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Book Review of "Reggie Wakes Up"

The Substance of Truth

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"Under the FUBU is a guru, that's untapped..."

-Hip-Hop artist, Common, *The 6th Sense*.

With the recent victory of President-Elect Obama, many have speculated a change of attitude in young black men, vis-à-vis the thirst for educational prowess. Whilst this prediction does seem, by all measures, accurately reflective of the lingering emotion within Black circles, some have suggested the need for a handbook of sorts, as necessary in guiding Black students, male and female, toward a more promising future. Of such is Zekita Tucker, a St. Louis author and publisher, whose advocacy for Black students builds on the legacies established by W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Janice Hale, etc. Zekita Tucker, of fame "[Don't Call Me Nigga](#)," has a new book out titled, "[Reggie Wakes Up](#)."

Reggie Wakes Up is a blueprint for teachers and students alike – with an emphasis on public schools. In a moment when numerous questions abound, concerning the fulfillment of a Black presidency, Ms. Tucker has provided some suitable and reliable answers, in dealing with Black students. Meant for ages 8 and up, *Reggie Wakes Up* takes a hard look into the public school system, and its effects on the psyche of Black students. Though written in simplified terms, and intended for a young readership, Zekita Tucker takes into strong consideration the impact teachers have on their students. With subtle advice for tutors confused about their role(s) in the education relationship, Ms. Tucker has written and published a great resource for combating the sleeping giant of black academic inferiority in the public and private school systems.

Reggie, the book's main character, is presented as a representation of young black

masculinity in society. With a clear overdose on commercial Hip-Hop and other forms of mindless entertainment, Reggie's view of life is infinitely limited to the Black characters he sees repeatedly on TV, and hears on the radio. With a nickname of "Dolla," Reggie's outlook is blurred by the pursuit of temporary pleasure, and endless gains. As he strolls late into class, Reggie feels at home in a classroom filled by nonchalant and directionless students. Prompted by Ms. Roberts (his 6th grade teacher) to take off his hat, Reggie refuses as he furthermore declines the offer to pay close attention to her subsequent demands.

In public schools across the country, marred by unenthusiastic, frustrated, ill-equipped and financially-challenged instructors, most similar scenarios unveil an all-too-familiar ending: The *protagonist* gets suspended, the rest of the class revolts, teacher takes leave of absence, less-enthused substitute teacher is hired, and the vicious cycle repeats itself – until each student has been suspended, or placed in detention, at least once. In this case, however, Ms. Roberts lays out a manuscript for future, and present, inner-city school teachers.

"Going rogue," as it's colloquially known, she employs some creativity in engaging her increasingly lifeless classroom. "How many of you would like to be important in your community and make lots of money?" she asks. At this point, every hand goes up. Leading through a series of succeeding questions, she stumbles while inquiring how many of her students "want to study hard, focus and go to college or university." Puzzled by the intense decline in enthusiasm, as expressed by her students, in pursuing some form of advanced education, Ms. Roberts curiously inquires what each student foresees as a successful future, devoid of any substantive engagement with education. In a highly predictable move, the words "model," "go 'pro' (baller)," and "rapper," swing high from the lips of her students.

Those who have struggled for many years with the *hoop/mic*-dreams of younger Black males/females understand the dire need for, as Dr. King might put it, a revolution of values in the younger generation. The psychological warfare waged by big-media companies against the mental-fiber of Black children is bearing poisoned fruits, as more, and more, Black kids see no future worthy of aspiration, beyond the entertainment realm. For a disturbing number of Black younger adults, a deliberate avoidance of critical interaction with intellectual stimulation is a viable route toward financial empowerment.

Aware of this trend, Ms. Roberts, a diligent, skilled and empathetic tutor, enlightens her students on the powerlessness of most Black entertainers: "...I'm sure that those things probably look really good and make life seem much easier than it really is," she says, "but why not start a business or choose a career that will give you the money that you want and some form of power?" With a look of bewilderment overwhelming her students, leading one to ask if "money doesn't," ultimately, "give them [Black entertainers] power," Ms. Roberts explains that the ones who "seek them out to do those jobs for entertainment" are the characters with "real power." This *foreign language*, of empowerment beyond entertainment, is carried on as Ms. Roberts informs her students that "the people who control TV, politics, and big companies... decide on how things... work." Ms. Roberts advises that to "break" this "cycle... of bad habits," it's "important" to begin the process of mastering education as a weapon for liberation.

What the fictional Ms. Roberts understands, which many inner-city tutors sadly struggle with, is the degree to which the educational system, as it stands today, works in harmony with enemies of Black advancement. Inner-city *Educo* has lost its inspiration "to draw out" passions for greatness in younger Black students. Ms. Roberts is aware

of the necessity for a re-education, within the education paradigm, to take place – if a future of possibilities is to be unraveled in the next generation. As the Hip-Hop artist Nas, remarked earlier this year, in a song titled *N.I.G.G.E.R. (The Slave and The Master)*, from his controversial album *Untitled*, "They say we N - I - Double G - E - R/ We - are - much more/ Still we choose to ignore/ The obvious/ Man, this history don't acknowledge us/ We was scholars long before colleges."/ It goes without saying that the Eurocentric educational model is a misfit for most Black students.

With the attention span of her students at an unprecedented high, Ms. Roberts snags the opportunity to inspire her students toward becoming marathon runners in the seemingly endless race for educational excellence in the Black Community. Ms. Roberts confirms the potential for distinction in her once-nonchalant pupils: "Even though most African Americans have had many challenges and disadvantages in the past," she says, "we have a chance now to catch up." Raising the stakes, Ms. Roberts announces her students as "the key" to the *Promised Land* of equality.

Breaking conventionality seems to be the least of her worries at this point. As she sees it, the depth of concern for her students could not be, and should not be sugar-coated to fit into the presumed mold of an *acceptable* educator. To Ms. Roberts, conventionality – otherwise known as eurocentricity – in inner-city schools was/is the cause of [the jaw-dropping statistics](#) of Black students, and an end to the vicious cycle is optimum. Ms. Robert's leadership is a blueprint for success for any aspiring educator, who holds dear the value of her/his students.

In a symbolic gesture to highlight the sacred relationship between a teacher's words and a student's consciousness, Reggie, who had remained visibly silent through the whole ordeal, asks how much of Ms. Robert's comments affect "our community." Before Ms. Roberts can chime in, a classmate mentions that "because we are all a small part of our communities... we can change things from bad to good." With the intense level of emotion and excitement tethering on the brink of explosion, Reggie wakes up from his mental slumber and removes his hat of insouciance.

At a time when most administrators are scrambling to develop creative models that incorporate the victory of the President-Elect into school curriculum, Ms. Zekita Tucker has written a blueprint for what such a model must look like. *Reggie Wakes Up* is a must-read for students, teachers, parents, activists and other concerned citizens.

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