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**Education and the Future of Black Children:
Silence the Violence (Part 1)
The Substance of Truth
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"In addition to having to use their heads to get ahead, they had the weight of the whole race sitting there. You needed two heads for that."

-Morrison, Toni. [Beloved](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987, p. 198.

*"Junior high school dropout, teachers never cared/
They was paid just to show up and leave, no one succeeds/"*

-Nas, "2nd Childhood," [Stillmatic](#), 2001.

"The public school system is invested in ignorance..."

-Mumia Abu Jamal, "[Huey: A Memory](#)," 2009.

An activist once declared that "the educational system was structured to carry out a political agenda," and, judging by recent history, it sure seems so. The statistics are unapproachable. Grimier, is the reality that encloses them. No one with a functioning conscience can deny it: Black children have been violated by the school system. They are being victimized in every way imaginable. And let it be clearly understood that those statistics are not a delineator of their incompetence, but rather, an indictment of a system that is, in its very nature, incapable of educating them adequately and appropriately. The school system has made clear its mission, and it goes without saying that this *mission* never considered (still doesn't) the future of Black children as attention-worthy. What we have in return, is a neo-colonizing of the educational process, where the dreams and aspirations of Black children are bought and sold on the auction block of standardized testing. To a considerate degree, this scheme has found success.

The underperformance of Black students on state-sponsored tests is championed, by many, as emblematic of intellectual deficiency. Black children: dumb, White children: smart. In essence, the bell curve is validated in perpetuity. But, behind this veil lies the truth - a sobering one: Those tests were never meant to assess academic proficiency. No. They were constructed to separate the wheat from the chaff. And in this instance, Black students are being sifted away from their futures by a racist straining device - the school system. Unless we begin challenging those dogmas that sustain this device, the violence will continue unabated.

A black child, walking into a classroom at the early age of five, soon comes to realize the truth about his/her function in the educational system. At Kindergarten, this *function* is actualized. The child notices a difference shared with the other children of lighter complexion. They - the White ones - are more advanced, and have already found their niche in the classroom. But the Black child is still lost in this unknown universe. This strange environment. Naturally (and logically), the narrative of inferiority becomes personalized - even at such young an age. The Black child is unable to piece together this puzzle, but doesn't fail to notice how out of sync from the rhythm of education he/she is. What the Black child knows, however, is that his/her peers were introduced to a form of education that pre-dates their enrollment in Kindergarten.

This prior engagement could be the demarcating line between success and failure, for many Black children. Because universal crèche programs are still a non-reality, Black children are largely left out, at the start of the race, but still expected to catch-up, somehow. The lack of Preschool education becomes their first introduction to a world dictated by privilege and prowess. This is victimization, and nothing else.

Preschools make a great difference in early childhood education. What should result as a transition, is usually first confrontation, for Black children. This setback is vastly overlooked by educators, as though it matters not. A Black child is the blind man whose sight is cured, but, at risk of reversal, forced to become familiar, within 24 hours, with the vast volume of space that stares back at him. Most would agree that his plight shouldn't count against him, but the same conscionable observers fail to see the parallel in Black public education. Black children are the victims, not the violators. It is criminal, as Malcolm might have put it, to request of them something they were never equipped to produce. If the gap is to be bridged, and equitable education for all children is to realize itself, critical steps must be taken to ensure universal pre-kindergarten access for *ALL* children.

At a time when the young Black generation's future is hung on a tight rope, administrators couldn't appear less concerned. To save money and cut costs, unfathomable practices are being employed by school board members. Quality educational resources are presented as luxuries (consequently, falling victim to the accountant's sword), but security apparatuses always find refuge in the budget. They don't mind that a complaint of short change inevitably leads to the short-changing of their students - predominantly Black and Brown. The school system shares no unease that these schemes to make financial ends meet, end up with more and more children left behind. Resources might be hard to come by, in these economic times, but many bureaucratic-minded superintendents have found comfort in that excuse, to fire teachers, replace principals, cut programs, reduce benefits, enforce regimental practices, and dismantle the vision of public schooling.

Teachers who lack the skill, patience, cultural awareness, and spiritual determination to imbue greatness into students, especially the Black ones, are filling up classrooms, across the country. Unable to effectively communicate with their students, many White teachers resort to tactics learned by watching such Television shows such as *COPS*. Their Black students are transformed into criminals - in need of prosecution and reformation. The fact that these practices, in the words of 19th century philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, "sacrifice the genius" of students, unsuccessfully permeate the conscience of frustrated White instructors. These pedagogical models, Emerson explained, obliterates "[their] unknown possibilities."

Regrettably, the lesson drawn from these experiences is that Black children are unfit to learn, and drastic action must be taken to make *right* their inherent *wrongness*. To simplify it, Black children need discipline, and whatever "measure" can instill this value must be instituted, at once! The urgency of discipline, as they see it, overrides the potential hazards those "measures" might cause. Many of these teachers, administrators, and superintendents have sought out militarization as a worthy "measure," for the institution of *order* and *structure* in inner-city public schools. In the last 8 years, a huge chunk of Chicago's public schools have met such fate.

Courtesy of the current Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, inner-city public schools in *the windy city* underwent a radical overhaul - for worse. Whilst CEO of Chicago's public schools, Arne Duncan and his army of corporate solicitors successfully invaded these facilities. Duncan's battalion spent millions, creating a brigade-like environment within the schools. Thus, in 2009, we're compelled to ask the question Emerson posed two centuries ago: "[Y]ou grow departmental, routinary, military almost with your discipline and college police. But what doth such a school to form a great and heroic character [among students]?" He instructed that the "function of opening and feeding the human mind is not to be fulfilled by any mechanical or military method," but Duncan, [as always](#), wasn't listening.

Black children are not stupid, or reckless, or dangerous, or criminal-minded. They are simply, in Nina Simone's words, *misunderstood*. The wrongful diagnosis of excitement as hyper-activity, hence, Ritalin-worthy or *discipline*-deserving, has committed grave injustices in Black homes, for decades. By rendering Black students, at first contact, intellectually-challenged, and subjecting them to Special-Ed classes, or holding them back, an assault on their integrity is struck. This practice of classifying Black students as "other," or "unfit," or "challenged," or "troublesome," or "dangerous," or "erratic," has created a pattern many teachers now follow thoughtlessly. After all, it is less tiring to dismiss a student as nonchalant, than to question the Eurocentric educational models most instructors are taught - and forced - to adhere to.

In his lectures on Education, Emerson poignantly outlined the fundamental qualities of genuine, student-centered pedagogy:

I believe that our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know, what he shall do. It is chosen and foreordained, and he only holds the key to his own secret. By your tampering and thwarting and too much governing he may be hindered from his end and kept out of his own. Respect the child.

To respect the child, one must first *know* the child - Emerson understood that. And most teachers don't - care to - know Black children. They would rather rely on stereotypes than engage their students critically. For decades now, Black children have suffered the brutal violence of a tyrannical system, and the possibility of recovery can only come through the efforts of progressive educators, activists, parents, community-members, theologians, ethicists, and concerned citizens.

- Of such is Cristin Noesen, an educator living in Indiana. Ms. Noesen teaches College freshman English Composition Art, at a penitentiary in New Castle, Indiana. With text ranging from Tupac to Paul Laurence Dunbar, Lauryn Hill to Zora Neale Hurston, Kanye West to Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni to Gwendolyn Brooks, Nas to Jay-z, John Legend to Earth Wind & Fire, she is able to connect on a deeper level with her students - the same ones cast in society as criminals or lost-causes.

- Noesen's principle focus is to teach her students how to "think critically." With the variety of texts she wields in the classroom, her students, young as 18 and old as 50, are addressed individually. Opting for a non-traditional pedagogical approach was easy, she explains, as the poems and songs incorporated in the classroom help facilitate strong messages of "friendship and honesty," better than the "classical canon" can. Her African-American dominated class, Noesen understands, is best "hooked" with material they are "familiar with." But even familiarity can be limiting. Knowing this, she also fuses "non-familiar" text that is "juxtaposed" with the *indigenous*. Critical thinking, in the school system, can only work with material Black students can "relate to," she adds. Doing so informs students that the instructor "validates" their existence enough to "acknowledge the issues they are facing in life."

Those who use this excuse to perpetuate notions of skin-defined inferiority are simply fraudulent in their ambitions, Noesen contends. Black children are not deficient, she insists, they simply draw strength from a "different cultural knowledge."

- If Black students respond more favorably to texts that engage them on a cultural parallel, why aren't good-natured educators following suit? Noesen explains that it requires "will, determination and energy," to bring these non-canonized "literature into the classroom." She adds that there is a system in place which is not readily responsive to those requests.

- Paulo Freire's doctrine of empowering students through love immediately caught Noesen's attention. Unfortunately, this concept is largely perceived as "radical," within school circles. To create an avenue where ideas like that presented by Paulo Freire are accepted, principals, administrators, and school board members must be pushed, she advises. In addition, they should be "shown research" conducted by Afrocentric scholars, who present non-conformist views for the education of Black children.

- Noesen longs for the day when "education [becomes] much more fluid." For that to happen, it has to change "from the didactic," to a format where students are the drivers of their own intellectual vehicles. Teachers must shift the emphasis from

memorization of "certain facts," and do away with the "scripts" with which they are told to instruct students. The obsession with standardized tests must also cease, Noesen adds. As she sees it, "real education" is achieved when students are provided with the "knowledge to critique" their surrounding, and can better relate with the world outside their reach. Teachers, if they are to effectively reach Black children, must value the conscience of their students above the intimidation that usually follows any progressive shift in pedagogical practice, Noesen believes. In place of a "war on drugs," she prescribes a "war on ignorance." In her words, there has to be a "full-front attack" on illiteracy.

In addition to working toward a day when that vision becomes a reality, she is also focused on getting her Master's degree in education. Because of educators like Cristin Noesen, Black children have a future worth counting on.

However, the number of those fighting on the other side far outweighs that on our side. Their arsenal is larger, and their drive, judging by recent history, blows ours to smithereens. But our history has no shortage of David and Goliath folktales, and once again, David will conquer Goliath - if we have the fortitude and determination to win the battle.


This is Part 1 of a three-part series titled, "Education and the Future of Black Children." Click [here](#) to read any of the commentaries in this series.


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