to
feel safe!

(the speech continues on but now focus changes
to ALAN, SUSAN, AND MELANIE)

ALAN

(to Susan and Melanie, who are next to him at
rally)

Cops out of schools? Yeah, ok. The only ones who want that are the gangs! Why is she letting
these kids interrupt her?

SUSAN

We don't have cops at my school, but I've heard complaints from some teachers at other schools about how the cops are really rough with the kids. But also, some teachers feel safer with police in schools, so I dunno.

MELANIE

We don't have off-duty cops anymore at my school, but we still have security. Those kids have got a point. Cops don't have training to work with kids and especially with my special ed kids, cops usually made it worse. I've done a lot of work with our security to make sure they understand which students have special needs you know, so they don't escalate problems.

(While Alan, Melanie, and Susan are talking, a new speaker takes the podium. She is a young African American woman who is a leader of an organization called Assata's Daughters, which is part of the larger Movement for Black Lives.)

ACTIVIST SPEAKER

While I have all y'all's attention, what I wanna say is Fuck the police! Fuck CPD, Fuck the FOP! Dante Servin¹⁷ your ass is being fired without a pension! Fuck the police and everybody fuck with 'em!

(SOFIA claps and whistles while AMY, standing on the other end of the stage, boos. JEFF, SAMANTHA, KAYLA, REGINA and ALANA look around at one another.)

SUSAN

(in disbelief, turns to ALAN)

Did she just say what I think she did?

ALAN

(to SUSAN)

Yep, you heard her right. This has somehow turned into an anti-police rally!

¹⁷ Dante Servin was a Chicago Police Officer who gunned down and murdered Rekia Boyd, a 22-year-old Black woman in 2012. Although he was brought to trial, his case was dismissed. Black led organizations in Chicago, along with Rekia's family launched the 'Fire Dante Servin' campaign, which gained huge traction in Chicago (and nationally) in 2015. Right before Servin's final hearing on whether he would be fired or not, he resigned, and grassroots organizations have credited the success and pressure of their mobilizing to leading to this outcome (Carruthers, 2018).

ALAN

(to AMY)

I'm gonna take off.

AMY

Yeah, me too.

(ALAN walks off stage. As AMY is making her way out of the crowd to leave the rally, she sees a group of Chicago police officers on bikes, watching the rally from a short distance.)

AMY

(to officers)

I am so sorry! That last speaker doesn't speak for all of us teachers! I don't even know who she is! Chicago teachers support our police and we appreciate all you do!

(Amy walks off stage.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT 1

SCENE 12

“Post-rally beers”

Characters walk into a café, and eventually all sit down at a table, one which KAYLA had just reserved a few minutes prior. SUSAN sits down first, next to KAYLA and then MELANIE takes a seat. JEFF, SAMANTHA, ALANA, REGINA and SOFIA arrive together a few minutes after and sit down next to one another. Everyone takes off their jackets, places their orders and sits in an awkward silence for 30 seconds.

SUSAN

(breaking the silence, speaking to everyone at the table)

She shouldn't have said that at a teachers' event. Today was about building unity to fight Rauner and Rahm.

JEFF

Well, it wasn't just a teachers' event, Susan. It was Black Lives Matter, Fight for \$15, and CTU all coming together in one event. And besides, what she said is relevant. This is stuff that affects our students and many teachers of color in our union as well.

SUSAN

(sounding annoyed at JEFF's remark)

I know it does. I get it, believe me. I am not unaware of the issue, ok? But she's distracting from the common enemies that we have. Look, when we were on strike in 2012 the cops were very supportive. And the police are now under attack and they're fighting to protect their pensions just like us. And we should be right there, like they supported us. I mean we talk about workers' rights all the time, well...

SOFIA

That speaker has every right to be as pissed as she is. They strip us of resources that could help keep kids safe and learning and instead spend it on more policing which doesn't actually keep our streets safer and ends up just incarcerating our kids. We can never find enough money to get a nurse or social worker in every school, but we can put cop in every school?

REGINA

Well if the police were supporting us in 2012, that was their choice. But we sure as hell don't owe them anything in return because they supported us. And we shouldn't be scared to call out police misconduct cuz we don't want to piss them off.

(With a tone of annoyance.)

And, c'mon! The police are not under attack. They're out here at these rallies with all their gear. Just totally over the top. They shut down the streets more than the protesters at the rallies!

(A short awkward moment of silence again.)

MELANIE

Well look, I think a lot of us are going to have our own opinions about today and what was said or done, but I do think we've got to understand that the connections may be there for us, but they aren't always there for folks in terms of our participation in these rallies and how the issues of various movements connect to our work. For lots of folks they get it, but for others they don't and we can't assume that we're all on the same page. I do think there are lots of folks who want to be involved in the social struggles of this city and strengthen our relationship with Black Lives Matter, but a lot of folks I've been talking to at least, feel like we need to take care of our own stuff first before spreading ourselves too thin. And I think getting into these sort of controversies like what happened today doesn't help.

SAMANTHA

(in a defensive tone, directly addressing

MELANIE)

So what are we supposed to do? Abandon our social justice cause and go back to the old way of doing things and just focus on pay and benefits? Look, we all know that very few teachers do this work for a paycheck. And so if we were to center only on bread and butter issues, I think we would lose the ability to keep activists inside our union to do the work.

MELANIE

I'm not saying that. I'm—

SAMANTHA

(continues talking and cuts MELANIE off; is speaking very passionately)

If we don't energize our unions about more than good health insurance and a cute calendar, how are we going to get people to join up for the union? These new teachers coming in, they're extremely passionate about their students and the lives of their students. They don't want the old style unionism. They're turned off by that. So if we want to attract folks into unionism and keep our union movement strong, we've got to do that by being out here, with the community, showing that we really care about students' lives. And that means continuing to participate in actions like today, even when hiccups occur.

(SOFIA and REGINA nod their heads in agreement.)

MELANIE

Yeah, I agree and I think we can find a way to do some of both, but we have to make sure we are connecting this all for folks and meeting needs in our individual buildings cuz that's our lived experience. And you can't ignore that. If you do, you're gonna lose folks.

SOFIA

(in a surprised tone)

Do people think we are ignoring them?

MELANIE

(takes a sigh)

I'm just gonna say it. People feel like leadership is disconnected from teachers in the classroom. A lot folks in leadership have been out of the classroom since 2010. Ya know, that's a pretty long time. A lot has changed and some of the folks in leadership

(senses SAMANTHA getting offended because she has a role in leadership)

and I'm not talking about you specifically Sam—I know you're in the classroom—but a lot of folks leading us haven't experienced the longer school day, the longer school year and the exhaustion that comes from that.

ALANA

A lot of us may not be in the classroom, but we're fighting like hell on the political and legislative front to change the dynamic in this city and fight for our members and students. We launched a strike that literally reinvigorated the labor movement. And we've fought against gentrification, privatization, school closings and-

MELANIE

(interrupts ALANA)

Yeah, I understand that you all fought tooth and nail against the school closings, but the fact of it is, we didn't win that battle, right? Fifty schools were closed. That's not a win! And you know, our staff and students have had to recover from that.

REGINA

(looking to Alana.)

Now that's true. Everybody talks about 2012 but I remember I was at Emerson at the time and all of the positive energy that we felt was short lived because right after we came off strike, the school closing hearings started. And well, we all know what happened to Emerson, so...

(looks down.)

KAYLA

(sensing tension)

If I can jump in here. I think some people feel ignored. Some, like myself, are overwhelmed and want to try to put our energy towards dealing with important issues we're facing, and we can't be at all places involved in all things. And I think other people probably don't feel comfortable with the social justice direction of the union and prefer it to be about workers' rights and job security and that's it.

ALANA

Look, I'm hearing what you're saying, Mel, I am. And I do think we need to find that balance otherwise the bread and butter stuff could come back to bite us. But we also gotta understand some of the reactionary elements of this too. Just look at the racial component of the folks and groups opposing our strong social justice message.

SAMANTHA

(interjects, with a bit of a sassy tone)

You mean the "white people's caucus"? That's what I call 'em!

ALANA

Absolutely. You know, we're an unabashedly anti-racist union. We've sent shock waves through this city in our fight against racism and that may not sit well with some folks who feel threatened by our work so I think we're also looking at reaction to that.

KAYLA

Yeah, I mean I see it. A lot of teachers don't acknowledge their own privilege and their own struggles with racism, that's true.

(puts hands up, as if anticipating a defensive reaction by someone in the group)

And I'm not trying to make excuses for racism, but like we aren't given opportunities really to reflect on those things, ya know?

(puts her hand on her chest and looks around at everyone in the group as she is reflecting aloud.)

Asking ourselves what is my privilege doing? How is that informing how I teach and the decisions of my curriculum and the choices I'm making? Like as a white woman, why am I so

upset that this person is saying “This is what the police are doing to us, and fuck them”, you know? Like why is that so offensive to me?

(SUSAN, MELANIE AND SAMANTHA are looking down, reflecting on what KAYLA is saying, nodding their heads as she speaks)

And I think that is something we as a union could do more of. I mean, I’ve taught in predominantly black schools my entire time here and I’ve had maybe three or four- maybe- four PD’s talking about race, so we gotta do more.

JEFF

That’s true, Kayla. The people I know who are upset about the union’s involvement with the social justice stuff in our city and say that our contract is shitty, like they seem to be the ones who are not as comfortable talking about race or not- or don’t connect the dots of how it’s all connected.

SAMANTHA

Yeah, well what can we say? A lot of those folks are just racist.

MELANIE

(with a tone of impatience with SAMANTHA)

Look, I’m sure some people are racist. No doubt. We’re not immune to racism just cuz we’re a social justice union. But we shouldn’t just paint all people who have criticism with a broad brush and just discount what they’re trying to say and label them all racist. Sometimes I feel that some of the more radical folks of this union approach others in a way that’s like “I care about social justice, but you don’t”, you know? And I’m sorry but that’s not the way. Everyone cares to some degree, you just have to tap into where their issue is. I mean that’s what I learned as an organizer from you all at the CTU organizing summer institute! Why don’t we take our own advice?

(everyone at the table sits reflecting on what MELANIE has just said.)

(END OF SCENE. END OF ACT I.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

“Fighting to change minds”

ACT II begins right after the last scene in ACT I.
MELANIE comes back out on stage and
addresses the audience directly.

MELANIE

Sometimes I get accused of being too naïve, too Pollyannaish.
But I don't think I am. I'm trying to understand where people are coming from.
Do we live in a racist society where people have racist ideas? Yes. No doubt that those ideas
exist within my union. But to me, people who hold racist ideas are not irredeemable in my mind,
people can learn new ideas, right? I think white supremacy plays on these system wide levels and
that people learn the racist ideas from the systems. I think that's really important for us to
understand, especially with the language around Trump voters and deplorables and all of this.
You sometimes see that attitude in movement work, and I see some of it from our own rank and
file folks, you know, where they are just like there's these irredeemable people in our union. And
it's like if we're just gonna give up on a whole section of our membership-

(her voice increases in intensity and she speaks
steadfastly)

Like NO! We should be fighting to change their minds as opposed to saying, “You're just
hopeless. You're disgusting, I don't ever want to see you again”. Like that actually doesn't help
us defeat this white supremacist project that we're all living under! And I think we can do that, I
think we can change people's minds and rebuild some of what we've lost with a lot of the
internal issues we've been experiencing. We just gotta make sure we're meeting people where
they are at.

(MELANIE walks off stage.)

(END OF SCENE.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

“How do you negotiate a non-negotiable?”

REGINA in in her classroom. She is sitting at her desk. She has been thinking about what MELANIE said after the rally the other day. She gets up from her desk and speaks to the audience.

REGINA

It's not always easy to hear, but Melanie has a point. I think most of the folks who are really involved in the union are mostly of the same ilk. So when there's something that's explained in a way that says we're advocating for this for these reasons, there's not a lot of push back. But when you go into the schools and you're having conversations to a broader CTU base, well, that can be a different story. I'm not surprised by any of these sorts of tensions, and you shouldn't be either. We can't believe that everyone has the same mindset or the same goals or the same visions because we come to it from different places and experiences. And the tensions and divisions created can be so broad. And while I can understand Melanie, sometimes you try to find the middle ground and other times you have to draw the line in the sand.

(shaking her head “no” as she speaks the next line)

You know, we can't back down from the racial justice fight. That's a line that needs to be drawn. And so not every issue can be negotiated. Sometimes we gotta come out hard on certain ones.

(begins to move away from her desk closer to the audience)

You know, take for instance these zero tolerance policies that put students in jail for discipline issues in school. Some of our teaches don't think that's a problem. Well it is, I'm sorry.

(goes up directly to a member in the audience and speaks directly to them)

Lemme ask you, where is the happy medium within the school to prison pipeline?

(waits for a few seconds for audience member to respond)

Trick question. There isn't one! You are either saying that it's ok for brown and black children to go into schools and be under a group of very restrictive practices that send them off to correctional institutions or you come out and take a hard stand against it. You gotta pick a side.

(tone becomes slightly softer, slightly less forceful)

But with that said, what Mel said has me thinking a lot about our organizing, and I agree with her- it's a matter of finding people where they are. You know, what is your passion, what are you prepared to do? And so maybe that means having fewer big actions and more things that get more at changing people's consciousness. We have to always be considering, how do we stay connected to folks?

(puts her left hand out in front of her and then her right hand out creating a big gap between her hands, and using her hands to speak as she says the next line)

Because if you are trying to guide folks somewhere you think that they're here, but they're really back here and you're making decisions based on assumptions and not really doing the work of figuring out where your people are at, well... And any group can lose its direction if it loses focus.

(ALANA walks back to her desk and sits down and begins writing her reflections in a notebook.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT II

SCENE 3

“It’s hard to keep a cohesive movement”

SAMANTHA has just attended a tense meeting with union leadership, discussing some of the issues the union has been experiencing. She comes out on stage and addresses audience.

SAMANTHA:

It’s hard to keep a cohesive movement. Yeah, CORE is leading the union, but there’s really only about a hundred of us rank and file who do the heavy lifting. I mean, you lose part of your troops, especially when we’re talking about long struggles. And not only that, but within the same union you’ve got folks who respond to Black Lives Matter with ‘Blue Lives Matter’.

(Shakes her head in annoyance)

You’ve got some people who don’t want to rock the boat too much, you know, not make too many waves. Then you’ve got the folks with the purity test who always find certain things unreconcilable and have to find their movement space elsewhere.

(throws hands up in air)

And then you’ve got the radicals who want the Chicago Teachers to start the revolution! And we’re all one movement. Or trying to be.

(sighs, takes a short pause)

It’s not easy leading this movement. And we don’t have millions like the Koch brothers, you know, our energy and funds are finite. So the question is, do we only use our energy and our funds for the local struggle or do we branch out broader? One of the things you’ve probably recognized by now is that the attacks are coming from all sides. Kind of like when Audre Lorde said that she fights all things on many fronts because there’s that many fronts against her. It’s all interconnected, right?

(takes a short pause; tone changes a bit to convey contemplation and reflection.)

But with that said, we’d be foolish if we didn’t listen to the criticism and concern from our members. Some of it is very true. The issues that create tension aren’t only around police. There’s a lot of other stuff too. And I’ll be honest, thinking about our last rally, you know, rallies are very visible. It’s what gets on the news. But I don’t think we’ve been using the rallies very strategically and folks are getting tired. It’s easy to forget that the actual political fight is a lot more subtle than having rallies. You can get anyone to come to a rally and wave a banner. But the actual political work is about deep organizing and getting people to be committed to the struggle.

ACT II

SCENE 4

“Winning the school level fight”

It’s now 2017. CPS is proposing to merge two schools into one and close the other school for budgetary reasons. At Mc Robinson School. SUSAN, KAYLA, ALAN, and SOFIA want to call a meeting with the parents and organizations in the community to strategize and oppose this. They are seeking to reach out to other teachers in their school to get more support.

KAYLA

(walks into AMY’s classroom)

Hey Amy. Got plans tonight?

AMY

Hey. Other than going home and making dinner, no I’m not doing anything. Why?

KAYLA

Well, I’m sure you’ve heard, CPS wants to co-locate our school into Mc Hughes building.

AMY

Yeah, I found out today. That would be disastrous!

KAYLA

Yes, for us it would be, cuz I’m sure there would be layoffs in that process of merging, and we would be the receiving school. It’ll be so disruptive for us, our students and the community as a whole.

AMY

(surprised)

We’re slated to be the receiving school!? It’ll be chaos next year. Doesn’t CPS know that Mc Robinson and Mc Hughes are rivals? They can’t just put all these kids together and expect there not to be brawls and fighting!

KAYLA

Exactly!

(sarcastically)

You know, CPS is all their infinite wisdom decides, yeah, let's put kids from rival schools together and voila, they will just get along! CPS only sees numbers. We know that by now.

(AMY nods head in agreement and rolls her eyes.)

KAYLA

Anyways, we've been in contact with the folks on Carrol Ave¹⁸ and I was just talking to Susan and Jeff, and they think we need to come out strong and united on this one, and get parents involved too.

AMY

Yeah, I agree.

KAYLA

I know it's last minute, but would you be able to stay today to help us plan a meeting for next week with parents and the community?

AMY

Yeah, I can stay after for a bit.

KAYLA

Great, we're meeting at 3:45 in Susan's room. See you there!

(KAYLA leaves AMY's classroom and walks down to SOFIA's room, where she is grading papers.)

KAYLA

Hey, so Amy is in for meeting today. So, so far, we've got almost half the staff here who are in on organizing something to oppose this merger.

SOFIA

Really? That surprises me. She's been so vocally upset with CORE and the union in general lately, I would've thought it'd be hard to get her to buy in to this.

KAYLA

Well, I guess you never know. I mean, let's not be overly optimistic. She may prove to be a thorn in our side, but maybe not. I dunno, I've just been thinking about the conversations we've been having lately as a union and the whole idea about finding out what people are willing to do and show up for and use that as a way to rebuild some trust that has been broken, and it just made me think about reaching out to her and seeing if this can work. It's worth a shot anyways.

¹⁸ Chicago Teachers Union headquarters is located on a street called Carrol Avenue in Chicago and this is a colloquial way of referring to union headquarters by some local teachers.

SOFIA

Totally. Nice job, delegate!

SOFIA

Thanks! Anyways, I'm gonna see if I can get some grading in before this meeting starts! See you soon!

(KAYLA leaves SOFIA's room.)

(SCENE ENDS.)

ACT II
SCENE 5

“An injury to one is an injury to all”

Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers have merged with the CTU. It’s now December 2018. Teachers working at Acero network schools have gone on strike in the first charter school strike in US history. Characters are at a rally outside of Torres Elementary, an Acero school¹⁹. RICKY, a leader of the Chicago charter school teachers, goes up to the podium at the rally.

RICKY

It’s so great to see so many teachers out here today! It’s great to see the solidarity that we as teachers have with one another! There are so many charter school teachers who now teach in CPS schools and vice versa.

(passionately)

We teach the same students. We are brothers and sisters! We’re fighting the same battles. This is the same fight!

(cheers from the crowd)

RICKY

Rauner and Rahm didn’t want us to merge!

MEMBERS OF THE CROWD

Boos!/ They can’t divide us!

RICKY

No, they wanted to keep us divided, pitted against one another! Well the divide and conquer strategy worked in Rahm and Rauner’s favor for a long time, but not anymore!

(cheers from the crowd)

VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE CROWD

That’s right!/Not anymore!/ Solidarity forever!

¹⁹ Source for this scene: <https://www.ctulocal1.org/chicago-union-teacher/2018/12/when-we-fight-we-win-2/>

RICKY

Now that we've united the CTU teachers and charter school teachers, and we're standing strong together, it's much harder to divide us! And they see our strength! We've shown our strength because we've won!

(cheers from the crowd)

We've won not only lower class sizes and better compensation, especially for our teacher assistants, who are often so underpaid, but the Acero win establishes sanctuary schools, restorative justice and culturally relevant education in all our schools!

(MELANIE sees KAYLA, REGINA, SAMANTHA and SUSAN and approaches them.)

MELANIE

Hey! So, we meet again!

SAMANTHA

Hey! Yes, and this time, for a better reason. We're showing our strength once again as the fighting union that we are! I think this fight for charter teachers is bringing us together again!

REGINA

Yeah, I know there was some pushback from folks not wanting the charter teachers to join the CTU, but that didn't surprise me much. Folks are always easily fooled into thinking their enemy is their fellow co-worker rather than the boss. But good thing we prevailed. Now we're able to launch this strike and the charter teachers have our support and it matters. The whole country is lookin' at Chicago again right now, making history-

(REGINA pauses, 'breaks the scene' momentarily and says her next line directly to the audience.)

or rather, herstory, since it's the women leading these fights-

(REGINA then goes back into the scene and the conversation continues.)

SUSAN

Yeah, like at my school, I overheard some teachers saying things like "lower class sizes is something CTU has been fighting for for like ever and it isn't fair if charter school teachers get it first, they've only been unionized like a year.

JEFF

(with a tone of impatience and annoyance.)

You know, sometimes I think I've heard all the most ridiculous arguments there are to make, but then I hear stuff like this. It's like what's so hard to understand that now that we're united, their wins will help push our fight forward as well? That's why it's good when everyone is unionized because now, we can say 'hey, we want what they have' and vice versa.

KAYLA

Well, to share something less frustrating, I've been reaching out to folks in my building to organize meetings with the community to oppose this co-location of Mc Hughes and Mc Robinson and we're getting a lot of people to say yes, even people who have been giving CTU leadership and CORE a hard time lately.

MELANIE

Wow, that's great Kay!

KAYLA

Yeah, even Amy stayed after the other day and is like really on board with this so far!

SAMANTHA

(with attitude)

Amy? Ms. 'Back the Blue'²⁰ Amy? Wow! Way to go, Kayla! Not sure she would come out to a meeting if I asked her!

MELANIE

Well, sometimes people surprise us, Sam.

KAYLA

Yeah, so we'll see how it all goes.

(scene shifts focus to RICKY who is about to finish his speech at the podium.)

RICKY

So chant with me! When we fight we win!

VARIOUS CROWD MEMBERS

When we fight, we win!

RICKY

²⁰ 'Back the Blue' is a term that colloquially means support the police. It is a response by police supporters to Black Lives Matter (BLM) to disregard the concerns that BLM raises around police misconduct.

An injury to one, is an injury to all!

VARIOUS CROWD MEMBERS

An injury to one, is an injury to all!

(SCENE ENDS.)

(END ACT II.)

EPILOGUE:

Characters come on stage, one by one, to say their final monologues. SOFIA is the first and enters from stage left.

SOFIA

Where are we going from here? The way I see it, maybe we're not moving at the same speed as before, like back in 2012, but we're still keeping it in motion. We're not on the offensive by any means, but at same time, we've changed the conversation in important ways around education. A lot of politicians are adopting our positions on things like charter schools, an elected representative school board and other stuff. We gotta try to not lose the momentum or become cynical. It's so hard not to and I mean it's a struggle for me too. This upcoming year I told myself I'm not going to take on as much, just cuz I think for my mental health I need to kind of fall back a little bit but for the same reason that I don't want to get burnt out. The people in power, the mayor, everybody wants to see you burnt out. And that's why I think we need to have a core group that doesn't lose sight of the struggle. And it's important that this core group know how to struggle more than anything with their group. Struggle with folks in our movement as opposed to struggle against It's not easy, it's rough, but hopefully things get better.

(SOFIA exits stage left and JEFF enters stage right.)

JEFF

Sometimes I look to my wife and ask her why are we even doing all this? Why do we care? We should just go somewhere cuz this is ridiculous. But you know, most of the time I don't feel that way. Most of the time I see a lot of possibility here!

(looks around the room)

There's a lot of people who are really doing amazing work to bring about change and I wanna be a part of that. I wanna see that, experience that. I dunno how it's gonna go forward for us. The charter fight is inspiring.

(Takes a short pause)

And maybe change in leadership isn't a bad thing? Of course, I always support CTU, no matter what. But, you know, tension isn't always a bad thing. We can never get too comfortable or complacent because the struggle never lets up!

(JEFF exits stage right and ALAN enters stage left.)

ALAN

As I've been saying, when you get to the point now where we have a union that's going overboard in its political correctness- the current issue of the Union newspaper barely mentions unionism. It's all about internationalism, diversity, overcoming the school to prison pipeline, and

all the rest of those buzz things of today- When you get to that point, members are gonna wake up to the fact that this leadership has sold them out! And they are! There is planned opposition running against the current leadership. We'll see how that turns out!

(ALAN exits stage left and KAYLA enters stage right)

KAYLA

I think that CTU is still the star of the teacher union and labor movement. But I think that a lot of movements have come since 2012. Because of the Black Lives Matter movement and the important role it's having in moving the racial justice conversation in the US and because of Trump and the political climate we're in, there are more people who are willing to be politically engaged or involved. And now we need to continue to find a way to move forward on the social justice front. We need to continue to provide opportunities for teachers to learn about these issues, to grow and also find out what our members need and provide it to them.

(takes a short pause)

You know tension is good, tension is not bad. I think there has to be some very real frank talk amongst these different groups about what do we need? What do we need to move forward as a coalition? What teaching, what learning do our members need? What support do our members need?

(KAYLA exits stage right and SUSAN enters stage left)

SUSAN

I've been trying to be open-minded to understand all perspectives on what's been going on because we've been really divided, and we need to unite. And I don't have a lot of answers. But one thing I've learned by watching and participating myself in so many of the conversations we've been having in this movement is that you can't change people's experience that brought them to where they are just by telling them that they're wrong. It doesn't work that way. The organizations that have formed and are leading these movements, and our union included, have power and should have some momentum in educating and bringing the conversations to the front so we can talk out our differences. How to do that? I have no idea, that's a tall order. But that's why they are organizations and not just individuals.

(SUSAN exits stage left and MELANIE enters stage right.)

MELANIE

I've done a lot of thinking about this, as I've been trying to figure out how we can turn things around and pick up the momentum again?

(conveying nostalgia)

Back in 2012, the fact that CTU was able to strike and unions were not going on strike, that was huge! And it for sure paved the way for the more recent wave of teacher strikes last year.

But, as you've probably noticed by now, my favorite word is connection- and we've got to connect even more! I'm talking not only making the connections for folks within our movement to understand how other issues are related, but I'm also talking connecting different unions in different sectors.

(strong voice)

Heck, I'm talking general strike! Last year I remember we actually started having discussion with CTA train conductors and bus drivers cuz their conditions are also getting worse. And we were thinking, what if we all were able to go out and strike on the same day with them? That would scare the hell out of the people in charge! And like I still think that's possible. It didn't happen, but I think it could happen! We can rebuild and form a united movement. I 'm hopeful!

(less militant tone)

But we have to recognize the power we potentially have to harness it. As you've seen, within this movement- and any movement really- skirmishes do pop up, tensions surface. So how do we deal with it? How do we overcome them? Does it mean that we possibly can't work together? There are going to be people with racist ideas in our movements; there are people with racist ideas in the working class. What do you do with them, then? How do you shift people into a new way of thinking and understanding? Cuz the reality is, we need the numbers to win. We need it to be a unified, giant mass movement.

(MELANIE walks off stage and curtain drops.)

(END OF ETHNODRAMA.)

Chapter 5: A Critical Discussion of *Shifting Grounds: Movement Struggle*

Amongst Teachers in Chicago

Shifting Grounds: Movement struggle amongst teachers in Chicago is a theatrical exploration into the lived experience of eleven teachers, all active members of one of the most militant unions currently in the US, as they engage in social and political struggle for racial, education and social justice in the city. From the front lines of rallies back to their classrooms, from face-to-face encounters to online discussions, the audience follows these teachers as they work to sustain their movement through its ebbs and flows. In the spirit of both director's commentary and theatre critic, in this chapter I take a step back as playwright and make *Shifting Grounds* the object of analysis to engage in a discussion of the piece's main themes and my reasoning and justification for presenting characters or topics in the way I did (or attempted to do). For each major theme I discuss in this chapter, I incorporate a specific reference to how it manifests in participant interviews, its treatment in relevant scholarly literature (with critiques of the literature, in cases where its treatment has limitations), and how I represented it in the ethnodrama. Finally, throughout this chapter, I present a critical assessment of what *Shifting Grounds* accomplishes as well as where it has limitations.

Shifting Grounds is not a totally factual, historical account of the movement struggle in Chicago. In this piece I present a snapshot of important moments, events, people, ongoing debates, struggles and victories through an artistic medium, while ensuring I keep a close allegiance to the lived experiences of the people I encountered in my research. The eleven characters featured in this ethnodrama are all realistic and truthful representations of people and perspectives that I encountered and observed during my data collection. The characters in

Shifting Grounds deal with a range of personal and interpersonal dilemmas and struggles. At times, they are contradictory in their statements and actions. Furthermore, the dilemmas and struggles they experience are not all resolved at the end. Their stories are ongoing, and the piece's conclusion is purposefully unfinished. *Shifting Grounds* is not overly triumphant, nor is it pessimistic. Ultimately, it seeks to convey the multi-faceted, dynamic, complex and shifting ground upon which movements take place and seeks to present opportunities for empathetic reflection from the audience on each of the themes brought to light.

5.1 The Context of Organizing in Chicago

Chicago is a city marked by militant resistance on the one hand, and extreme racist repression on the other. Chicago has a deep and rich history of labor organizing, community organizing and radical Black organizing that continues to this day. This radical history spans generations, from the Haymarket martyrs in 1886, to radical labor organizing during the Great Depression, to the Chicago Freedom Movement during the Civil Rights Era, to Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition organizing in Chicago's Uptown in the late 1960's and 70's, to the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression in 1973 (to read more about these aspects of Chicago's history, see Cohen, 2014; Finley et al., 2016; Storch, 2007; Williams, 2013, to name a few). More recent examples include the Movement for Black Lives' strong presence and lead organizing role in the city, the fight for reparations for survivors of Chicago police torture, anti-gentrification organizing in the city's working-class neighborhoods, to name just a few. On the labor scene, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) has become a leading voice in grassroots resistance to corporate education reform in the US. Its 2012 strike sparked a rejuvenation in teacher union militancy across the US (Ashby & Bruno, 2016).

Chicago's strong movement organizing context exists in direct response to the repression its marginalized communities experience (Carruthers, 2018). In other words, the city's robust social movement scene has existed and continues to exist because the city's people, particularly its poor non-white residents, have endured sustained systematic racist attacks on their communities and schools, and have often been the victims of severe state repression and police torture. For example, for 2 decades (1972-1991), Chicago police detective commander John Burge tortured black men and women to obtain false confessions from them. An example of state sanctioned violence and repression of Chicago's Black liberation movement is the 1969 assassination of Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton by the Chicago Police Department (as part of the overall COINTELPRO operation) (see Haas, 2011 for a detailed history of the killing of Fred Hampton). Chicago police have engaged (and continue to do so) in heavy surveillance of radical movement leaders and spaces, often leading to their arrest and imprisonment.

As mentioned in chapter 1, Chicago has been an experiment in corporate neoliberal governance, and this has had the most negative impact on the city's black and brown residents. For example, the city closed 50 public schools and half of the city's mental health clinics in 2013, all of which are concentrated on the south and west sides where the majority of the city's black residents live (Lipman, 2017). This has left some communities without any local neighborhood schools and has meant long and dangerous journeys for students to attend new schools, as they are often forced to cross rival gang lines. School closings have also meant that those teachers and staff working in the schools are left without a job, and the effects of this can be seen in the decline of black educators in CPS (Johnson, 2013).

Furthermore, neoliberal governance relies on heavy police surveillance of communities of color, as the use of police forces serve as military solutions to the social problems created by

such governance (see Puryear, 2013). Youth of color living in communities under police surveillance are automatically criminalized. A recent manifestation of this phenomenon in Chicago was the killing of African American teenager (and Chicago Public Schools student) Laquan McDonald by a Chicago police officer in 2014. These issues of neoliberal governance, lack of resources for communities of color, racist education policy, and heavy police surveillance of communities of color (and the violence that results from that) have brought together the work of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and the Movement for Black Lives (MBL).

This broader context of Chicago discussed above serves as the contextual backdrop to *Shifting Grounds* and is represented throughout the ethnodrama in several important ways. Firstly, the ethnodrama begins with a prologue that provides the audience with the necessary contextual framing to understand the broader social and political struggle that the characters they are soon to encounter have been fighting. Secondly, the piece begins and ends with scenes where the characters are at a mass rally, which serve as representation of Chicago's active social movement scene. Thirdly, examples of the key issues discussed in the paragraphs above are specifically referenced in the ethnodrama. These include a scene dedicated to the mass protest on Black Friday 2015 in response to the killing of Laquan Mc Donald, as well as the April 1, 2016 rally and the subsequent dialogue surrounding that event. Moreover, throughout the ethnodrama, specific references are made by characters to the issues of the decline of black educators in CPS, the school closings, the lack of resources in communities of color, and police violence.

5.2 Theoretical Grounding: Our struggles and Movements are Connected

Shifting Grounds' central focus on the dynamics within and between movements is rooted in the idea that movements do not happen in isolation and people do not live one-dimensional lives (Jones, 1949; Lorde, 1982). As I discuss in Chapter 1, rather than explore

movements individually on their own, this research is principally concerned with exploring the ways that movements are connected in struggle and understanding reasons for why movements may connect well theoretically but in practice experience tension and disconnection. This approach contrasts greatly with the analytic approach taken by social movement theory scholars who tend to take an individual movement or specific struggle as their analytic focus. Even the small pockets of research on ‘cross-movement coalitions’ that specifically focus on how groups and movements come together temporarily for specific purposes do not challenge this analytically myopic framework (see Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Hewitt, 2011; Lichterman, 1995; Obach, 2004; Rose, 2000 for examples on cross-movement research). Like the rest of the social movement theory literature, cross-movement research takes a removed, bird’s eye view of movements and focuses on factors such as “organizational characteristics, tactical decisions, ideological claims, and cultural differences” (Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009, p. 664), which produces an analysis that is dehumanized, extremely abstract, and not reflective of the lived experiences of participants in movement struggles who are fighting multiple struggles at one time.

My interviews with research participants and participant observation over a period of about a year pose serious challenges to the approach that scholars in social movement theory take in their analysis of social movements. Most of the teachers I spoke to articulated their struggle through an intersectional lens of class, race and gender (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991; Jones, 1949). For example, one Latina teacher I interviewed sees herself as a popular educator for parents, especially mothers, to help them find their voice in a system that tries to “beat them into submission”, as she described. Explaining how the various movements and campaigns she is involved with connect:

I've been involved with a lot of things city wide- different campaigns you know, regarding racial justice, but I definitely feel that it's all connected, you know racial justice and education justice. And I think it's connected more than anything through class, because these changes are happening on the south and west side, but why? Because they're mainly working-class communities, you know, communities with people of color and communities where it hasn't been as easy for parents to find their voice in the whole system and to find the power behind their voice.

The changes that this teacher is referring to are school closings and turnarounds, where the existing staff is fired and replaced by CPS approved people. As she explains, these changes are intentional, by design, and to understand this, one must understand how different struggles are connected under capitalism. As will be discussed in more detail below, the CTU is a large union composed of teachers from various ideological and political perspectives. While the union articulates its work in terms of social justice unionism, the most radical political perspectives can be found amongst the union's rank and file, who often center a critique of capitalism and the relationship between race and capitalism in their activism.

In *Shifting Grounds*, this point emphasizing the interconnected relationship between race and class in the struggle for educational justice in Chicago is explicitly made through Alana's monologue in Act 1, Scene 10:

I often hear people talk about the quote 'racial justice' and quote 'education justice' movements as if they were two separate movements that we like need to bring together. But I don't see them as two movements. I don't. Cuz that's not my experience. Fighting for public education in Chicago *is* the fight for racial justice!...The fact of the matter is, we wouldn't talk about dirty classrooms, we wouldn't talk about 50 school closings, we

wouldn't talk about the hyper-privatization of school spaces if the kids weren't black or brown and poor, right?

Alana's monologue, which is an edited segment of a research participant's interview transcript, pushes back against any neat categorization or abstract fragmentation that scholars and activists alike often place movements under. Distinguishing between a racial justice issue and an educational justice issue is an artificially contrived abstraction of lived experience and not reflective of people's lived experiences.

Furthermore, the teachers with whom I spoke who are members of CTU's Black Teacher Caucus explained their experience of the racial and class-based nature of Chicago's corporate education reform on themselves as professional educators. The statement and demand 'Black Educators Matter' has sought to bring awareness to the education context in the US where black educators are increasingly pushed out of the teaching profession (Johnson, 2013). In Chicago, through the mass closure of schools in Black neighborhoods with largely Black veteran teaching staff, there has been a precipitous decline in the number of Black educators in CPS. As one CTU Black Teacher Caucus member explained in an interview, 'Black Educators Matter' is about:

the attack on tenure and the way that it directly impacts black educators' ability to stay employed in the city of Chicago. Cuz at that point [in 2013], we had gone from 44% down to 14% of the teaching staff of CPS. I was at 2 schools that were closed.

In this way, the struggle against the racist attack on poor working-class communities of color is not only an issue for teachers because it impacts their students, but it's also a 'bread and butter' issue for teachers themselves, as Black teachers- most of whom are women- are disproportionately impacted by school closings and corporate education reform. *Shifting Grounds* locates the teachers' struggle for educational justice within the broader social struggle

for racial and economic justice because without doing so, quite frankly, one cannot understand anything about the teachers' struggle and the key issues raising debate and contention that this piece examines.

5.3 Staying Cohesive Amidst Internal Division

While people do not live one-dimensional lives, people experience the world from different standpoints mediated by social location (Au, 2012; Diangelo, 2018). Within capitalist society, as Ford (2017) has noted “capital structures our ways of understanding ourselves, our relationship to ourselves, others, and the world” (p. 29). One way our understandings are influenced by capital are by the ways that we are socialized to see the world and our experiences in fragmented ways, as products of individual particular circumstances, rather than as part of a larger interconnected web of social relations (Ollman, 1993; Ross, 2018). Furthermore, this emphasis on the individual and particular circumstances of one's lived experience is intrinsically connected to the cultural myths of individualism and meritocracy, both of which serve to sustain the status quo of a capitalist white supremacist society (Diangelo, 2018). The result of this is a divided working class, which impacts working-class solidarity and can often create division and tension within movements and amongst movements that don't see their issues as connected or related.

While our relationship to capital and our identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) influence how we understand the world and our experience in it, as scholars of critical education have long emphasized, we are not determined by these conditions (Freire, 1970/2011; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1993). There is a dialectical relationship between our agency as humans and the larger social forces and structures of capitalism as a social, political and economic system. While humans have agency to change the social, political and economic order under which we currently

live, changing entrenched systems of oppression and domination is not an easy task and can only happen through collective struggle. This struggle happens on many levels or fronts.

Much scholarly attention is paid to understanding the most obvious site of struggle between opposing forces in a given conflict, the big picture focus, so to speak. In the field of education, for example, much of the focus of critical scholars is placed on investigating the overall struggle between the actions and ideologies of people and groups representing the corporate education reform movement on the one hand, and those groups opposing the corporate education reform agenda on the other, such as teachers and community-based groups. However, a less focused on --but tremendously important-- site of struggle in any social movement is intra-movement struggle, where people from different ideological perspectives and lived experiences are all part of the same side of a movement. Put differently, it's the challenge of keeping a united cohesive movement among a working-class that is divided. *Shifting Grounds* takes this less analyzed aspect of struggle as its focus and looks at intra-movement struggle amongst teachers in the CTU, a union that has had a leading role against corporate education reform in the US.

The challenge of navigating this aspect of movement work is represented in Samantha's monologue in Act II, Scene 3:

It's hard to keep a cohesive movement. Yeah, CORE is leading the union, but there's really only about a hundred of us rank and file who do the heavy lifting. I mean, you lose part of your troops, especially when we're talking about long struggles. And not only that, but within the same union you've got folks who respond to Black Lives Matter with 'Blue Lives Matter'. You've got some people who don't want to rock the boat too much, you know, not make too many waves. Then you've got the folks with the purity test who

always find certain things unreconcilable and have to find their movement space elsewhere. And then you've got the radicals who want the Chicago Teachers to start the revolution! And we're all one movement. Or trying to be.

To create this monologue, I drew a significant portion from one teacher's interview transcript and supplemented it with paraphrased ideas from several other participants' interviews about the challenge of keeping a cohesive movement not only inside the union at large, but among the rank and file within CORE itself. In addition to the above character monologue, I also sought to show the lines of division amongst characters through dialogue and juxtapositioned monologues throughout various scenes in the ethnodrama, as discussed in more detail below.

5.4 Teachers Address Police in Chicago

The most salient example of a line of internal division was apparent when I explored how the topic of police brutality is addressed within the movement. Among the teachers within CORE who take a radical approach to their work and the larger fight for racial justice, the connection between racial justice and police brutality is clear. These teachers believe fighting against police brutality an arena of struggle where they should be involved. One of the ways these teachers make the connection between police brutality, racial justice, and their role as teachers is highlighting the ways in which police brutality impacts their students.

For many teachers, this connection was made clear in the example of Laquan McDonald, a 17-year- old African American Chicago Public Schools (CPS) student who was shot 16 times and ultimately killed by Chicago Police officer Jason Van Dyke.²¹ When the interviews for this

²¹ Laquan McDonald was killed by Jason Van Dyke on October 20, 2014, but the dashcam footage of the incident wasn't made available to the public until November 24, 2015. The footage was released because of a court order to do so (through a FOIA request submitted by local journalists in Chicago).

project were carried out (about a year and a half after the dash cam video of Laquan's murder was made available to the public), many teachers centered Laquan in their discussion for why addressing police violence and working more collaboratively with the Movement for Black Lives (MBL) are important pieces of their work as educators in the city. During one interview, a research participant explained, "I don't want our city to kill black people.... I'm a teacher, so I feel that it is a moral responsibility for us to protect our kids. And Laquan McDonald was one of our kids".

In addition to the way police violence impacts students, many rank and file teachers – many of whom are women of color—experience the impact of police brutality in more direct ways, when their family members are victims. As one teacher I interviewed explains: "The rank and file are the ones that live in the communities being gentrified. Yeah, those are the ones whose kids are getting killed by police". Furthermore, for many the issue is not just addressing police brutality, but the allocation of vast amounts of resources to police departments while schools and other social services have consistently dealt with austerity.

Throughout many conversations during my data collection, the point was consistently raised that school budgets continuously are cut, schools are closed, and teachers are laid off while the city of Chicago spends 39.6% of its general fund expenditure on policing (equaling \$1.46 billion a year) and the Chicago Police Department is adding officer patrols to streets and placing more police in schools (McCarthy, 2017). The shift of resources from schools to police is not only a racial and educational justice issue, it is also a 'bread and butter issue' for teachers.

This connection was made clear as one interviewee explained, the decision to:

raise the amount of money that we're spending on cops to be in schools while simultaneously cutting the number of teachers in schools... this bread and butter issue for the teachers, which is hanging on to our jobs and having equitable funding, is immediately and tangibly tied to the fact that this city chooses to spend money on policing and incarcerating our kids.

5.4.1 Teachers marching and protesting for black lives

The teachers who take a radical approach to their work and the larger fight for racial justice, however, do not just talk about the connections between police brutality, racial justice and education justice. They believe it is important to act and take a stand in full support of the MBL. One of the most noticeable ways that teachers decided to support the MBL was by officially endorsing the 'Black Friday Protest' in 2015, a protest called by the MBL to bring awareness about Laquan, police violence, and the realities of black residents in the city, by targeting one of the most affluent areas of Chicago—the "Mag Mile"—on one of the busiest shopping days of the year. In addition to endorsing the protest and encouraging its members to attend, the CTU had a delegation of teachers at the protest with a banner to visibly show the union's support.

The CTU's presence at the protest, while supported by many, also stirred up controversy. Alluding to the controversy, while maintaining a steadfast commitment to the union's decision to endorse and have members attend the Black Friday protest, one research participant explained:

because of the police brutality, even though many people might be against what we've done as leadership, it's so principled, we can't go back on it. It's our child. Laquan

McDonald was our student. He was shot 16 times and then it was covered up. I don't care about somebody's hurt feelings.

For this teacher, showing up for Laquan is the principled thing to do, and there's no going back on that, even if it means that some other teachers may disagree or feel offended by the CTU's decision.

The murder of Laquan McDonald and the Black Friday protest march were key events discussed in almost every participant's narrative, and because of this, their representation is a significant part of *Shifting Grounds*. For example, Act 1 Scene 7 is titled "Justice for Laquan" and is a representation of the march on November 24, 2015. I drew from interviews as well as media sources (both news media and social media) and my own participant observation as an attendee at the protest to capture the sentiment of protestors and make this scene as representative of the actual event as much as possible. A chant that was frequently repeated during the protest was "16 shots and a cover up", which refers to the number of bullets Jason Van Dyke fired into Laquan as well as the fact that the murder was covered up by the city's mayor Rahm Emanuel and district attorney Anita Alvarez. The other chant of "Indict, convict, send those killer cops to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell!" serves to capture the anger, indignation, and overall longing for systemic change and justice that so many protesters felt. In the context of the US, where police violence is endemic, this chant is not specific to Chicago, as is the "16 shots and a cover up" chant, but rather, a chant that is repeated at many protests of that nature throughout the US.

This scene serves to not only represent teachers' support of the MBL, but it also begins to introduce the audience to the dynamics of internal tension within the union. This is represented through Samantha and Susan's dialogic exchange. Susan mentions the tension around the

union's decision to endorse the march, a point that was conveyed to me by several research participants. Samantha's response to Susan in their exchange introduces the audience to the existence of strong opposition from teachers with a pro-police perspective and serves to foreshadow what is to come in the ethnodrama.

5.5 Representing Differing Perspectives

Throughout my research, I encountered teachers with a wide range of perspectives on police violence, the role teachers should have in addressing the topic, and teachers' relationship with the police union. There were various ways I sought to represent this range of perspectives throughout the ethnodrama. One way was through use of monologue. As discussed in Chapter 3, a monologue presents a snapshot of a character to an audience. Through characters' 'solo narratives', the playwright is able convey individual viewpoints as well as interject broader social commentary (Saldaña, 2003). Monologues also help the audience generate empathy and connection with characters (Saldaña, 2003).

In *Shifting Grounds*, I employed character monologues with these purposes in mind.²² The "Why I march" monologues, for example, present to the audience those teachers who support the MBL in Chicago. The monologues serve as a brief snapshot into who these characters are, what their lived experience has been, and how that relates to why they support the MBL. The monologues also help contextualize why characters engage the way they do with others throughout the play. For instance, through Sofia's monologue, the audience gets to know that she identifies as a working-class popular educator, has strong organizing roots, and is

²² Except for Ricky and the union president, all other characters have monologues where they directly address the audience.

committed to advancing working-class struggle. These details help the audience understand why she is one of a few characters who always has the blowhorn, why she has such strong convictions through the play and why she is not afraid to be confrontational with others in the movement (such as, when she defends the activist speaker from the April 1 rally in Act I Scene 12).

In addition to serving as a way to present characters to the audience, the monologues also allowed me to present different sides of a conflict, or different individual's versions of a story. For example, Amy and Alan's monologues in Act 1, Scene 10 allow them the opportunity to tell their perspective on the issue of policing after the heated Facebook conversation (more discussion on that scene below). Finally, in some cases, characters' monologues function as venting sessions for them to express their frustration with a topic and further gain empathy from the audience (such as, Alana's in Act I Scene 10, and Melanie's in Act II, Scene 1).

Apart from monologues, another way I sought to represent the range of perspectives on the topic of policing was through the format of a Facebook chat. Whereas Act I Scene 7 foreshadows some of the internal tension, in Act I Scene 9 those tensions are presented in a fuller capacity through characters' comments on a post Sofia shares on Facebook. The juxtaposition of characters' comments with starkly contrasting perspectives within the conversation helps to capture the level of tension the topic of policing conjures up amongst teachers. Through the quick, and at times caustic comments characters fire back and forth during this scene, the audience begins to understand that this tension runs deep. They also begin to see that it's about more than solely taking on police violence. It is also about a larger discussion of solidarity, and in particular, fragmented working-class solidarity, as well as differing visions of unionism.

5.5.1 “Just cuz we’re a social justice organization doesn’t mean we don’t struggle with racial tension”

As scenes 7 and 9 of Act I illustrate, not all teachers see the connection between racial justice and police brutality. While research participants made clear that many teachers support the union’s position allying with the MBL and addressing police brutality, they also made clear that within the union there is a vocal opposition to the union’s support of the MBL as well. Being a union that puts racial justice at the forefront of its work does not mean that racial tension doesn’t exist within the union. As one teacher explained to me, “there’s racial tension within the union itself. You can’t escape it. Just because we’re a social justice organization doesn’t mean that we don’t have the same issues on a smaller scale”.

As every teacher with whom I spoke explained, the most vocal opposition to the union’s support of Black Lives Matter comes from white teachers. Moreover, those who are most strongly opposed to BLM are CTU members who are often related to or in relationships with members of Chicago’s Police Department. As Carol, a white elementary school teacher explained,

And for many, the tension between this work and other members of the CTU is that many of our CTU members are married to police because of the nature of how Chicago works with it’s, you know, there’s almost a tradition within, you know, white Catholic women marry a cop and they all live in the same neighborhood because of residency requirements. And there’s that dynamic and because there are pockets of neighborhoods in Chicago where police and teachers live. It’s [the tension] been on neighborhood lines, too... the northwest and southwest side.

Carol's words above shed light on two important and connected elements of the tension among teachers within the union, both informed by race and class. Firstly, the overall experiences that white people have with the police in the US are drastically different than those experiences by people of color. Mike, a white teacher working on the city's southside, explained this reality through the experience of his students:

I was like, damn, this is obviously not my white male experience. Like one of my students told me about how his house got broken into and they called the police, but they didn't come for like 24 hours. And then there was this other kid who was just walking to school in the winter and you know, it was dark out in the morning and the police pull up and point guns at him and he's like laying in the snow and comes into my classroom crying first period and it's not normal for him to be doing that

Secondly, cities and towns across the US are racially segregated and in the case of Chicago, due to its historical and ongoing racial segregation, these teachers tend to live in white neighborhoods where their interaction with people of color is limited.

The present racial and geographic division within Chicago has long historical roots that are still felt today. The segregation in Chicago was done by design, through federal, state and local policies that ensured racial segregation (Rothstein, 2017). As Diangelo (2018) notes, "In the US, race is encoded in geography" (p. 36) and our lives are shaped by the racial segregation that we live in". The result has been the creation of "Two cities really...one white, one black. One for the rich, one for the poor", as the experience of poor people of color is drastically different than white residents in the city's North, Northwest and Southwest sides (Lipman, 2017, p. 4). As Carol indicates, this longstanding division impacts internal union solidarity and cohesion.

To examine the first element of Carol's interview quote above, I referred to the abundant scholarship in the fields of criminology, sociology, and labor studies that examines differing views and attitudes about the fairness of the criminal justice system amongst various demographic groups in the US. This scholarship provides one helpful lens through which to analyze and understand why despite being a social justice union, some teachers are vocally opposed to the union's support of the Black Lives Matter movement and its decision to speak out against police violence in Chicago. As discussed in Chapter 2, white people tend to experience and view the criminal justice system as a fair system that is designed to provide security to citizens by upholding laws that are based on justice and equality (see Brandl, Frank, Worden, & Bynum, 1994; Carter & Corra, 2016; Girgenti- Malone et al., 2017; Larson, 2016; McNeeley & Grothoff, 2016; Mc Quade, 2015; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997; Weitzer, 2000; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999 among others). The continued images and portrayals of people of color in media and public discourse that serve to demonize and code black or brown to indicate criminality have not only had an enormous impact in shaping public policy (that further targets and oppresses people of color), but have also deeply shaped broader public perception around justification for police use of force, whereby white people tend to overwhelmingly legitimize police use of force (Carter & Corra, 2016; Cochran & Warren, 2012; Larson, 2016; Soss & Weaver, 2017). This remains the case despite overwhelming evidence that confirms the widespread prevalence of police violence and misconduct against poor people of color, and the subsequent impunity they receive, as an extremely small number are ever convicted of crimes (Stinson, 2017).

5.5.2 Race and geography in Chicago

While the criminology and sociology literature discussed above helps shed light on why many white teachers are surprised or in many cases, fail to understand the widespread patterns

and practice of police brutality against people of color in the United States, it does not help explain why many white people experience such a visceral reaction to the MBL, and why, in the case of the teachers, there exists a group that is vocally opposed to the CTU's stance on the MBL. A segment of an interview between one participant, a black female teacher named Tanya who is a leading member of the Black Teacher Caucus of the union, and me helps contextualize this point a bit further:

Michelle: so, what you're saying is that it's very common or typical for a teacher to be in a relationship with either a firefighter or a police officer?

Tanya: yeah

Michelle: and then there are certain neighborhoods where city workers live-

Tanya: like Mount Greenwood

Michelle: yeah, and so is that also an issue that kind of plays out where—

Tanya: where the alliances are? Oh yeah, absolutely. It happens within the CTU. The Mount Greenwood bunch. There's a group of teachers in that community that were most vocal against those alliances, that spoke out, that actually wrote letters to the editors in multiple newspapers saying that the CTU went against their wishes and they had no authority to demonstrate with them [the MBL].

Tanya's words corroborate the previous cited interview source regarding the geographic and racial component of the factional alliances that collectively voice their discontent with the union's stance on the MBL and police violence. The specific naming of the Chicago neighborhood of Mount Greenwood is contextually very important. As Stieber (2016) notes, Mount Greenwood is a neighborhood that:

has a very long history of trying to stay white while keeping Black people out... It was a common saying for Black Chicagoans who lived in the Morgan Park, Beverly, and Roseland areas in the '90s to say, "Don't go west of Western," because you would be venturing into Mount Greenwood (para. 3 & 4).

To not only reflect the significance that Mount Greenwood represents in Chicago's racist past and present, but to also reference the connection participants made between teachers within the union opposed to BLM and that neighborhood, reference to Mount Greenwood was specifically included in *Shifting Grounds*, in Act 1, Scene 7. As Samantha says to Susan:

Yes, and so be prepared. I'm sure there is going to be lots of debate and some strong opposition, especially coming from the Mount Greenwood bunch, the Pro-cop caucus!

Mount Greenwood, a racially homogenous neighborhood, is also a place where many police and fire department workers live. As both Tanya's and Carol's interviews point out, the teachers who live in these communities and have personal relationships with police—whether they are husbands, brothers, cousins, fathers, etc.—tend to be supportive of the police.

To understand the racial and geographic component within the broader topic of police violence in Chicago, I not only drew on participant interviews as well as the scholarly literature from fields such as critical geography, but I also drew extensively on my own personal experience growing up in a mostly-white neighborhood on Chicago's southwest side. The neighborhood I grew up in (which is also where I was living during my research), is one of *those* neighborhoods that Carol is referring to in her quote above. It's a residential neighborhood, home to many Chicago police and fire department employees. Although it is technically still part of the city of Chicago, the feel of the neighborhood (and others like it) is more like a suburb than a city.

As I would walk to Archer Avenue to catch the 62 bus on my way to attend a MBL rally or meet a research participant for an interview, I would pass along rows of houses with blue light bulbs on their porches, blue ribbons tied around trees, and signs in windows reading “Support our Heroes in Blue”. In addition to houses decorated to display support for the CPD, schools in the neighborhood also partake. For example, during a walk one day through the neighborhood, I noticed the local public elementary school had the banner below posted (and it stayed there for many months):



Figure 5-1 We support CPD banner outside of elementary school. Photo taken by author.

This banner serves as a direct response to the key issues that the MBL has raised into the larger national conversation in the US and is making the point, “don’t you dare critique our police”. The use of ‘our’ is important here, as it leaves no ambiguity as to who the police protect, who feels protected by the police, and where alliances lay.

To represent both dynamics explained above, that of the white teacher married to a police officer and the connection between race and geography, I created the character of Amy, a white middle-aged teacher who is married to a Chicago police officer and lives on the southwest side. The character of Amy is a completely fictionalized character. I did not interview anyone who had had Amy's experience or views, but through interviews, participant observation and my own lived experience, I knew that a character embodying such a perspective existed and therefore needed to be created.

While it was important to create Amy's character, one risk that often goes with creating a character to serve one main purpose is that the character becomes predictable, without much depth or development. In *Shifting Grounds*, Amy is unable to escape the label assigned to her to be *that* perspective. While the views that Amy holds are indeed accurate representations of the perspectives many teachers hold, her representation borders on caricature. Whereas other characters experience some growth or evolution throughout the ethnodrama, Amy doesn't. For example, the character of Regina reveals to the audience that her interactions with Melanie have encouraged some reflective thinking and re-thinking around union strategy. As she explains to the audience in her monologue (Act II, Scene2) after the tense post-rally beers, "It's not always easy to hear, but Melanie has a point..." and then proceeds with her reflections. Amy's character isn't allowed that introspection and reflection, which is a limitation of the ethnodrama.

5.5.3 "Why is that so offensive to you?"

In addition to race and geography, as Tanya's account above illustrates, there are aspects of the opposition that feel so offended by the union even acknowledging police violence, let alone participating in any marches alongside the MBL. What else is it about calling out police brutality that triggers defensive and/or aggressive responses by some teachers? A growing body

of research within the field of critical race theory has conceptualized the notion of ‘white fragility’ as the way in which white people, when confronted about their racism, often respond in ways that deflect and deny their racism, thereby making honest conversations about race challenging, if not impossible (see Corrigan, 2016; Diangelo, 2018; Liebow & Glazer, 2019). While the analytical potential of the ‘white fragility’ framework is ultimately limited by its lack of any meaningful analysis of the relationship between racism and capitalism in the US, it nevertheless can be helpful in understanding why some teachers within the union respond with such contempt to the Movement for Black Lives.

As critical race scholars working with the framework of ‘white fragility’ have noted, there are a series of relatively predictable responses from white people when confronted about racism. These include responses such as “Well, not all white people are racist”, “my husband/ father/ family member is not a bad person”, “I have Black friends/coworkers/students who I care about very much”, “how could you even suggest such a thing?”, among others (Ciccariello-Maher as cited in Judge, 2017; Diangelo, 2018). Such responses close the possibility of honest conversation around racism, white supremacy, and state-sanctioned violence against communities of color. As Ciccariello-Maher (2017) explains,

The oft-uttered “Not all white people” is a form of white violence. It is a silencing move that... displaces the conversation. It says, “Yeah, you’ve had that experience, but since all white people don’t do that, it doesn’t count (as cited in Judge, 2017, para.12).

Systemic critiques raised about white supremacy and racist police violence, for example, often trigger emotional responses in white people that display personal offense and outrage. The tendency for many white people to deflect or get personally offended when something is pointed

out as racist (even if it is not directed at them personally) was conveyed through interviews, as research participants with whom I spoke shared different ways they have observed this dynamic play out within the movement. The example mentioned above from Tanya's interview is one example of the way that a group of white teachers felt so personally (and collectively) offended, that they felt the need to write an Op-Ed to 'set the record straight' and pose themselves as victims of a union leadership that is going against their wishes. Furthermore, as the image of the banner above illustrates, the attempt to bring the reality of police brutality to public consciousness (in the way that the MBL has done) is met with a sense of collective outrage as white people, and is countered by doubling down on support for police.

Another clear example of this dynamic was the visceral emotional reaction that some teachers had when an MBL activist at a CTU-led rally on April 1, 2016 ended her speech by shouting,

While I have all y'all's attention, what I wanna say is fuck the police! Fuck CPD, Fuck the FOP, Dante Servin, your ass is being fired without a pension! Fuck the police and everybody fuck wit' 'em!

This event is depicted in Act 1, Scene 11 of *Shifting Grounds*. I chose to depict this scene in its entirety because it was a key event in almost every research participant's interview. Out of 13 interviews, 11 research participants narrated their version of what happened on April 1st and their assessment of the impact of the day's events. For some teachers, the speaker was justified in her comments. For example, without using the language of 'white fragility', Sarah, a white teacher reflecting on the outrage by many of her colleagues, gets at a fundamental aspect of 'white fragility' when she asks rhetorically during our interview: "as a white woman, why am I so upset that this person is saying "This is what the police are doing to us, and fuck them", you know?

Like why is that so offensive to me?” In a sort of stream of consciousness way, Sarah walks me through her feelings about that day and her critical reflection on the speaker’s comments.

Other research participants at first felt unsure about the appropriateness of the comments, but after some reflection, agreed that they were also justified. As Mike explained in an interview, “For me when she first said that, at first I was like I dunno if this is the right event to say that, but then I was like, but it is cuz it wasn’t just a teaching event and it’s stuff that affects our students”. For others, they felt that although they didn’t disagree with the activist’s sentiment per se, nonetheless felt that such comments created division and took away from the larger solidarity that was achieved on April 1. As Rebecca argued during her narration of the event on April 1 as we were both sitting in her first-grade classroom,

for me it was- we had been asked, we had done so much work and we had spent a good deal of our treasure and the signs and the permits, the stage and the overtime and all of the phone calling! To have one person’s comment be the focus other than the glory of all of those workers coming together to me was hugely disappointing. Because for me it was a glorious moment for the solidarity between many different types of workers, especially all the different unions

Others felt angry and confused about how the activist speaker could get on the mic and say what she said, as Erika, an elementary school teacher explained, “she isn’t a part of CTU, and she wasn’t vetted to speak”. With so many views on this one event, I created Scene 12 of Act I, “Post-rally beers” to serve as a representation of what a conversation could have looked like if it really occurred, putting together the various ‘takes’ on the event relayed to me through interviews. Like the Facebook conversation (Act I, scene 9), the ‘Post-rally beers’ scene serves to not only represent the tension over a specific issue—that of the rally on April 1st—but also

bring in other larger themes, such as the emotional toll of the struggle on members, and the challenging balance between engaging in social justice struggles while at the same time maintaining an ear to the ground on the everyday concerns of union members. In short, the challenge of social justice unionism in practice.

While the ‘post-rally beers’ scene illustrates a very plausible representation of dialogue, as characters’ responses build on one another, at times it feels like a series of mini-monologues instead of dialogue. As Saldana (2005) notes, research writing is different than drama writing, and often researchers writing ethnodrama can fall into the error of scenes comprised of ‘talking heads’ whose lines in a dialogue really serve as a vehicle for intellectual arguments, rather than dialogue that is plausible and character driven. As playwright and researcher, I sought to represent the breadth of perspectives on the events of April 1 and create a scene that would get into the issues in some depth, while at the same time create a sense of dialogue and not just simply segments of interviews conjoined together. Achieving this balance is a challenging task and in Scene 12, the long, almost mini monologues of some characters (like Melanie, for example) are examples of ‘dialogue’ that is comprised of interview segments transplanted into a scene. While the scene, from a research standpoint, includes all the important points that I wanted to, from an artistic standpoint, it lacks stylistic techniques that, if present, would make the scene flow better.

5.5.4 “We should be right there, talkin’ about workers’ rights”

The tension around addressing police brutality is not only a struggle that more radical teachers have with teachers who are generally antagonistic to the MBL. On the progressive side of the issue, there are also divergent and conflicting views around police, the issue of police

brutality, and union solidarity. *Shifting Grounds* represents this dynamic as well. For example, several research participants, when speaking about police brutality, attribute police violence to racism in society and more specifically, to the racism of *individual* police officers who are violent against people of color. In this view, the *institution* of policing and the function that police serve in society are understood as having the role of serving and protecting people. Karen, a teacher who proudly states in our interview “I was always raised around social justice activism, it’s kind of a family trait”, explains how she understands police violence:

They’re [the police] designated to protect us and to keep us safe but we have a problem and it’s a problem that’s entwined with racism, in which they are excessively violent sometimes against unarmed African American people

In the excerpt from Karen’s interview, the acknowledgement of racist police brutality is present, but it is characterized as “sometimes”, which seems to suggest police misconduct is more of an exception, rather than the rule. The idea that police violence is an occurrence ‘sometimes’ directly contradicts not only what the Movement for Black Lives has continuously emphasized—that police violence is an epidemic—but also what the U.S.’s own Department of Justice has confirmed in their 2017 report, which is that “CPD [Chicago Police Department] officers engage in a pattern or practice of using force, including deadly force, that is unreasonable [and]... in violation of the Constitution” (U.S. Dept of Justice, 2017, p. 5). Furthermore, the idea that police violence is an occurrence ‘sometimes’ echoes the larger social narrative that police brutality is the result of ‘a few bad apples’. The assumption here is that the institution of policing is fundamentally good and necessary for society, and with certain changes, such as reprimanding racist individual officers, providing resources and training to police (such as implicit bias

training, anti-racism training, etc.), and putting in mechanisms for accountability (such as body cameras), the problem of police brutality can be solved.

In *Shifting Grounds*, this perspective is expressed through the character of Susan. For example, during the Facebook conversation in Act 1 Scene 9, Susan acknowledges that there's a problem, and even reprimands Amy and Alan for "acting like the problem doesn't exist". She is clear about her support for Black Lives Matter and the important role that teachers should have in supporting the movement, but has yet to internalize a larger systemic, institutional critique of policing. To Susan, police are in public service, like teachers, and as such, they need certain training. She views police violence as a result of insufficient training. Thus, while she is generally on the progressive side of the issue of police violence in the United States, her analysis is marked by naivete and an inability (at the moment) to bring a larger systemic analysis to the issue, which ultimately limits her ability to put forward solutions to police violence beyond the framework of training and resources for police.

For other progressive, rank and file teachers, acknowledging and addressing police violence is important, but when the situation calls for it, it is also important for teachers to support the police to show union to union solidarity. For example, as Patricia, an elementary teacher who credits CTU with "waking her up" and fostering her activism explains, "The issue [referring to police brutality] is an issue of society that needs to be addressed". During the same conversation, a few moments later, Patricia passionately argues,

When we were on strike, the cops were very supportive... And now police are gonna be attacked for their pensions. We should be right there, talking about workers' rights. Hey, they're just laborers, just like us, they just happen to have a weapon and a uniform.

Patricia's strong identity as a union member leads her to advocate for police pensions and their role as 'workers', while perhaps not realizing that doing so, works counteractive to the broader goals of the MBL. This illustrates, then, that the framework of simply 'union solidarity' has serious limitations. What *kind* of unionism being advocated, defended, or protected matters. Just as not all social movements are progressive (and there are increasingly reactionary movements growing more and more), not all unions are progressive. Police unions have a historical legacy of supporting reactionary, anti-progressive policies and practices, and that continues to the present. As Gude (2014) notes, "When police unions have widened their gaze beyond issues like compensation and working conditions, it's been almost exclusively to conservative ends" (para. 11).

Moreover, applying the notion of union to union solidarity without specifying the kind of unionism is essentially making the same argument used by teachers antagonistic to the MBL. As illustrated throughout *Shifting Grounds*, teachers against the MBL make the argument that teachers should stand with other union 'workers', such as the police, over standing in solidarity with the MBL movement. For teachers who may not bring a systemic analysis to understanding the role of police in capitalist society but who want to practice social justice unionism, this topic can put them on the same side as reactionaries to MBL, which is the opposite of their intention.

In *Shifting Grounds*, I created the character of Susan to represent this tendency. Susan is supportive of the MBL and feels a sense of responsibility to protect her students from police violence (as she declares in her monologue in Act I Scene 8), but also feels bothered by the events of April 1st and fears that the activist's comments hurt the good relationship between the teachers and police in the city, referencing the support police showed the teachers during the 2012 strike.

5.6 What is Social Justice, and Does It Mean the Same Thing for Everyone?

The intra-movement tension over race and police brutality illuminates another key aspect of movement struggle for progressive unions that this piece seeks to engage with, and that is around the topic of social justice unionism in theory and practice. As discussed in Chapter 2, much of the focus of labor scholars interested in the revitalization of labor unions has focused on the concept of social justice unionism. In particular, much attention has been paid to the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) as an example of social justice unionism, especially since its well-known 2012 strike. However, as I also discussed in chapter 2, a critical review of the literature reveals important limitations to its conceptualization of social justice unionism, both in theory and practice.

As I wrote in Chapter 2, one is hard pressed to find a clear explanation of what exactly social justice means within the discourse on social justice unionism. Across the literature, it is assumed that everyone agrees on what terms like ‘social justice’, ‘peace’, and ‘social change’ mean. These concepts are written about with a universality in which the authors assume that these concepts mean the same thing to everyone, and hence, no definition is required. The result is a concept that does not have the clarity of meaning necessary to provide the foundation for a coherent program for organizing and activism for social, education and racial justice.

Adding on to Fletcher and Gapasin’s observation, while the theory of social justice unionism needs more fleshing out, the gulf between current theory and practice must be noted. The literature tends to overwhelmingly describe the ideal state of what social justice unionism would be in practice in ideal circumstances (Lier & Stokke, 2006). But activists are never building movements or unions in ideal circumstances. There is a disconnect between the scholarly rhetoric on social justice unionism and the lived experience of research participants

seeking to implement social justice unionism in practice (see Lier & Stokke, 2006 for a similar critique of social movement unionism theory in the South African context).

My research corroborates Lier and Stokke's findings. Through interviews and participant observation, research participants conveyed that social justice unionism in practice is much more dynamic than what the literature suggests. Furthermore, definitions on what the concept means in practice are not always clearly defined. As Patricia asked rhetorically towards the end of our conversation,

You know, what is the union's role?... For example, does a union need to get involved in economic justice rights for people who are not their members or for their students, you know? I think that that can be a really tricky thing for a union leadership. Like if their members are saying "this is your function, your function is to support workers' rights and our rights" and that's it, you know, like how does a union leadership like negotiate that? You know, to what end? What's the stopping point? You say you're social justice focused, where is the end line? I think that's really difficult to pinpoint.

Patricia's interview above speaks to several aspects of social justice unionism in practice. On the one hand is the question about what the union's role is or should be in broader social struggle. Are social justice unions social movements? If so, what distinguishes them from one another? Secondly, is there a boundary or 'end line' to a union struggle with regards to a broader social struggle? If so, how is that boundary defined? And lastly, what happens if the leadership of a union that is a social justice union wants to support social struggles that parts of its membership are opposed to supporting? How is the boundary defined then?

Echoing Patricia's struggle, another research participant explained, "deciding the broader political involvement of our union, whether to step in or step back, has been very hard for us....

do we only use our energy and our funds for the local struggle, or do we branch out broader?” Perhaps these questions don’t have an answer per se. Or perhaps the answer is that “it depends” on the issue or struggle, where members are at in regard to consciousness about a struggle, among other factors. As Weiner (2012) argues, “How do we reconcile our responsibilities to members’ “bread and butter” needs with the union’s social commitments? ... there *has to be* a tension between these responsibilities” (p.44, emphasis in original). While there is a necessary tension between those two goals of social justice unionism, research that explores various examples of what this looks like in different contexts could provide greater strategic insight to unionists on the ground who are navigating these tensions.

5.6.1 “You can’t get folks to believe in social justice stuff if they are drowning under the pressure of all of the other ills”

The challenge of finding the boundary or end line as Patricia explains above is the task of balancing meeting members’ needs and being a part of larger movements for social justice. Particularly in school systems like Chicago where resources are lacking and teachers are facing multiple struggles at once, it is difficult to maintain teachers’ commitments to broader social justice struggles when their everyday lived experience in the classroom is increasingly more stressful and isolating. As Mike explained,

there developed a kind of riff around the idea of what social justice is within the union, where a lot of people started feeling like the union didn’t care about our everyday lives. It cared more about how we presented in these movements as the CTU. And for someone like me that was frustrating because I care about both things, you know? I’m like I want to do both.

Speaking to this point in another way, Tanya explained “You can't tell folks your love of children should overcome your need to feed your family. So we're at a point where the bread and butter stuff could come to bite us in the butt”. Both research participants speak to the challenge of maintaining a commitment to broader social struggles, like racial justice, when teachers' working conditions are continuously deteriorating. Moreover, as circumstances change, the emotional energy teachers have to give changes.

Faced with this circumstance of increasingly worse working conditions, teachers respond in different ways. For some, their solution is to go back to the basics of business unionism, so to speak. For these teachers, the social justice focus has gone too far. As Jerry, a long-time CPS teacher explained during an interview, “You know if you're strong as a union, you don't have to take these attacks on your key people. Some of the key people have been organizing in social justice land as opposed to union land”. Others believe in the broader vision of social justice unionism, but with the increasing attacks on their profession and fear of repression, feel the need to dial back their involvement. For example, Lana, an elementary school teacher, explained,

I did start to feel like I had to be involved [in the social justice struggles] and now I really truly am rethinking that. How do I dial it back? I'm afraid that I won't be able to get out with a pension that I was promised. I would love to be more and more involved, and then the other part of my world is saying, “you got to pull it back”.

Many research participants provided similar accounts to Lana's. They care about the social justice struggles, they want to be in solidarity with the MBL and really fight for racial justice and other struggles, but they are also experiencing fear, repression, emotional burnout, trauma of their own, and it's hard to maintain the same level of commitment over many years.

Navigating this tension is a key theme that runs throughout *Shifting Grounds*. Drawing on interviews, participant observation, in addition to the robust critical literature on the corporate education reform in cities like Chicago, I sought to provide a realistic representation of the various emotional aspects of teachers' struggle and illustrate why and how that can impact their involvement in the union's broader social struggles. For example, Kayla's character is dealing with the reality of insufficient resources and the need to fund her own classroom in addition to real trauma that teachers who work in high poverty, hyper segregated cities like Chicago witness in their students' communities. Kayla believes in the broader social justice work of the union but is also realizing that she needs more concrete resources like trauma support and classroom supplies, and so her involvement in social protest is put slightly on the back burner to do that. This at times, can come into tension with other rank and file members, as illustrated in Act 1 Scene 5 of *Shifting Grounds*. Research participant Jerry's perspective was represented through the character of Alan. Alan is not opposed to social justice struggles per se either. In fact, he prides himself on being a militant unionist, but he expresses his frustration with the contract and his overall working conditions by putting the blame on the CTU's social justice agenda and feels that leadership has "sold out their members". Similar to Kayla, the character of Jeff is juggling having a newborn and family commitments with his teaching work and explains to Melanie—who is very concerned about the decreased involvement of many teachers in the union—as it basically coming down to "picking and choosing your time".

5.7 Nostalgia and Social Movements: "It's Not Like 2012"

A final important theme that runs throughout *Shifting Grounds* is the idea that as the struggles for education justice, racial justice, and economic justice are long and hard, the function of nostalgia serves important purposes. During interviews and participant observation,

2012 served as an important nostalgic reference point. For many teachers it was a reference point to their introduction into CTU activism. As one research participant explained “Certainly since 2012, I became you know much more involved”. For others, 2012 represented a great show of working-class militancy that unions had not engaged in for a while. As another research participant explained, “I think in 2012, something of this magnitude had not happened in a long time, and it really really reenergized people”. For other teachers, 2012 represented the height of CTU’s strength as a union, and since then, things have not been the same. As Marissa explained in an interview:

We had this really successful strike in 2012, but since that time, our working conditions have just deteriorated. If you ask anyone, they will say it’s harder to teach now than it was in 2012. It was harder in 2012 than it was in 2010. And you know it’s been progressively getting worse and worse and worse. We’ve had more attacks. They extended our school day, closed all those schools, they attacked us and everything. It feels like everything we’re doing is like clawing back up to just where we were as opposed to pushing forward.

Whereas nostalgia can often be associated with a want to return to older times fueled by conservative or reactionary beliefs, recently sociologists have been theorizing ways that nostalgia can be harnessed for progressive ends (see Jarvis & Bonnet, 2013; Smith & Campbell, 2017). As Smith and Campbell (2017) argue, “nostalgia is an important phenomenon in understanding how the past is both brought to bear on the present and on the development of social and political agendas for the future” (p. 612). From this perspective, movement activists can gain insight from nostalgia by asking, what events or moments bring back nostalgia for our movement and why? In the case of the CTU, that moment is 2012, and thinking about ways to engage in movement

building in the current moment to achieve a similar level of mass teacher mobilization as then can be a powerful movement building strategy.

Nostalgia for 2012 plays a pivotal role in the overall storyline of *Shifting Grounds*. For the characters of Melanie, Sofia, Alana, Amy, Kayla, and Susan, the time leading up to and including the strike in 2012, and subsequently the notoriety the CTU gained after the strike, represents the heyday of the CTU, its best days of movement momentum and strength. Each character uses memory of 2012 to understand their present circumstance. For Melanie, lamenting the noticeable decline in member turn out at rallies, 2012 serves as a comparison. As she states in Scene One, “We’re not turning out as many people as we used to at these rallies, not like in 2012, that’s for sure”. For Melanie, 2012 represents a time when members were more engaged and her task of motivating teachers to come out to rallies was easier. It also represents a time when the leadership and membership were more closely connected, and folks ‘got’ what social justice unionism was all about. It represents not only a time of greater momentum, but also of greater inter-movement alignment and clarity. Sofia similarly uses 2012 as a reference point to gauge the current movement momentum. However, whereas Melanie sees the present moment as more or less decline (and thus throughout the ethnodrama struggles to find out why it’s happening and what to do about it), Sofia doesn’t see as much decline. As she states in her final monologue in the ethnodrama’s epilogue, “maybe we’re not moving at the same speed as before, like back in 2012, but we’re still keeping it in motion”. Sofia acknowledges that there isn’t the same level and speed of movement as in 2012, but her tone suggests that things are still moving. She doesn’t display as much alarm as Melanie to get back to 2012 levels of turnout and mass mobilization. For Kayla, 2012 represents a starting point; it’s when her involvement in the union began, her initiation into what it means to march and protest. Kayla alludes to the strike of 2012

as putting the CTU in the national spotlight to become the “star of the labor movement”, something she still believes the CTU is, but also acknowledges that it’s “hard to do it all”.

While nostalgia for 2012 can serve as a strong source of organizing motivation for many teachers, “2012” doesn’t represent the same thing for all teachers. For example, for other research participants I encountered, 2012 recalls a less contentious past of greater unity, not only within the CTU, but between the CTU and various unions in Chicago, especially the police union. In *Shifting Grounds*, I represented this angle of the nostalgia for 2012 through the characters of both Susan and Amy. For Amy in particular, the union movement has ventured into an arena of challenging power that she is not comfortable with. The strike of 2012 represents a time when the teachers were staying in their appropriate lane and sticking to education issues, “calling for more resources for our students, better teaching, learning and working conditions” as she puts it. “We were all united with the other unions in this city”, she explains, and now laments that the union has taken a stand against police violence, which she interprets as the union “using its energy and money to go after cops” at the expense of fighting for its members.

But for Regina, 2012 doesn’t evoke the same nostalgia and she isn’t lamenting the strained relationship between the CTU and the FOP. As she points out during the rather heated conversation between Alana and Melanie during post-rally beers, “Everybody talks about 2012 but I remember I was at Emerson at the time and all of the positive energy that we felt was short lived because right after we came off strike, the school closing hearings started”. The mass school closings of 2013 disproportionately impacted Black students and teachers; as a Black educator, Regina wasn’t allowed to take a breath and marvel in the victory of the strike as much as perhaps Amy or Susan did. Rather, she went to work every day with the threat of her school being closed looming over her, and ultimately it did happen.

5.8 “Where Do We Go From Here?”

Shifting Grounds emphasizes that social justice unionism is an ongoing process that takes continual work and tending to; it is a process that is not linear. As the ethnodrama explores these questions, it ultimately illustrates social justice unionism as an ongoing, dynamic process that is continuously unfolding and in the making. For this reason, *Shifting Grounds* doesn't end with a clear resolution.

After the hitting peak tension is Scenes 11 and 12 of Act I, events leading to the plot's resolution are about teachers not giving up and looking for way to engage their fellow teachers in the new struggles that come up. Characters like Samantha, Regina, and Kayla find ways of re-engaging with fellow colleagues. Act II Scene 4 illustrates this dynamic of re-building, taking note of critique and incorporating that critique into strategies for keeping the movement going forward. Even if some teachers have said no to many other protests or rallies in the past, people and circumstances are constantly changing and evolving. As *Shifting Grounds* seeks to show, activists can feel a moment of lull in their movement, but then another struggle that has slowly been brewing erupts and helps regain some or most of the momentum that some felt was 'lost' or being lost. The last scene of the ethnodrama illustrates this through the example of the charter school fight gaining strength. What the last scene of the ethnodrama shows is the ground is always shifting in movements.

5.9 Implications for Theory and Practice

This dissertation has consisted of an exploration into the lived experiences of rank and file teachers navigating their teaching along with their activism and participation in movements struggling for racial and education justice in Chicago. With this exploration, I have sought to represent aspects of this work that are not often present in academic discussions of teachers'

work and teacher unionism with the hope of opening a deeper conversation on these themes within current academic scholarship, as well as within movement spaces. Through employing ethnodrama, this dissertation sought to capture the multi-dimensionality of teachers' experiences, with the goal of presenting an analysis that was neither overly abstract, nor overly celebratory or dismissive, but rather, one that is rooted in experiences with which teachers, activists, unionists alike can relate. Furthermore, I have attempted to put the representation of research participants' lived experiences—and themes that emerge from that—in dialogue with social justice unionism theory in order to provoke a deeper conversation around its current theoretical limitations. This research has both theoretical and practical implications for researchers and activists interested in racial justice and social justice unionism.

5.9.1 Grounding social justice unionism within an anti-capitalist framework

In Chapter 2, I illustrated how the academic scholarship on social justice unionism assumes that readers agree on what concepts like social justice, racial justice, and solidarity mean. As this research illustrates, this is not the case. Teachers have differing perspectives on all these concepts. The lack of clarity on what 'social justice' means not only makes organizing around it difficult, but it also leaves space open for others to define it for their own purposes. For example, the mayor of Chicago uses the language of social justice to embrace corporate education reform policies in the name of 'closing the achievement gap'. In the absence of a strong theoretical grounding to define social justice, the literature does not really distinguish itself from the co-opted forms of social justice language. In chapter 2, I also discussed the notion of union 'revitalization' present in the literature. The example of the 2012 CTU strike, along with more recent strike waves, such as the wave of teachers strikes in 2018 ('Red for Ed'), and most recent strike in Chicago (October of 2019), are all presented as signs of union

revitalization. But it's rarely—if ever—explained towards what (or for what) unions are revitalizing. To strengthen the theoretical potential of the concept, social justice unionism must be grounded in an anti-capitalist framework that emphasizes the interlocking systems of oppression (discussed in Chapter 1) that working-class people experience as well as a broader vision of what unions are fighting for. This vision should not be limited to contract demands or issues related to a particular profession or area of work. In other words, teachers' unions shouldn't limit their vision of unionism to advocacy and activism only on topics directly related to education and remain silent on others. It should be a broader vision of a society free from oppression and exploitation in all its forms.

Furthermore, a framework grounded in a critique of capitalism is needed to develop a conceptualization of solidarity that is rooted in a class analysis. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the decision of some teachers to support the police over supporting the MBL based on the idea that 'all unions in the city should support one another' signifies a superficial understanding of solidarity, one that is lacking a class analysis. As Marxist scholars have analyzed and as labor history shows, the police serve on opposite sides as labor within a capitalist society. For example, during strikes, police are called to protect employers and restrain workers; they are literally on opposite sides of the picket line. Labor solidarity grounded in a class analysis means solidarity with movements and peoples fighting oppression in all its forms. In the case of the MBL and police unions, labor solidarity should mean supporting the MBL in its struggle against police violence and other forms of state-sanctioned violence against communities of color. Labor solidarity should not be about supporting the institution that carries out violence against communities of color on behalf of the state. The confusion or conflict that some teachers feel around where to lend their solidarity with regards to the MBL and police

indicates an area where an anti-capitalist and intersectional framework need to inform labor organizing and education for its members.

5.9.2 Breaking down false dichotomies with an intersectional lens

A vision for labor grounded in anti-capitalism and intersectionality provides a path forward because anti-capitalism helps illuminate and expose the reality that social justice (even broadly defined), or the elimination of oppression are not possible within capitalism, a system rooted in exploitation that uses racism and other forms of oppression to divide and further subjugate people (as explained in Chapter 1). The intersectional lens with its focus on interlocking systems of oppression and the ways in which segments of the working-class experience oppression differently (based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) is particularly necessary to challenge the binary between social justice and bread and butter issues. By shifting the analytic focus on the ways seemingly disparate struggles are connected under capitalism, it becomes clearer that the distinction between bread and butter and social justice is an artificial one. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, intersectionality is both a mode of political analysis and a guide to action. A good example of what intersectional organizing may begin to look like can be seen in the CTU's most recent strike (October 2019) where affordable housing was included as something the CTU was bargaining over. While this example is important, the reality is that unions have yet to adopt an intersectional framework. The discussion on bread and butter versus social justice and finding the 'balance' between both is an indication that an intersectional analysis grounded in an understanding of capitalism does not yet exist within labor movement organizing, or in most of the conversations around its revitalization.

Because of the labor movement's confinement to conceptualizing a union's role as that of primarily concerned with those who claim membership status, other social issues come in

‘second’. With a focus on membership, a boundary between members and non-members is reinforced, and is part of what serves as an impediment to unions becoming more deeply involved with movements for racial justice. To be clear, I am not arguing against union membership engagement or members feeling empowered by their union. Rather, I am pointing out that while a labor organizing model that centers membership status in unions may be empowering, it is also constraining to broader union organizing for the working-class. For example, a focus overwhelmingly on a membership frame means that the unemployed or incarcerated are completely left out of labor movement organizing. This should not be the case. Labor should struggle against all forms of ‘divide and conquer’ tactics, including tiered salary mechanisms that pit workers within an organization against one another, but also the ‘divide and conquer’ tactic of having the ‘waged’ segment of the working class, and another large part either incarcerated, uncompensated for their work or unable to find work. In other words, organized labor needs to get past the false binary between union and non-union issues. As intersectional analysis shows us, the arbitrary distinction between a ‘bread and butter’ issue and a ‘social justice’ issue limits the political analysis and organizing capabilities of organized labor. Labor organizing should prioritize making the connection between seemingly disparate struggles, organizing and educating members on how issues connect, and not just organizing around a contract.

5.9.3 Organizing cannot be limited to gathering support and momentum for strikes

Very few people would disagree with the claim that organizing is key to union activity. However, as is often the case—and illustrated to some extent in this research—the deep mobilizing, one-to-one labor organizing where leadership is on the ground, in schools, connecting with workers around their lived experiences in their jobs—is too often limited to

gathering support for and building up member momentum for an impending strike. While strikes (and other types of job actions) are an indispensable tool of labor, they have their limitations.

Lenin reminds us of the limitations of strikes when he argues,

When strikes are widespread among the workers, some of the workers (including some socialists) begin to believe that the working-class can confine itself to strikes, strike funds, or strike associations alone; that by strikes alone the working class can achieve a considerable improvement in its conditions or even its emancipation...strikes are only one means of struggle, only one aspect of the working-class movement (Lenin 1970/1924, p. 65).

Strikes are important but cannot be the be all end all of labor organizing efforts. Strikes often mean gains for workers, but the extent of those gains varies for each strike. As I discussed above in this chapter, while the 2012 CTU strike was important, it didn't mean the same optimism for all teachers. There is a tendency within the literature on social justice unionism to romanticize strikes (i.e. CTU in 2012, and most recently the Red of Ed strikes in 2018) to the point where one could think 'all we need are more teachers to strike and that will stop the corporatization and privatization of public education'. As the quote above shows, Lenin provides caution against such thinking. Furthermore, as Lenin points out in his other writing on trade unions, membership in a union and participation in strikes do not automatically revolutionize workers' consciousness. This research has confirmed this and has shown the reality of differing perspectives (even reactionary ones) within a progressive union. The importance of a day to day organizing strategy involved in everyday struggles, not just limited to organizing for strikes should be prioritized.

5.9.4 Unions have a responsibility to organize, educate and build political consciousness among their members

Unions have a particular role—in fact, responsibility—in educating members and building political consciousness around important working-class struggles. Aside from a working-class based party, unions are another organizational form in which workers are organized.²³ This organization and the resources from such organization can—and should—be harnessed for political consciousness raising work (see also Lenin, 1970/ 1924). This point was articulated as one research participant explained as she was reflecting on how the union and other organizations are fighting back against the corporate education reform narrative around schools and teachers:

the organizations that are coming out of all of this do have some power and should have some momentum in educating and bringing the conversations and not letting it rest and fighting the propaganda. How to do that? I have no idea, that's a tall order, but that's why they are organizations and not just individuals

This rank and file teacher highlights the capacity and power that organizations can harness to educate that individuals on their own cannot. This conceptualization of unions expands them beyond having the role of defending workers' and fighting for a better contract towards having an explicitly larger pedagogical function.²⁴

²³ For detailed analysis and theorizing on the key role of the Party in working-class organizing, applied to today's context, see Dean, 2016; Ford, 2016.

²⁴ Conceptualizing unions within a pedagogical lens connects to Lenin's (1970/1924) conceptualization of unions as 'schools of communism' and his insistence that communists work in trade unions (and all other forms of working-class organization) to collectively raise more radical consciousness and elevate the working-class struggle to a higher form, in the sense of pushing further towards revolutionary demands.

The work of political consciousness raising requires ‘on the ground’ organizing where union members take on various roles. The reality, as many organizers and scholars have lamented, the working class under capitalism is divided. When working to create a unified movement, those divisions can’t be denied. In the case of this research, racism within the working class, exacerbated by geographic segregation, along with a confused notion of solidarity that is lacking a class analysis all need to be addressed. In addition to grounding a conceptualization of social justice unionism in an anti-capitalist intersectional analysis, it’s necessary to think about the various roles needed to navigate this work of political consciousness raising and organizing members. This was represented in the ethnodrama through the characters of Sophia, Samantha, and Alana most strongly, who take a more radical approach to their union activism and are pushing the union to embrace a stronger racial justice focus. Those roles are necessary to combat complacency and acceptance of the status quo. But at the same time, as this research shows, members taking on the roles of ‘bridgers’ are needed to engage with members who may not be on board or see the big picture of where the union is going. In *Shifting Grounds*, Melanie and Kayla serve as bridgers; they see the bigger picture of where the Sophia’s and Alana’s want the union to go, they’ve got class consciousness, but are on the ground with fellow teachers and are exposed to other perspectives, like Alan’s and Amy’s, who don’t quite yet make the connection between the issues of police violence and the union’s work. Furthermore, organizing strategy must encompass anticipating and thinking through (prior and throughout) a coherent approach of ways to engage members and address racial tension or objections to issues when they arise, such as ‘what does this have to do with us?’. This underscores the importance of

a grounded broader political analysis. At the same time, as *Shifting Grounds* sought to illustrate, members will need to be open and creative for how they engage with members they are trying to ‘reach’ politically. This is illustrated when Kayla asks Amy to join the planning meeting to work with parents and oppose the co-location of two schools into one (which would result in one of those schools closing). Kayla doesn’t hold a grudge against Amy for her previous stance on supporting the police over the MBL, but rather, seeks to engage with her on another issue where she can find common ground and ‘go from there’.

5.9.5 Principled leadership: ‘At times you have to draw the line in the sand and take a stand’

Finally, I don’t mean to suggest that the work of organizing and ‘meeting members where they’re at’ will magically solve the tensions and lead to consensus among members. While organizing work is ongoing, leadership will at times need to make decisions based on values and principles, even if all the membership does not agree. What this all emphasizes is the way in which the key components that I’ve laid out— a vision grounded in anti-capitalism and intersectionality, an expansion of labor’s focus beyond members, a developed, class-consciousness practice of labor solidarity, and deep organizing and political consciousness raising—are all needed for labor’s revitalization as a force within the working class to push closer towards a world free from exploitation and oppression.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Consent Form



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

UBC Faculty of Education

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4

Consent form for participants in the research project:

Exploring the intersections of social movements: An examination of the education justice movement and the Movement for Black Lives in Chicago

July ____ 2017

Dear _____

I would like to ask you to participate in a research project that I am carrying out as part of my doctoral studies. This research explores the process of organizing to build a broad working-class movement of racial and economic justice by looking at two movements—the education justice movement and the Movement for Black Lives (MBL) — in the city of Chicago.

Who is conducting this research project?

Co- Investigator:

Michelle Gautreaux, Curriculum and Pedagogy, PhD student in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Contact: (email) or (phone).

PhD supervisor/ Principal Investigator:

Dr. E. Wayne Ross, professor in the department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia, is principal investigator for this research project and Michelle Gautreaux's PhD supervisor. Contact: (email) or (phone).

Invitation and Purpose

I, Michelle Gautreaux, am conducting this research exploring the process of inter-movement relationship development between two social movements as a way towards developing a deeper understanding of the actual and potential possibilities and challenges for building a broad working class movement of racial and economic justice not only in Chicago, but in the US at large. This research hopes to contribute to some deeper understanding of how the two movements collaborate, the challenges they face (or have faced) and how they manage to work together and unite in their struggles and deal with those differences. I am asking if you would be willing to participate in this research because I think you would be able to offer extremely valuable insight.

What is involved?

If you agree to participate in this project, I will schedule an interview with you. You will be provided with a list of questions in advance to consider, although it's also possible that through our conversation additional questions will come up in the interview and encourage discussion beyond the interview questions. I will record the interview using an audio recorder, most likely an I Phone, and I will also be taking some written notes. Your participation will require approximately 1- 1.5 hours for an interview and perhaps another hour or so if any follow up questions need to be asked in the future.

Research Project Results

The analysis of my interview with you and other activists is part of my doctoral research.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent. I will use pseudonyms for participants. There will be a master file that will link the code given to each participant to their name. All data will be identified by code only. This file will be both password protected and encrypted and it will be stored separately from the data. All data will be kept at the University of British Columbia.

Payment

You will not be paid for your participation in this interview.

Contact for Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Participant Consent and Signature Page

Participation in this research project is voluntary and you may decline to answer any questions or to participate in any component of the research. Further, you may decide to withdraw at any time, or to request the withdrawal of your contributions without any negative impact.

Please, let me know if you are interested in being interviewed for this project. I am happy to answer any further questions that you might have about this project and your potential participation.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Appendix B : Interview Questions

- 1.) Can you describe your involvement in the Chicago Teachers' Union?
- 2.) What movements do you see yourself as a part of?
- 3.) Do you see the movement for black lives and the movement to resist corporate education reform as related? If so, in what ways do you see these movements to be related?
- 4.) Can you talk about the relationship between the CTU and its type of social justice unionism and racial justice movements in Chicago?
- 5.) Can you talk about any differences, tensions, challenges, or dissonance that you have experienced or perceived between these two movements as they have joined together or overlapped at certain points?
- 6.) How are those issues or tensions or challenges being dealt with or negotiated in the movements?
- 7.) Can you talk about some things that you have learned from those issues/tensions or challenges? What those have meant in terms of the collective effort in building a larger united movement?
- 8.) How do you see the work going forward? Are there any current or potential obstacles that you see that may pose a challenge to the two movements uniting in struggle?

Appendix C : List of Documents Analyzed

1. Movement for black Lives policy platform: <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>
2. The schools Chicago's students deserve: <https://www.ctulocal1.org/reports/schools-chicagos-students-deserve-2/>
3. A Just Chicago: Fighting for the City Our Students Deserve:
<https://news.wttw.com/sites/default/files/article/file-attachments/A%20Just%20Chicago-CTU%20Report.pdf>
4. Handcuffs in the hallway: The state of policing in Chicago Public Schools:
<https://povertylaw.org/files/docs/handcuffs-in-hallways-final.pdf>
5. Various issues of the Chicago Union Teacher (published 8 times a year)