



‘There Is No Change Without Contemplation’: bell hooks and the Sisters of the Yam

Abstract In this chapter, I look at how mindfulness practices like ‘days of mindfulness’ were taken up by African American studies professor and feminist cultural critic bell hooks in the United States in the 1980s—a decade that saw a concerted conservative backlash against the modest gains of the civil rights era. Combining mindfulness with Black feminist thought and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, hooks offered her students a unique path to navigating the oppressive social environment of the United States at the time: taking contemplative time out for self-recovery as a political act. Her work in this period gave rise to ‘engaged pedagogy’—an educational philosophy that insists on enhancing both critical consciousness and wellbeing for students and teachers, especially amidst the struggle against systemic oppression.

Keywords Mindfulness • Violence • United States • Black Feminism • Oppression

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‘Mindfulness would also help me heal myself and treat myself with more compassion instead of constantly trying so hard not to fit a certain mold or expectation of myself,’ a student in the ‘Contemplative Lawyering’ course at the University of San Francisco (USF) declared in 2011 (in

Magee, 2016, p. 278). By itself, this statement is an encouraging affirmation of the commonly proposed link between mindfulness programs and self-compassion (Neff, 2003; Shaprio et al., 2005; Baer et al., 2012), and hence of the usefulness of teaching mindfulness to pre-professional students who are about to enter high-stress, emotionally demanding work situations (Birchinall et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2021; Scott, 2018). Given the flood of research now available extolling the positive psychological effects of mindfulness in educational contexts (Ergas & Hadar, 2019), as well as its significant uptake in higher education (Chioldelli et al., 2022), this student's comment on the course is also unexceptional. But when situated in its time and place, it stands out for three reasons. Firstly, while such a statement and course may appear familiar from the perspective of the 2020s, it is worth remembering that in 2011—much less in 2008 when the course was first planned (Magee, 2013, p. 34)—the boom in scholarly fervour for bringing mindfulness into higher education had not yet begun in earnest. According to Ergas and Hadar's (2019, p. 16) comprehensive map of peer-reviewed publications on mindfulness in education from 2002 to 2017, there were 87 English-language publications on the topic in the decade up to 2011; in the five years following, there were 360. From 2016 to 2021, 677 mindfulness in education publications were added—more than double the amount (328) in the preceding five decades (Baminiwatta & Solangaarachchi, 2021, p. 2102). No wonder that in 2011, one of the teachers and designers of the USF 'Contemplative Lawyering' course (who I will return to shortly) still had to make the case, through a 61-page journal article, 'that the implications of educating lawyers in contemplative practice [e.g., mindfulness meditation] are much more profound than have yet been articulated' (Magee, 2011, pp. 536–537).

A second reason the law student's statement is worth noting is the way they identified themselves: as a 'self-identified Latina' who wanted to speak 'of the benefits to her of dealing with her identity challenges mindfully' (Magee, 2016, p. 278). This is no minor detail. Historically, the legal profession in the United States has been demographically dominated by White men. In 2011, male-identifying lawyers made up 66.9% of the profession, while 88.3% of lawyers identified as White (American Bar Association, 2020, p. 109). Latinas, who in 2009 made up 7% of the total US population and are part of the largest and fastest-growing demographic group, represented only 1.3% of lawyers, 'the lowest representation of any racial or ethnic group as compared to their overall presence in

the nation' (Hispanic National Bar Association, 2009, p. 7). Those considering entering the legal profession confront 'a career path filled with race, class, and gender-based obstacles' such as a lack of role models and financial resources, as well as hardships involved 'when assimilating and fitting into the law school culture, being tokenized, and being afraid to be labeled as either too passive, or as a "fiery" or "hot-headed" Latina' (Hernandez, 2018). Once in the profession, they have to navigate complex expectations: to be accountable to White, middle-class femininities in legal settings, and also 'to adhere to distinct values and perform culturally gendered behaviors by their Chicano/Latino clients' (García-López & Segura, 2008, p. 230).

In the face of such social pressures, it is no small matter that the Latina student in the 'Contemplative Lawyering' course found the teaching of mindfulness helpful for healing and self-compassion, a counter to 'constantly trying so hard not to fit a certain mold or expectation of myself'. What she describes as 'trying so hard *not* to fit a certain mold or expectation' is one response to what is known as 'stereotype threat'—'a form of identity threat that occurs when a negative group stereotype exists, and the possibility exists that an individual member of a stereotyped group can be devalued by a stereotype because of membership in the group' (Manning, 2018, p. 99). While 'fight' responses to the stereotype, as suggested by this student, is one approach—albeit one that creates 'an additional cognitive burden, which does not exist for nonstereotyped individuals' (Manning, 2018, p. 106)—others can be categorised as 'flight' responses. In an educational environment perceived as hostile to one's group identity, this commonly manifests as 'disengagement', which can include 'failure to seek help, truancy, detached attitude, and distraction' (Lain, 2016, p. 305). However, like the 'fight' response, this response also saps energy. 'Similar to the fight coping mechanisms, those who disengaged through flight also expended additional energy into avoiding law school, as opposed to attempting to gain the knowledge that they needed to be successful,' Lain (2016, p. 305) points out in her study of minoritised students who had been academically dismissed from law schools. That mindfulness meditation might offer relief to students facing such pressures is significant. Another self-identified Latina student from the 2011 'Contemplative Lawyering' course at the USF concurred, articulating in her own words the 'stopping' and 'seeing' that mindfulness enables according to engaged Buddhists (see Chap. 3):

I think that the meditation has really put things in perspective because I feel like I can remove myself from a situation and really think about what's going on... Mindfulness has helped me see the big picture. I don't feel the need to sweat everything. And when I do worry I think about things in a more positive/optimistic manner. (In Magee, 2016, p. 278)

The potential of mindfulness-based practices to ameliorate the pernicious effects of stereotype threat on the academic achievement of minoritised students is a key reason that it should be incorporated into all law school classrooms, according to USF law professor Rhonda Magee—one of the teachers and architects of the USF's 'Contemplative Lawyering' course. The biographical and scholarly background that she brought to the teaching of this course is the third noteworthy point to be drawn from the students' statements. For this was not a mindfulness-based 'intervention' whereby 'that which intervenes, is not the thing in which it intervenes' (Ergas, 2019, p. 347). Drawing from her own experiences 'as a Black woman from the South, whose own family had experienced the reality of racial segregation and systemic subordination for generations', and who was taught 'race-blindness and the irrelevance of minority perspectives' in her own legal education, Magee (2016, pp. 259–260) recognises that 'for me and similar students, managing the threat of such stereotypical outcomes was an additional psychological burden that we managed throughout law school, and, indeed, throughout our careers in the profession'. It is from this shared experience that she posits that 'mindfulness may play an important role in giving potentially stereotyped and stigmatized students the capacity to protect against or minimize the harm from stereotype threat', specifically by assisting affected students and their peers 'in maintaining composure during unfortunate (and probably inevitable) instances of insensitivity and incivility in our classrooms' (Magee, 2016, p. 275). This is particularly important for students who have survived traumatic experiences in their lives—reportedly 66 to 85% of US college students (Carello & Butler, 2014)—including those coping with racism-related stress and racial trauma from both within and beyond the institution (Hernández & Harris, 2022). What practices like mindfulness meditation and self-compassion meditation can do for such students, according to Magee (2016, p. 276), is support '[i]nterpersonal healing' and 'pro-social transformations of experience' by 'creating space for sitting with suffering around social identity differences'.

To be sure, Magee neither suggests that mindfulness is the only response to such circumstances, nor that the students themselves—particularly those who are minoritised on the basis of their race, gender, class, and other identity markers—are primarily responsible for finding ways to deal personally with the injustices they face in law school and the legal profession. She has for decades been an advocate for radical society-wide solutions to the seemingly intractable problem of racism in US institutions, arguing for reparations beyond Black integration and separatism (e.g., Magee, 1993), and for ‘humanity consciousness’ as a sublation of hyper-individualistic ‘colourblind constitutionalism’ on the one hand, and the tendency towards reification in ‘race consciousness’ approaches on the other (e.g., Magee Andrews, 2003). This reparative, humanity consciousness project entails radical reforms in legal education that seek ‘to place the full development of free human beings at its center’, specifically through ‘an approach to the study of law and its institutions that incorporates aspects of critical legal theory and critical race theory with spiritual humanism to develop human beings’ capacities for sustained engagement with dignity and community’ (Magee, 2007, p. 471). It is within the ambit of this broader project that Magee enlists mindfulness meditation and other contemplative practices in her teaching: ‘It counteracts the alienating dynamics inherent in legal education generally, and directly supports students in reconnecting with a sense of self, meaningfulness in their work, and interconnectedness with others’ (Magee, 2013, p. 37).

From the foregoing sketch of Magee’s work with her students at the USF School of Law, we can identify her affinities with the work of Nhat Hanh and the SYSS in Vietnam as discussed in Chap. 3: that mindfulness practice creates a space for students to pause from identity pressures and stigmatisation—often conditioned by dominant ideologies (i.e., symbolic violence; see Chap. 2)—which enables personal healing, as well as insight into interrelatedness with others. This insight then opens up possibilities for creative engagement to address causes of suffering: ‘Practices of mindfulness and compassion prepare us to meet the patterns of oppression in our midst without becoming mired in them’ (Magee, 2019, p. 244). A key difference between Magee and her students on the one hand, and Nhat Hanh and his students on the other, is context. While for the latter mindfulness practices are addressed towards the direct (subjective) violence of war, for the former they are directed towards a more diffuse form of violence: the systemic (objective) violence of racism, sexism, class, and so on. Hence Magee’s (2016, p. 283) insistence on ‘the need to work on

these issues on at least three dimensions—personally, interpersonally, and systemically, since any ultimate healing or transformative justice around such matters will require not merely individual but also collective, systemic change’.

In the expansiveness of her overall project and the different types of violence it addresses, Magee’s framing of mindfulness as a contemplative pedagogy is remarkable. She is not overstating the case by declaring that: ‘My own experimental work with like-minded others at USF mirrors similar work being done by others in what might be called the vanguard in the academy across the country’ (Magee, 2013, p. 36). To move this ‘vanguard in the academy’ forward in her work, Magee weaves her life and teaching experiences together with an extensive range of sources from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and neuroscience. In what follows, I suggest one more source: a historical exemplar whose biography, political commitments, and introduction of contemplative practices like mindfulness meditation into higher education prefigure Magee’s own.

RECOVERY

In the 1980s, a thirty-something assistant professor of African American studies and English at Yale University would run a regular support group for her Black female students. Decades before trauma-informed teaching became common coin in higher education, she realised that for many of her students, encountering Black women’s fiction ‘that emphasized various forms of trauma in black women’s lives’ was ‘an emotional trigger which stirred up lots of repressed, unspoken pain and emotion’ (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 155). ‘Hearing these women describe their sense of estrangement and loneliness,’ she reminisces, ‘I felt that a support group was needed and helped organize it’ (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 5). On the elite gothic campus of Yale where ‘the preponderance of wealthy, White families has not changed from 1952 to the present’ (Soares, 2007, p. 114), this Black teacher opened up a safe space where Black women could speak freely and critically examine the controlling images and expectations of the broader culture—‘the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside Black civil society but [also] within African-American institutions’ (Collins, 1991, p. 101). Amongst a trove of counsel this teacher offers at the time and later documents, one that recurs is the need for Black women to find occasion to subtract themselves from the pressures and expectations of ordinary life in order to ‘be with ourselves in a spirit of acceptance and

peace' (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 143). One way to do this, she instructs, is to meditate in solitude and silence by marking out days dedicated to doing so:

It is helpful to have days of silence, times that allow us to practice what Thich Nhat Hanh calls 'the miracle of mindfulness.' He uses the term mindfulness to 'refer to keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality.' Worry and stress often keep us fixated on the future, so that we lose sight of the present, of what it means to be here and now. Mindfulness helps us find a way back to the present. Black women's lives are enriched when we are able to be fully aware, to be mindful. Meditation enhances our capacity to practice mindfulness and should not be dismissed. (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 144)

To understand the significance of this passage, it is necessary to place it within the historical context in which it was delivered, as well as in the specific life of the teacher that delivered it. To bring this exhortation about taking days of mindfulness to the elite chambers of Yale, Gloria Jean Watkins (1952–2021) had to travel a long way. She began her formal educational journey at Booker T. Washington Elementary School and Crispus Attucks High School—segregated Black schools in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Despite the broader marginalising effects of segregated schooling buttressed by White bureaucratic surveillance and murderous violence (Givens, 2021, p. 7), it was in these Black schools that she 'witnessed the transformative power of teaching, of pedagogy' from the almost exclusively Black female teaching staff, who 'gave to their work a passion, a devotion that made it seem a true calling, a true vocation' (hooks, 1989, p. 50). Importantly for Watkins, they were teachers 'who conceptualized oppositional world views, who taught us young Black women to exult and glory in the power and beauty of our intellect', and in so doing 'offered to us a legacy of liberatory pedagogy that demanded active resistance and rebellion against sexism and racism' (hooks, 1989, p. 50). This legacy she describes is the unique heritage of Black education in the United States—a heritage that Givens (2021, p. 230) terms 'fugitive pedagogy', which 'encapsulates the enslaved and their descendants engaging in the process of thinking the world anew and building an educational protocol with this curricular object at the center'. For Watkins, this heritage was embodied in her favourite junior high school teacher—Miss Annie Mae Moore:

Miss Moore knew that if we were to be fully self-realized, then her work, and the work of all our progressive teachers, was not to teach us solely the knowledge in books, but to teach us an oppositional world view—different from that of our exploiters and oppressors, a world view that would enable us to see ourselves not through the lens of racism or racist stereotypes but one that would enable us to focus clearly and succinctly, to look at ourselves, at the world around us, critically – analytically – to see ourselves first and foremost as striving for wholeness, for unity of heart, mind, body, and spirit. (hooks, 1989, p. 49)

There are two reasons why this recollection is important for this chapter. Firstly, it offers a summary through personification of the key marks of what would come to be Watkins’s philosophy of ‘engaged pedagogy’ as articulated across her works in the following decades: that education for freedom should cultivate both ‘critical consciousness’ and ‘wholeness’—the latter dimension strongly connected to her introduction of Thich Nhat Hanh’s thought into educational contexts (Low, 2021). We will return to engaged pedagogy below. A second reason for paying attention to this recollection is that it illustrates a key feature of her educational criticism: her early schooling experiences are frequently raised as an ideal referent against which she will come to evaluate all her subsequent experiences of education and teaching—from busing into a White neighbourhood for senior high school where almost all her teachers were White and ‘did not really believe we were as capable of learning as white children’ (hooks, 2003, pp. 68–69), to her disheartening years as an undergraduate at Stanford University ‘spent struggling to find meaning and significance in education’ (hooks, 1989, p. 100), to graduate school at the University of California Santa Cruz where ‘university and the classroom began to feel more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility’ (hooks, 1994a, p. 4). By the time she arrived at Yale, she was already gaining visibility under her pen name bell hooks, author of the landmark *Ain’t I a woman: Black women and feminism* (1981)—much of its material generated while she was still an undergraduate student at Stanford as a response to ‘the dearth of material by and about black women’ in women’s studies classes and mainstream feminist circles in the early-1970s (hooks, 2015, p. xviii; also 1981, pp. 12–13). In accord with her valorisation of Black people’s voices—especially those of Black women—hooks (1989, p. 65) describes her transcontinental move from California to Connecticut as motivated by a belief that with a

joint appointment in African American studies at Yale, she would find 'a place within the university wherein scholarship focussing on black people would be unequivocally deemed valuable'.

From a superficial reading of US history and society, hooks could easily be regarded as emblematic of the supposedly nascent 'Black middle-class' emerging from the dissolution of Jim Crow laws and affirmative action in white-collar workplaces like Ivy League universities. According to a much-debated treatise from the time, the combination of US economic expansion from the 1950s to 1970s, union recognition of Black demands, legislative provisions for union representation and civil rights, and affirmative action policies in educational and professional spheres had led to the formation of a distinct Black middle class (Wilson, 1978). No doubt, as Manning Marable (1984, p. 169) argues, the fading of Jim Crow laws and federally sponsored affirmative action programs had by the mid-1970s 'brought tens of thousands of blacks into middle-class jobs in both the public and private sectors'. Desegregation thus allowed 'the most gifted black intellectuals, athletes, artists and musicians to leave black colleges to accept higher-paying positions within white institutions' (Marable, 1984, p. 173). Yet, if there was a narrative about a burgeoning Black middle class that would eventually take in a majority of African Americans—a narrative that chimes with the optimistic, triumphalist, progressivist grand narrative of American historiography (Ross, 1995)—it would be fleeting and chimerical. Marable (1984, p. 171) points out that in the early-1980s: 'Considered as a socio-economic group, the black elite—in the fields of banking, commerce, law, education, and medicine—comprised only 7 to 10 per cent of the total Afro-American population.' By the time hooks began teaching at Yale in the mid-1980s, the 'unprecedented optimism and confidence about their future' expressed by this Black middle class in the mid-1970s would be severely challenged (Landry, 1987, p. 133).

While liberal commitments to civil rights reforms such as affirmative action and *de jure* desegregation in the 1970s had scratched the surface of power in a deeply racialised capitalist society, even this had begun to wane in the 1980s. 'For whites of all income levels, the emergence of thousands of well-educated, articulate and aggressive black professionals seemed to require a political "white backlash"' (Marable, 1984, p. 172). This political backlash came with the 1980 landslide election of Ronald Reagan, whose candidacy for the White House rode on the wave of a backlash to affirmative action, court-ordered busing, and equal opportunity policies for African Americans, as well as women and other minoritised

populations (Marable, 1984, p. 194). This foretold the decade that had dawned. In his two terms in office, Reagan would oversee the reassertion of White dominance and Black deprivation that has marked US history, albeit newly couched in the cold language of economic rationalism. This was tagged as ‘economic racism’ by a scholar writing at the time, marked as it was by a reduction of all social problems to ‘matters of national economic welfare’ and the reframing of minority dissent from a social issue to a ‘law-and-order’ problem (Kinloch, 1987, p. 9). This discourse is archetypal of how the relationship between race, culture, and economic interests in the United States ‘is modified over time as the racial elite adapts to its changing economic interests, needs, and response to minority reactions, maintaining the racial status quo on a differential basis as situations change’ (Kinloch, 1987, p. 9). And the patterns that emerged from the 1980s bear this out: in the absolute increase of those living in poverty to the tune of over 3 million (Plotnick, 1993, p. 353), with Black people 33% more likely to be working below the poverty line than Whites (Harrison & Gorham, 1992, p. 243); in the decline of Black workers in well-paid positions such that there were two and a half times as many White high-wage earners (Harrison & Gorham, 1992, p. 243); in the steady erosion of Black living standards so that for every \$1 in wealth held by a White family a comparable Black family had just 9 cents (Cotton, 1989, p. 815); in the funnelling of Black professionals primarily into sales-clerical and operative roles rather than professional or managerial ones (Kinloch, 1987, p. 5); and in the drastic evisceration through defunding of institutions like hospitals, schools, colleges, and public facilities that had catered to historically Black communities and neighbourhoods (Jefferson, 1986, p. 7; Feagin, 1986, p. 198). ‘From bare human necessities to basic civil rights, the status of Black America is, worse in the 1980s than it was in the 1960s. Even gone are the futile promises of a bankrupt national agenda promoting racial equality,’ a Black scholar lamented at the time (Jefferson, 1986, p. 2).

The sum effect of all this would be the deterioration of the overall social environment for African Americans. Those who could leave Black neighbourhoods and workplaces often did so, compounding the socioeconomic decline of these areas: ‘In large cities, where ghetto life had always retained a degree of vitality and an atmosphere of extended families at the neighborhood level, the environment turned increasingly ugly. The specter of violence and death became frighteningly familiar’ (Marable, 2007, p. 188). Prejudice and discrimination in the US housing market produced segregated urban residential environments along racial lines that, when

compounded with declining socioeconomic fortunes and the defunding of local services, meant that Black neighbourhoods were marked by higher levels of unemployment, welfare dependency, dilapidated housing, poorer schools, and crime (Peterson & Krivo, 1993). Disaffected communities would be beset by what might today be termed 'lateral violence' under oppressive forces (Whyman et al., 2021; see Chap. 2): throughout the 1980s, murder was the fourth leading cause of death for all African American males and the leading cause of death for Black males aged 20–29; Black males were robbed at 2.5 times the rate of White males; Black women had a 30–60% higher chance of being sexually assaulted than White women; Black children were far more likely to live in a household that was burglarised than Whites; and by 1986, one out of every 25 African Americans annually became the victim of a crime (Marable, 2007, pp. 190–193). The US Federal Government's response, as mentioned above, was to reframe underlying social issues as problems of law-and-order. This came into view most prominently in Reagan's turbocharged 'War on Drugs' in October 1982 (originally initiated by President Richard Nixon on 17 June 1971; see Farber, 2022). Large amounts of funding and resources were poured into this 'war'—including the transfer of military technology to civilian police—which saw heavy-handed law enforcement campaigns launched in neighbourhoods featuring advanced tactical units such as SWAT, armoured cars, tear gas, and military-grade weapons (Hinton & Cook, 2021, p. 275). In the early-1980s, for every White person killed by the police in the United States in any year, 22 Black persons were killed (Marable, 1984, pp. 189–190). And by the end of the 1980s, Black Americans were incarcerated at nearly seven times the rate for Whites, and one out of four Black American males would go to prison at some point in their lifetimes (Marable, 2007, p. 193). Black youth aged between 15 and 19 were four times as likely as White children to be incarcerated (Davis & Davis, 1986, p. 34). No wonder the Reagan-initiated War on Drugs has been labelled 'the New Jim Crow' on account of its removal of generations of young Black men from communities (Alexander, 2012).

Under the weight of all this, many Black families would splinter (Marable, 1984, pp. 175–177; 2005, p. 208). For Black women—historically the sinews that held African American communities and families together through their care work in the face of oppressive forces (Davis, 1981; Jones, 2009)—the 1980s cannot but be regarded as decade of assault on their collective lives and livelihoods. 'The communal child-care

networks of the slave era, the extended family arrangements of the rural South, and the cooperative family networks of prior eras of Black urban migration have eroded,' Patricia Hill Collins (1991, p. 64) observed, and these shifts 'portend major problems for African American women and point to a continuation of Black women's oppression, but structured through new institutional arrangements'. At work, Black women's fortunes appeared to be better, but even here the 1980s were an ambivalent time: while those of working age enjoyed a 33% increase in the incidence of high-wage employment (compared to an 88% increase for White women), there was also a 37% increase in poverty-level employment among the same age-race-gender group (Harrison & Gorham, 1992, pp. 244–245). Overall, while relative wages for Black people rose in the 1970s along with the unprecedented class optimism mentioned above, they stagnated and declined in the 1980s (Blau & Beller, 1991, p. 17). Notably, younger Black people experienced declining relative wages compared to Whites and older Black people in this decade, casting a pall over their future (Blau & Beller, 1991, pp. 17–18).

Despite all this, White majoritarian opinion in the United States in that period arrived at the view that 'any further government efforts on behalf of Blacks is undeserved special treatment and amounts to reverse discrimination against whites' (Cotton, 1989, p. 817). All things considered, the 1980s can be described as a decade of conservative backlash against the modest gains of African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s (Huckfeldt & Kohfeld, 1989; Edsall & Edsall, 1992; Hughey, 2014). Or, to put it starkly, it was a doubling-down on systemic racial oppression—an objective violence historically institutionalised in the United States, albeit in mutating ways: 'The oppressed Black majority is generally more subject to the violence of American capitalism than whites [because] America is not simply a capitalist state, but a racist state, a governmental apparatus which usually denies access and power to most Blacks solely on the basis of racial background' (Marable, 2015).

It is important to note that this objective violence reasserted in the 1980s was also accompanied by 'backlash' forms of symbolic violence and subjective violence, as alluded to above. Ideological rationalisation for Black inferiority was manifest in 'the adamant white opposition to any nationwide government program aimed at aggressively desegregating jobs, housing, and schools' (Feagin, 1986, p. 177). And as tragically not unforeseen in US history, the backlash saw both concerted and sporadic outbursts of physical violence against Black people: concertedly through

the deployment of militarised law enforcement into Black neighbourhoods often called 'combat areas' by police (Feagin, 1986, p. 198), 'shooting first and asking questions later' (Marable, 1984, p. 189); sporadically through 'hangings, castrations, shootings, and other acts of racially motivated random violence' (Marable, 1984, p. 190), especially in the early-1980s. For Black women, objective, subjective, and symbolic violence threaded everyday life under a blanket of racialised hostility—at school, at home, at work, on the long commute home from school or work (Collins, 1998, pp. 11–43; Small, 1994, pp. 80–109).

Even in the cloistered world of higher education, African American staff and students were not immune from the times. Enrolments of African American students nationally had plummeted by nearly one hundred thousand in the five years to 1986 (Marable, 2007, p. 183). This was, in large part, a direct outcome of Reagan-era policies. Indeed, one of Reagan's first proposals to the US Congress was to cut Federal student assistance and eliminate other special compensatory programs that aimed to recruit African American students (Harper, 2019, p. 114). Compounding this were societal signals being delivered to them. For instance, only slightly over one in eight Black graduates with four or more years of higher education were earning a middle income in 1987; their White counterparts with equivalent education were twice as likely to be paid this much (Harrison & Gorham, 1992, p. 246). Indeed, the number of well-educated African American men receiving low wages actually grew so that the fraction of all Black male graduates who had a middle income actually fell from 23.4% in 1979 to 19.5% in 1987; for Black women graduates—including the additional 407,000 who joined their ranks from 1979 to 1987—there was an absolute decline in those receiving middle incomes from 12.4% in 1979 to 7.6% (Harrison & Gorham, 1992, p. 246). When combined with the economic penalties of not having a higher education from the 1980s onward and sharply rising tuition costs, a picture of a three-pronged offensive against Black students emerges: narrowing options for higher education, declining incentives for pursuing it, and rising costs of not doing so. Surveying the landscape at the time, it is no wonder that Jefferson (1986, p. 3) surmised that: 'America's commitment to education as a way of creating political equality and social as well as economic opportunity has never been applied to Black America.'

Apart from the degradation of social conditions that supported Black students' participation in higher education, there was also a concerted targeting of African American Studies programs such as the one that

convinced hooks to move from California to Connecticut. A fruit of Black students' activism in the 1960s and 1970s to carve out an intellectual and social space within historically White institutions, African American Studies programs increasingly came under ideological attack for promoting alleged 'racial separatism' (Marable, 2005, p. 12). In the 1980s, ugly incidents of racial discrimination also erupted across US campuses as racist remarks, anonymous hate notes, racist graffiti, pro-racist demonstrations, cross burnings, physical assaults against minority students, and 'White student unions' popped up regularly to oppose affirmative action recruitment of students and staff (Farrell & Jones, 1988; Webb, 1990). The racial tensions in US higher education had gotten so severe in that period that a special two-day conference was convened in October 1989 for presidents of 32 public and private institutions to discuss short-term responses to racial tensions and violence prevention ('College Presidents Discuss Dealing With Racial Incidents', 1989). At Yale where hooks and her students were caucusing, the decade was bookended with its own high-profile racist incidents. In 1980, collegians plastered campus boards with posters advertising a 'Bring a Slave' party (Maslin, 2013). In 1990, a hate letter signed by 'Yale Students for Racism' was sent to Black law students, coming two weeks after racial slurs against Black, Jewish, and Asian-American students were found scrawled on four carrels in a library (Yale Students to Protest Racist Acts on Campus, 1990).

It is in this broader setting—and the devastating stress it would wreak on bodies—that hooks's teachings on mindfulness should be situated. We can draw from recent studies of like cohorts and contexts to furnish us with a deeper sense of this. For instance, a study of 262 Black women in higher education who had encountered racism found a moderate, significant correlation between racist stress events and depression; a significant, positive association between racist stress appraisals and depression; and a significant link between racist stress appraisals and attitudes of racial self-hatred (Jones et al., 2007). Another study of 218 Black students (157 females, 61 males) found that minority status stress—a descriptor for the unique stressors experienced by minority students like racism and discrimination, insensitive comments, and questioning of belonging—was a negative predictor of mental health (McClain et al., 2016). These negative outcomes were especially heightened for Black students in predominantly White universities (McClain et al., 2016). Interestingly, affirming hooks's valuation of Black Studies, the latter study also found that 'ethnic identity (i.e., positive increases in one's attitudes and feelings about a group of

people with shared ancestry, history, and experiences) at higher levels was related to increased mental health', suggesting that 'an added layer of self-reflection and cultural learning... may enhance mental health and help students make sense of their identity in a [predominantly White university] environment' (McClain et al., 2016, pp. 111–112).

RESISTANCE

In light of these more recent findings, and in the context of the 1980s backlash that sought to conserve a 'system of oppressions related to race, gender, class, and sexual preference', it is no surprise that hooks (1994/2015, p. 157) was alarmed by how ill-equipped many of her young Black female students were to face the situation they were in. 'I was amazed by their lack of self-awareness and understanding, their lack of knowledge of black history and culture, and the profound anxiety and despair that was so pervasive in their lives' (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 5). Other scholars have also noted this inability of those who grew up after the 1960s-1970s wave of Black activism to identify the conditions of oppression while suffering its acute effects. 'Many young Black people,' Lowy (1991, p. 450) noted, 'like their young White counterparts, have either lost sight of the protest politics and activism of the 1960s, or remain completely ignorant of such recent historical events and how they may relate to contemporary demands for social justice.' Marable (2005, pp. 187–188) likewise lamented of African Americans coming to maturity in the 1980s and 1990s: 'the absence of a personal background of struggle casts a troubled shadow over the current generation of black Americans who are poorly equipped to grapple with the present complexities of racial and class domination.' hooks's pedagogical innovations at Yale can be seen as a response to this. Placing the distress of her students within a longer historical arc not only of racial oppression in the United States, but also of Black resistance through spiritual practices and community-building, hooks (1994/2015, p. 6) initiated a support group called 'Sisters of the Yam' at Yale in the late-1980s in the hopes that 'it would be a space where black women could name their pain and find ways of healing'. It would be underpinned by 'each individual's desire to recover, to find a space within and without, where she could sustain the will to be well and create affirming habits of being' (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 6). And it is within this context that she recommended mindfulness cultivated through meditation practice as a way for healing 'the wounded parts of ourselves' (hooks,

1994/2015, p. 95). Citing Nhat Hanh's teaching on 'the need to restore the self to a condition of wholeness' against 'the way forces of domination fragment, estrange, and assault our innermost beings, breaking us apart', hooks (1989, p. 29) echoes the former's insistence that this is the first step of resistance against violence.

Recall that for Nhat Hanh, this restoration of wholeness is possible when one cuts through discursive thinking to realise one's True Self and Mind (see Chap. 3). hooks (1989, p. 29) credits him for bringing this emphasis on 'self-recovery' into her consciousness 'at a time in life when I had not fully developed critical consciousness, when I was lost yet still seeking, trying to understand myself and the world around me'. She echoes Nhat Hanh's interpretation of Buddhist enlightenment as 'the recovery of oneself, of one's integrity' (Nhat Hanh & Berrigan, 1975/2001, p. 128). However, in contrast to Nhat Hanh's modernist interpretation of mindfulness as a way of returning to one's unsullied Buddha-nature amidst the symbolic and subjective violence of a polarising war in Vietnam, for hooks the self-recovery that mindfulness abets is linked to a decidedly dialectical theory of social change in the face of the symbolic and objective violence of systemic oppression in the United States. She states:

In my thinking, I linked self-recovery again and again with the overall effort of the oppressed, the dominated, to develop awareness of those forces which exploit and oppress; with efforts to educate for critical consciousness, to create effective and meaningful resistance, to make revolutionary transformation. (hooks, 1989, p. 30)

It may not be immediately obvious how mindfulness meditation connects with 'critical consciousness' or 'revolutionary transformation'. It is easier to see how for the Sisters of the Yam in the context of the 1980s, such practices may be soothing, even healing. hooks (1994/2015, p. 95) suggests as much in offering a range of meditative practices to the group:

Singing, dancing, walking, or sitting meditation can all be used as a practice to bring us back in touch with our bodies. Learning to be still, in sitting meditation, is one way we can be one with our bodies. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that living in awareness, living mindfully, enables us to heal the wounded parts of ourselves.

To understand how meditation practices for cultivating mindfulness like singing, dancing, walking, or sitting can be of a piece with critical consciousness and revolutionary transformation, it is necessary to situate hooks's pedagogy within the broader tradition of US Black feminist thought. While undoubtedly change happens and is most visible at the level of community and society, Collins (1991, p. 111) explains that:

change can also occur in the private, personal space of an individual woman's consciousness. Equally fundamental, this type of change is also personally empowering. Any individual Black woman who is forced to remain 'motionless on the outside,' can develop the 'inside' of a changed consciousness as a sphere of freedom. Becoming personally empowered through self-knowledge, even within conditions that severely limit one's ability to act, is essential.

The quotation marks around 'motionless on the outside' and 'inside' are a direct reference to the writer and playwright Marita Bonner, who in the stifling confines of both her Black middle-class world and a racist White society wrote in 1925:

So—being a woman—you can wait. You must sit quietly without a chip. Not sodden—and weighted as if your feet were cast in the iron of your soul. Not wasting strength in enervating gestures as if two hundred years of bonds and whips had really tricked you into nervous uncertainty. But quiet; quiet. Like Buddha—who brown like I am—sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing... Motionless on the outside. But inside? (in Collins, 1991, p. 92)

Now note how hooks's (1996, pp. 289, 292) reflections on her adoption of Buddhist-inspired contemplative practices—including those of Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism where 'we find an integration of contemplation and political activism'—sit squarely within this tradition:

A fundamental shift in consciousness is the only way to transform a culture of domination and oppression into one of love. Contemplation is the key to this shift. There is no change without contemplation. The image of Buddha under the Bodhi tree illustrates this—here is an action taking place that may not appear to be a meaningful action. Yet it transforms.

The key point from the foregoing discussion is that mindfulness and the contemplative practices designed to cultivate it are, for hooks in the context of her work with her students at Yale, not separate from critical consciousness and pedagogies for raising it. They are two sides of the coin in the realm of social transformation. Moeller (2019, p. 186), a student of hooks in the late-1980s after the latter had left Yale to teach at Oberlin College, recalls how hooks ‘explicitly focused on her notion of self-recovery’ and so ‘helped cultivate our thirst for theory and praxis that transforms us and that did not divorce spiritual, political, ethical, emotional issues or aspects of life’. hooks thus concurs with Nhat Hanh that to be mindfully aware is to first stop and recover one’s True Self and Mind beyond oppressive ideological scripts (see Chap. 3), which is the foundational form of resistance. This is especially important in ‘a society that socializes everyone to believe that black women were put here on this earth to be little worker bees who never stop’, which she postulates as the cause of stress-related illnesses like ‘heart disease, depression, ulcers, hypertension, and addiction’ afflicting Black women (hooks, 1994/2015, p. 41). Recent studies have confirmed her suspicions on this (Harrell et al., 2011; Kalinowski et al., 2019; Erving et al., 2021), putting paid to the notion that systemic oppression—symbolic plus objective violence—is somehow less ‘real’ because of its lack of physical or bodily impacts. They have also affirmed her pedagogical interventions. Emerging findings indicate that while specific biomarkers of acute and chronic stress reactivity in relation to racial discrimination (e.g., increased catecholamine activity and greater overall cortisol output) have been found amongst Black women (and men and children), ‘greater mindfulness among Black Americans may be a relevant protective factor against the deleterious effects of chronic race-related stress’ (Brownlow et al., 2019, p. 7). For example, a study of 223 adult Black women found that mindfulness—specifically greater self-awareness and non-reactivity to inner experience—when combined with individual resilience to stressors that is cultivated by social and community support, led to increased self-care, which in turn is crucial to disrupting the negative influence of stress on self-rated health (Adkins-Jackson et al., 2019). From this baseline of recovery as resistance to what the authors of this latter study call ‘a macrosystem of societal practices around of race, class, and gender’ (Adkins-Jackson, 2019, p. 2), stopping then facilitates what Nhat Hanh calls ‘seeing’ or ‘deep looking’ (see Chap. 3)—or what hooks following Freire (1970) prefers to call critical consciousness: ‘learning about the myriad ways racism, sexism, class exploitation, homophobia,

and various other structures of domination operate in our daily lives to undermine our capacity to be self-determining' (hooks, 1994/2015, pp. 6–7).

ENGAGED PEDAGOGY

As might be apparent from this point, there is a strong homology between the dialectic of 'inner' and 'outer' work of Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism as discussed in the previous chapter, and what hooks teaches the Sisters of the Yam. Indeed, her group at Yale can be seen as a redress to what she perceives to be lacking in higher education. As she writes:

We must envision the university as a central site for revolutionary struggle, a site where we can work to educate for critical consciousness, where we can have a pedagogy of liberation. Yet how can we transform others if our habits of being reinforce and perpetuate domination in all its forms: racism, sexism, class exploitation? This returns us to the issue of self-recovery, extending it to include models of personal transformation that address both the oppressor and oppressed. (hooks, 1989, pp. 31–32)

Addressing this gap in higher education goes to the heart of hooks's lasting contribution to the philosophy of education: her conception of 'engaged pedagogy' that combines self-recovery with critical consciousness. Recall the impact that the Black women teachers of her childhood—like Miss Annie Mae Moore—had on her understanding of what an ideal education should entail: 'one that would enable us to focus clearly and succinctly, to look at ourselves, at the world around us, critically—analytically—to see ourselves first and foremost as striving for wholeness, for unity of heart, mind, body, and spirit' (hooks, 1989, p. 49). By contrast, reflecting on her teaching experience in higher education, hooks (1994a, p. 15) describes 'a grave sense of dis-ease among professors (irrespective of their politics) when students want us to see them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge'. To this situation, no doubt inspired by her own Black women teachers and drawing from her experiences with the Sisters of the Yam, she proposes engaged pedagogy—a fusion of a few core but distinct elements that had been swirling influences in her life: the critical pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire; feminist pedagogy from a broad swathe of sources, but especially those of US Black women

educators in the tradition of Anna Cooper, Frances Ellen Harper, Mary Church Terrell, and her own Miss Moore; and the engaged Buddhism of Nhat Hanh born in the fires of the Second Indochina War in Vietnam (hooks, 1989). To see how these threads are woven together by her into this novel theory and practice of teaching, it is worth citing her original formulation in full:

Progressive, holistic education, ‘engaged pedagogy’ is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes wellbeing. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that ‘the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people.’ In the United States it is rare that anyone talks about teachers in university settings as healers. And it is even more rare to hear anyone suggest that teachers have any responsibility to be self-actualized individuals. (hooks, 1994a, pp. 15–16)

In the space remaining in this chapter, there is no way in to offer an adequate account of the different expressions of engaged pedagogy that hooks offers as the outworking of this foundational principle – most prominently in her ‘teaching trilogy’ books (hooks, 1994a, 2003, 2010). Even where her works are not directly addressing education, it is difficult to ignore teaching as a key site where values are put into practice for her (e.g., hooks, 1994b, 2015; hooks & West, 2017). There are deep considerations of engaged pedagogy in scholarly circulation (e.g., Davidson & Yancy, 2009, pp. 17–94; Wisneski, 2013; Troutman, 2020) – testimonies of hooks’s impact that I have made a minor contribution to (Low, 2021). For present purposes, I will highlight how the imperative that she calls ‘self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing’—what she states as the key difference of engaged pedagogy compared to critical and feminist pedagogies—is linked to the self-recovery and healing for wholeness that mindfulness practices abet. While we can simply point to her explicit declarations as above about teachers as ‘healers’, and that ‘I have heard Thay [Nhat Hanh] teach about engaged Buddhism, and I have applied many of these ideas to engaged pedagogy’ (hooks, 2003, p. 173), this link can be more substantively demonstrated by the ways she emphasises the

importance of mindfulness to the self-actualisation and wellbeing of both teachers and students.

Firstly, teachers, for it is they who must first 'be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students', according to hooks's formulation of engaged pedagogy. While hooks does not offer a definition of self-actualisation per se in her initial work on engaged pedagogy or the sequels that make up her teaching trilogy, it nonetheless features frequently in them as an exhortation for teachers to embark on a process of healing the psychic wounds wrought by an oppressive status quo and restore their wholeness of mind, body, and spirit (hooks, 1994a, pp. 18–19, 165, 199; 2010, pp. 52, 183). hooks treats this process of healing—or 'self-recovery'—as synonymous with self-actualisation, which is in turn the basis for socio-political resistance. Reflecting on her first use of the term in the preface to the 2015 reissue *Sisters of the Yam*, she writes:

When wounded individuals come together in groups to make change our collective struggle is often undermined by all that has not been dealt with emotionally... Many of us have longed to see the union of our political efforts to change society and our efforts to be individually self-actualized. We have wanted to politicize movements for self-recovery. (hooks, 1994/2015, pp. xi–xii)

This passage is revealing because it fleshes out how self-actualisation understood as self-recovery fits in as a key plank in engaged pedagogy. While hooks is specifically referring to the original *Sisters of the Yam* here, it is not difficult to see how engaged pedagogy's exhortation to teachers is an extension of this – 'collective struggle' in this case involving teachers subverting the 'politics of domination, the impact of racism, sexism, class exploitation, and the kind of domestic colonization that takes place in the United States', which 'are often reproduced in the educational setting' (hooks, 1994a, pp. 39, 46). And as she argues in analogous ways in her landmark *Teaching to Transgress*, teachers who are 'wounded, damaged individuals, people who are not self-actualized' are not in a position to undertake such work but will instead 'seek asylum in the academy rather than seek to make the academy a place of challenge, dialectical interchange, and growth' (hooks, 1994a, p. 165). By contrast, those who 'embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of

knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply' (hooks, 1994a, p. 22). Although it should be evident by this point, it is important to state that this understanding of self-actualisation is quite different from its more popular usage, which refers to a 'person's desire for self-fulfilment' as defined by humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943, p. 382). For hooks, self-actualisation entails 'not only the idea of someone who is engaged in autocritique, self-exploration, and interior healing,' Yancy (2009, p. 36) clarifies, 'but someone engaged in outward movement toward the other, someone willing and eager to transform the other and be transformed by the other in rich and positive ways'.

Mindfulness helps with such self-actualisation for teachers because, in the first instance, it reminds teachers to pause their discursive thought so that the mind and body can be reunited with the realities of the present moment. Citing Nhat Hanh (1992, pp. 1–2) about finding peace and healing through practicing 'ways to bring our body and mind back to the present moment', hooks (2003, p. 172) reflects on how these words 'challenge me, and teachers like me, at the core of our being, even as we are obsessed with thinking, analyzing, critiquing'. While not obviating the need for critical thinking, for her the 'practice of mindfulness has helped me balance my passion for thinking, for processing... with a passion for silence, for the present moment' (hooks, 2003, p. 173). After stopping, teachers will be better able to see their interrelatedness with others, which enhances their sense of the classroom as a community: 'This state [of mindful awareness] evokes in us an awareness of interbeing. When we practice interbeing in the classroom we are transformed not just by one individual's presence but by our collective presence' (hooks, 2003, p. 173). As for engaged Buddhism, so also for engaged pedagogy, this mindful awareness is the basis for 'praxis'—'action and reflection upon the world in order to change it' (hooks, 1994a, p. 14). As with engaged Buddhism, so also with engaged pedagogy, 'this inward-outward movement is not contradictory, but harmoniously interdependent' (Yancy, 2009, p. 36).

This ability to see interrelatedness and community that mindfulness enables extends also to the way teachers treat one another. Describing a situation where she was enraged with a White female colleague who she perceived to 'ignore the critical feedback of myself and other black female colleagues if it did not support her perspective or proposed course of action', hooks (2013, pp. 145–146) recalls that: 'Throughout this conflict I was mindfully aware of the many moments when I had a choice either to

be compassionate and hold onto our bond or to allow anger and blame to sever meaningful ties.' In such a heated situation, mindfulness helps teachers by keeping visible their 'interbeing'—the portmanteau introduced by Nhat Hanh (1987, p. 88) as a translation of the Vietnamese *Tiếp Hiện* meaning 'mutual' and 'to be' (see Chap. 3)—which inevitably entails facing relational challenges amongst people of different races, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and so on, especially in the context of a broader politics of domination. 'Bringing the mindful awareness to bonding across differences keeps us ever cognizant of the reality that conflicts will happen,' hooks (2013, p. 146) points out, but 'even when we fear them we can and do learn to handle them. Most importantly, as in any relationship, we learn to grow and change'.

For teachers who are committed to self-actualisation, entailing mindful awareness cultivated through practice, they will then be able to 'to teach in a manner that empowers students' as per engaged pedagogy—'better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply' (hooks, 1994a, p. 22). Mindfulness practices—like the meditative sitting, walking, singing, and dancing taught to the Sisters of the Yam—can help by teaching students to 'be fully present, enjoying the moment, the Now in the classroom without fearing that this places the future in jeopardy' (hooks, 2003, p. 173). For hooks (2003, p. 173), this is important because with such present moment awareness, 'we can do the work of educating in such way that we draw out all that is exquisite in our classroom', which in turn 'brings us into greater community within the classroom because it sharpens our awareness [so that] we are better able to respond to one another and to our subject matter'. This is 'nurturing, life-sustaining' (hooks, 2003, p. 173), especially in a context where the symbolic violence of ideology permeates societal institutions like education and the media, underwriting the objective violence of systemic injustice. Mindfulness enables students and teachers to exercise critical consciousness of such violence without being unduly degraded by it. When looking deeply at race and racism, for instance, hooks (2013, p. 153) emphasises that:

One can be mindful of the impact of white supremacy while working consciously with mindful awareness to create a life where wholeness of self and identity stand as the powerful counter-hegemonic resistance to engulfment by racialized identity. Black folks, young and old, who are swept away by the idea of race and its concomitant anti-black racist agenda tend to end up

seeing themselves as victims, living with depleting psychological states of fear and paranoia, states of mind that make coping in a predominately white world difficult, if not downright impossible.

In engaged pedagogy, then, classrooms should be places that are both ‘life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership’ (hooks, 2003, p. xv). And this requires teachers— like hooks’s favourite Miss Moore and hooks herself—‘who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students’, that to ‘teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin’ (hooks, 1994a, p. 13). In the face of the objective violence of racialised and gendered capitalism, and the symbolic violence of ideologies that sustain it by working their way into the psyches and bodies of all people but especially those most cruelled by it, contemplative practices like mindfulness mediation becomes in hooks’s hands a pedagogy ‘that respects and cares for the souls of our students’, and way for mindful teachers to share in the ‘intellectual and spiritual growth of our students’.

CONCLUSION

In her penetrating study of how mindfulness has been taken up and advanced across a range of social institutions in the United States by a ‘contemplative elite’ that occupy privileged, high-status social positions, Kucinkas (2018, p. 176) observes: ‘In many ways, the contemplative community is a social bubble... the core membership of the movement was far more likely to be affluent, educated, and white than the typical American.’ Hence the attention she paid during her fieldwork to the presence of Rhonda Magee at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society’s 2015 annual conference. Prefacing her presentation with mindfulness practices like pausing, breathing, and bringing ‘benevolent awareness’ to experiences of emotional distress, Magee began by showing confronting video footage of Eric Garner’s brutal killing by New York police in 2014 ‘to raise awareness of racial injustice in the United States and the lack of attention to racial inequality within the mindfulness movement’ (Kucinkas, 2020, p. 189). As Kucinkas notes (2018, p. 178), Magee did so to raise the question of ‘how mindfulness

interventions could be used to bring people's attention to issues that were morally and socially important', delivering to the audience the provocation that there are 'a large set of issues that we often don't take mindfulness to', and a question: 'How can we bring these [mindfulness] practices to bear?' (in Kucinkas, 2018, p. 179)

Magee herself, in her work, has come to answer this challenge she set out for the contemplative elite. In *The Inner Work of Racial Justice*—a summa of her mindfulness-based contemplative pedagogy (called 'ColorInsight') drawn from 'more than twenty years as a law professor practicing mindfulness and ten years teaching mindfulness to others as a support for understanding race, racism, and justice'—she posits that mindfulness 'often starts the process of healing for the speaker' of painful race stories (Magee, 2019, pp. 24–25). It also 'serves to soften and encourage the listener to respond by sharing his or her own stories, a process that ultimately leads to healing in the broader community' (Magee, 2019, p. 25). This healing then becomes the basis for seeking radical social change because 'it can strengthen the inner justice advocate in us' (Magee, 2019, p. 25). In explaining her rationale for writing the book, Magee (2019, pp. 19–20) echoes Kucinkas's observations plainly:

Mindfulness helps us understand and expand our notions of self. And yet, talking about race and racism and examining these through the lens of mindfulness is uncommon. This is not to say that it is not being done at all. But many practitioners of mindfulness have been taught, whether explicitly or implicitly, that looking at racism and exploring efforts to address it—or to otherwise engage in talk of 'justice' or 'politics'—go against the core commitments of mindfulness.

In her confident affirmation that the healing, understanding, and political action needed to confront race and racism can be helpfully abetted by mindfulness—and that this route while 'uncommon' is not unheard of—Magee hints that she stands within a longer legacy. This legacy can be understood, most broadly, as continuous with the historical struggle for racial justice waged by Black Americans against slavery, Jim Crow, and the systemic devaluation of Black lives through various societal institutions (Magee Andrews, 1993; Magee, 2003)—resistance to the shifting shapes of symbolic and systemic violence in the United States. Specifically, she can also be situated in the legacy of 'fugitive pedagogy', a 'metanarrative of black educational history' and 'a social and rhetorical frame by which we might interpret black Americans' pursuit to enact humanizing and affirming practices of teaching and learning' (Givens, 2021, p. 11). And even

more precisely, she can be seen to be an inheritor of bell hooks's engaged pedagogy—Magee has acknowledged hooks as the innovator of ‘a progressive pedagogy that goes beyond traditional critiques and emphasizes “well-being”’ (Magee Andrews, 2004, p. 922n106). As discussed in this chapter, hooks has since the 1980s made the ‘uncommon’ move of approaching race and racism through mindfulness for the healing and insight it offers to both students and teachers, and in the same breath unabashedly engaging in talk of ‘justice’ and ‘politics’. Magee (2019, p. 332) defines justice and politics as ‘compassionate action to reconnect what has been artificially separated and to maintain those connections throughout our days’, buttressed by ‘a deep and revolutionary mindfulness with the capacity to awaken us to our role in the suffering of others and support us in enacting transformative justice—again and again, wherever we are’. hooks would no doubt wholeheartedly agree.

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