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**Are Schools the Assassins of Education?  
The Substance of Truth  
By Tolu Olorunda  
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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*"Subordinated by a hierarchal system that indoctrinates students early on, letting them know that their success depends on their capacity to obey, most students fear questioning anything about the way their classrooms are structured."*

-hooks, bell. [Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope](#). New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 86.

*"... [Y]ou can't just be talking more money, more money, without also talking about how are we going to reform and make the system better... And the truth of the matter is even as overcrowded as schools may be, as poor the computer equipment may be, if you took a bunch of kids right now from China or India and you put them in these classrooms, from their perspective these would be unbelievable schools. I mean, they don't have better facilities, but they're out-performing us in math and science. Why is that?"*

-President Barack Hussein Obama II ([03/19/2009](#)).

*"... [T]he whole system equates urban children, Black and Brown children, with what is naturally criminal and in need of reform... Encouraging students to be critical thinkers, to question accepted beliefs and norms, remains key to a teacher's role at any grade level... The public educational system in the U.S. from K-12, along with colleges and universities, should be overhauled! Trashed. Dumped. Parents, teachers, and students need to say it's over. Enough!"*

-Daniels, Lenore PhD. *"First It was a Cell Behind Prison Walls - Now It's a Seat Behind the Walls of a Military Academy: Arne Duncan Doesn't Care About Black and Brown Children! Why Should He?"* Black Commentator

([Issue 316](#)).

When Malcolm X remarked, four decades ago, that "education is the passport to the future," it's hard to believe he was relying on the school system to carry that cross. In the last two decades alone, many books have been written on the deleterious impacts schools seem to be having on students. These books, such as John Gatto's "[Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling](#)," have thrived in households across the country, and their success is an indicator of the frustration felt by parents in relation to the quality of education their children receive behind the brick walls in which they now spend 1/4ths of their day. They understand that if education is meant "to draw out" degrees of greatness in a student, schools might be missing the point, with the dangerous fixation on academic degrees as the highest accomplishment a student can attain.

Unable to submit their children to the control and domination of the school system, many of these parents have sought out alternative and unorthodox pedagogical media through which the guarantee of self-discovery and metacognition is fulfilled in the students' learning experiences. These parents agree with bell hooks, that "the failure to achieve harmony of mind, body, and spirit," in the classrooms, "has furthered anti-intellectualism in our culture and made of our schools mere factories." Parent desire nothing less than the transforming of their seeds of life into products and commodities, which are auctioned on the block of curriculum, and purchased by the highest standardized testing. To put it bluntly, the gift of public education has turned into a curse that keeps on giving.

The state of the Public School system has become comparable to correction facilities, and more chillingly, the *Prison Industrial Complex*. The comparison takes a frightening context with the reality that there are more books in some jails than in many Public schools across the country, and that more money is allocated in many states to incarceration mediums than that devoted to education programs. It is not an overstatement to suggest Public Schools, across the country, are nothing but less-resourced correctional facilities. In these schools, Black and Brown students are reprimanded, often harshly, for their mistakes, errors or wrongdoing, and often, based on the corrective mechanisms, find their detention halls eerily identical to the penitentiaries in which they ultimately end up.

Most Public schools based in Black and Brown districts are abysmal failures, and in sincerity, more invested in violence-reduction or gang-prevention than the sculpturing and molding of future pioneers. The joke that some schools spend less on educational resources and more on security apparatuses has become less funny as it inches closer to reality. The Public School system is fundamentally broken, and Dr. Lenore Daniels might have the answer in her calls for an overhaul and restructuring. Private, charter, and voucher alternatives are, quite frankly, useless attempts to replace the existing traditional model.

The abounding evidence documenting a lack of improvement in Black Charter school students over Public ones confirms my suspicion. Beyond the argument against its undemocratic "[Best, Bright & Lucky caste system](#)," as Dr. Janice Hale calls it, most Black Charter / Private schools have proven themselves to be little other than academies of rigidity, and bastions devoid of concrete, unique, student-centered expression. The main focus of these structures seems to be the ability to thumb their nose at dilapidated public schools by making the claim that the problem lies not with inadequate funding, but with the discipline of students, and (un)willingness of parents. They are, essentially, a place where decorum is equated with the wearing of school

uniforms, and accurate enunciation - *good diction*, as Malcolm called it - of words.

Speaking the King's English seems to be of optimum importance, rather than the institution of progressive values in the minds of students. The pupils, used as pawns, are checkmated by the rogue-like, disciplinarian formats used to ensure academic excellence in the performance sheets. bell hooks, in *Teaching Community*, explained that, "[w]hen educational settings become places that have as their central goal the teaching of bourgeois manner, vernacular speech and languages other than standard English are not valued." In some Charter schools, Black students are paid wages for their performance, and rewarded, financially, for good grades. This insult to the intelligence of the students has become an accepted mode of operation, because, as they see it, Black students need whatever push they can get, in order to perform equivalently with White students. The money, which could be spent repairing broken down Public schools, is wasted by Ivy-League educated fools, in a cynical ploy to prove the Bell Curve right.

Such is the case of Dr. Roland Fryer Jr., a 30-year old Harvard-tenured professor, who runs a pay-for-performance - pay-to-perform - scheme [[Click to read what our esteemed Ed. Board member, Dr. Martin Kilson, has to say on Dr. Fryer](#)]. The "young rightwing Black economist," as Kilson calls him, explains his program as a means to make explicit the connection between education and money. Paying students as young as 4th graders to score higher on tests, he shamelessly perpetuates the culture of assault on Black intelligence, which makes "outstanding, and "exceptional" men like himself champions in the halls of white academia. This bastardization of the learning process, greased with the avaricious desires of modern-day overseers like Dr. Fryer, carefully outlines how far out the advocates of "private," and other for-profit educational alternatives, are willing to go.

Just as dangerous as the concept of paying students for good grades, is the notion of "rewarding" teachers for students' performance - a tactic supported by the President. It's patently unhealthy to encourage a *by any means necessary* approach, in the drive for better grades. The notion of merit-pay is a transformation of the Public school system into a dog-eat-dog, cutthroat, competition-centered environment, where teachers are encouraged to do whatever - literally, whatever! - it takes to produce high grades in the classroom. With the involvement of merit-pay, teachers are inevitably forced to the brink of extremism in their struggle for economic survival. Merit-pay, as a concept, has failed woefully wherever it has been applied. Revelations of teachers [forging student records](#), to gain higher wages, should eliminate whatever excuse is tendered, for continuing the procedure. It is only logical that inner-city Public school teachers, often paid considerably less than janitors, would employ whatever strategy - legal or illegal - is necessary to pay the bills. The concept might be argued as a support of "good" teachers, but the notion of goodness is not only incalculable, but subject to countless inconsistencies. A "bad" teacher might thrive in a room filled with upper-class students, and thus, invalidates the theory of good vs. evil - as it concerns quality education.

In the equation of state-sponsored education, it is duly noted that teachers are predominantly left behind - just as much as the students. Obama confirmed last week that no vocation is more important than that of a teacher, but policies which affirm that resolution are yet to be seen - or drafted. If teachers are the root upon which the tree of education is structured, then the metaphor takes a curious structure with the reality that they are often unseen, mistreated, and trampled upon. My conversations with former teachers in High School led me to a bitter understanding of the mistreatment they face and are forced to live by.

High School teachers with monthly incomes of \$2,500 cannot be expected to perform with the exuberance of a College professor, when bills are left unpaid and stomachs unfilled. Every successful thinker, critic, essayist, intellectual or educator can always pointed back to the impact "good" teachers had on his / her formation. The absence of such presence can often separate success from failure. It can be the line of demarcation between greatness and defeat. If teachers are to value their work in the classroom, then the value of their service must be valued with progressive budgets. Actions speak louder than words, and the payment plan currently used to compensate them for their indubitable labor **MUST** undergo a radical shift in structure. Teachers also need the support of parents, if the proper flow of education is to prosper without interruption.

Most Black and Brown parents lack the resources (time, money, emotional energy, familiar structure, etc.) to attend PTA meetings, or to supervise their kids' homework sessions. It is cruel and misleading to suggest that this reality is emblematic of the parental irresponsibility that causes academic insolvency in Black and Brown students. For more than two decades, progressive educators, [like Dr. Janice Hale](#), have laid to bed the insanity involved in comparing female-headed, single-parent impoverished Black households, to double-parent, middle-class White ones. The danger in expecting the same level of parent-child engagement in both groups is perpetuated, often, by those who never lived the life of the former. Though many Black households resemble the former, rather than the latter, Black parents should take into consideration the severity of the crisis in Black public education, and begin contributing in whatever form - however small - they can. Black parents should understand that although cutting the TV-watching hours of their kids might not generate an immediate radical transformation in test scores and academic performance, as the President relentlessly suggests, an excess in such practice could lead to [deleterious consequences](#), down the line.

Interestingly, psychologists have found that when a child below the age of 2 is exposed to the light-rays emitted from the TV screen, [the possibility](#) of *Attention Deficit Disorder* (ADD) at six years of age dramatically increases. They should be aware of the damage un-regulated TV-watching causes in Black and Brown students - who seem to spend more time in front of a TV-screen, than other ethnicities. It has been properly documented, for decades, that the effect of a TV-screen flickering, induces a mild-hypnotic state in the viewer, and switches the brain-wave from a Beta state, to an Alpha state. With the Alpha [understood](#) as the perfect state for indoctrination and education, as found in the classrooms, Black parents should reconsider how much of the junk they see on TV they would prefer be transferred into the brain computer of their children.

The playing of Video-games is also a dangerous trend in the development of a Black and Brown mind, as the encouragement to live out the, often, violent and erratic impulses they provide is stimulated by the adrenaline-rush and excitement of the characters concocted by [mostly non-Black and non-Brown developers](#). A conscientious drive to reduce the costs of TV-watching and Video-game playing in the schedule of their children, for more substantive exercises, would go a long way in pushing back against the interests of those who create these outlets without the wellbeing of their primary patrons - *us* - at heart. A collective cooperation between the family and the school can help facilitate a pedagogy of redemption as it concerns the goals and visions of our ingenious - though marginalized - Black / Brown students.

With respect for students, teachers and parents front and center in any discourse on the future of education, the possibilities would appear limitless. With this, the knee-jerk, criminal reaction of medicating misunderstood Black students on Ritalin will

come to the end it's long deserved. Non-Black / non-Brown teachers and administrators will come to understand that, as Dr. Janice Hale prophetically announced, years ago, "Different does **NOT** mean deficient." Discriminatory practices in the classrooms would also bow before the altar of execution. The belief that no student is unable to learn would be restored as an integral part of the education process, and no parent would be forced to purchase an unaffordable home in a *friendlier* district, just to send kids to better public schools. Charter school fanatics would find their ideas inappropriate (to say the least) and would courageously join the fight to strengthen the Public School system - following the overhaul Dr. Daniels suggested. Black and Brown students would, to paraphrase V.P. Franklin, regain their rightful position as leaders and directors of the free world. Teachers wouldn't have to forge student records, as they would be justly compensated for their irreducible contribution to the continuation of life in this, as *Tears for Fears* put it, "mad world."


This dream would realize itself, and Black /Brown students would begin truly thinking for themselves, and, as First Lady Michelle Obama [spoke last week](#), come to understand that "all that matters is where you are, and where you want to be."


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