

Spring 2020

## Black Dreams Matter: An Experiment in Educational Possibilities

Imani Butler  
Yale College, New Haven Connecticut

### Abstract:

This project is comprised of a series of four essays that meditate on how we can use the theories, frameworks and histories that are central to African American Studies to illuminate innovative and humane solutions to contemporary problems in educating Black students in American schools. The first essay outlines the "gap" that I have encountered between Black Studies in the university and the education of Black students outside of the university. The second essay frames the contemporary problems in education through the lens/framework of living in the afterlife of slavery. The third essay recovers the long history of Black radical innovation in the realm of education as a source of inspiration for what is possible today. The fourth, and final essay, points us towards the potential for a more liberatory future for our schools using theories of radical imagination.

Suggested Citation: Butler, I. (2020). *Black Dreams Matter: An Experiment in Educational Possibilities* (Unpublished Education Studies capstone). Yale University, New Haven, CT.

---

This capstone is a work of Yale student research. The arguments and research in the project are those of the individual student. They are not endorsed by Yale, nor are they official university positions or statements.

# **Black Dreams Matter: An Experiment in Educational Possibilities**

Education Studies & African American Studies

Imani Butler

April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020

Advisors: Professor Aimee Cox & Professor Talya Zemach Bersin

## **Abstract**

This project is comprised of a series of four essays that meditate on how we can use the theories, frameworks and histories that are central to African American Studies to illuminate innovative and humane solutions to contemporary problems in educating Black students in American schools. The first essay outlines the "gap" that I have encountered between Black Studies in the university and the education of Black students outside of the university. The second essay frames the contemporary problems in education through the lens/framework of living in the afterlife of slavery. The third essay recovers the long history of Black radical innovation in the realm of education as a source of inspiration for what is possible today. The fourth, and final essay, points us towards the potential for a more liberatory future for our schools using theories of radical imagination.

## **Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION _____	2
SCHOOLING IN THE AFTERLIFE OF SLAVERY _____	5
GHOST OF A BLACK RADICAL PAST _____	23
DREAMS OF A BLACK RADICAL FUTURE _____	32
REFERENCES _____	41

## Introduction

I started this thesis with the ambitious goal of building a bridge. On one side, would be the world of Black Studies that I have come to know inside of Yale and places like it. On the other, would be the “real” world of Black people that I have always known and been intimately a part of. I could not have anticipated that in the final weeks of my work, the earth itself would crack and shift and force my two worlds even farther apart. I could not have imagined that I would spend the last semester of my senior year at home fighting to keep my Black family alive, while hundreds of miles away at Yale, my books on Black queer theory would sit untouched, unthought of. Building my bridge felt at once more impossible and more irrelevant than ever before.

Ironically, in writing this, I am reminded of many of the scholars who are cited throughout this thesis. I think of Christina Sharpe, who candidly writes about how surviving through the grief of multiple family tragedies brought her to truly understand the importance of what would become her book *In the Wake*. I think too of Savannah Shange, who opens her book *Progressive Dystopia* with an emotionally raw recounting of her mother’s death just days before her book went to press. She writes, “Her body wasn’t even embalmed yet and I was fiddling with tables and footnotes. This too, is her legacy: turning to work when the world gets hard, trying to produce something beautiful enough to be called Black and woman.”<sup>1</sup> Finally, I think of the great bell hooks, who was the first person to successfully convince me that the things I study could actually do good. “I came to theory because I was hurting,” she writes, “The pain within me was so

---

<sup>1</sup> Savannah Shange, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Anti-Blackness and Schooling in San Francisco* (Duke University Press, 2019).

intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me.”<sup>2</sup>

I came to this thesis, a joint project in African American Studies and Education Studies, to grasp what was happening around and within me. I wanted to use the theories that Black Studies gave me to help make sense of the injustices our school system perpetuates. The things I read along the way forced me to confront the depth of the trauma that centuries of violently sustained racism has inflicted on Black Americans. I learned to understand many of my own traumatic life experiences in this new, unsettling context. Yet, I also learned that Black life persists out of an abundance of community care, imaginative resistance, and hopeful defiance. These are the ideas my project pushes us towards. And though they were not enough to protect me from the effects of institutionalized racism as they trickled down into my own life, they are enough to leave me reassured of their promise. The world after this moment is in more desperate need of reimagining than ever. If Black Studies should serve the purpose that it was once established for, then it will need to fix itself to this task. It will need to take seriously the imaginative potential of our children—our future—and to once more build bridges to reach them. The thesis you hold in your hands now is not the project I once imagined it would be. But, it is the start of important work.

This first essay of this project is where I will employ my methodology of using frameworks in Black Studies to analyze and critique the logic of education reform today. By the end of the essay, readers should have a clear sense of how theory is not just abstract or academic, but a useful tool for making sense of our past and our present.

---

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

They should also understand the idea that racism is more than a material or institutional phenomenon and that it affects how Black people live and feel everyday. Ultimately, I will use these analyses to show that when reformers try to design education for Black children without relying on history or theory to guide them, their efforts fail to be truly impactful.

This second essay will track the history of Black radical experimentation in the realm of education. The emphasis is on times in history when Black intellectuals saw education as a way of changing the future and actively built their own schools and institutions. By the end of the essay, readers should understand how the history of Black experimental school building is a concrete example of how intellectual theories and “freedom dreams” form the basis of truly impactful material changes to our political/social order.

This essay finally moves towards talking about solutions to the problems in education by turning to theories about Black futurity. Fundamentally I will make the argument that resistance against dominant modes of power requires us to use creativity and imagination in order to conceive of alternative ways of living in the future. This understanding should form the basis of our approach to educating Black children in a way that aspires towards their freedom.

## **I. Schooling in the Afterlife of Slavery**

Black children need freedom for so many reasons. I could make my case with any number of statistics that are so often used to provoke and alarm. If I were an education researcher, I might point to the depressingly large “achievement gap” in the test scores of Black and white students that has persisted for over 50 years.<sup>3</sup> Despite several decades worth of education reform specifically targeted at improving the math and reading scores of Black students in low-income neighborhoods, this country has never managed to equalize educational outcomes for all students. If I were a journalist, I might point you to sobering statistics about school discipline and the prison pipeline. Nationally, Black students are three times more likely than white students to be expelled or suspended—two disciplinary measures that are proven to nearly triple the likelihood that a student will come into contact with the juvenile justice system in the next year.<sup>4</sup> In many states and local districts, these numbers are often even higher.<sup>5</sup> We can see this reflected in the fact Black youth are five times more likely than their white peers to be detained or committed to a juvenile facility.<sup>6</sup> I think the point is clear. All one has to do is look to the daily headlines to find evidence of Black children in crisis. Ironically however, the very ways in which we understand and define this crisis are a major part of the problem.

---

<sup>3</sup> Valant, “Have We Made Progress on Achievement Gaps?”

<sup>4</sup> “School-to-Prison Pipeline [Infographic].”

<sup>5</sup> Brian Zahn, “Data Shows Black Boys Punished at High Rate in New Haven Schools,” *New Haven Register*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/Data-shows-black-boys-punished-disproportionately-13629084.php>.

<sup>6</sup> “Black Disparities in Youth Incarceration.”

I am not a trained education researcher or an award-winning journalist—I am a student of African American Studies. Furthermore, I am a Black girl who has walked her entire life alongside other Black kids so full of life they make any statistic pale in comparison. For me, the crisis Black children face in schools has always been much less about numbers than it is about humanity. The facts I presented earlier about student achievement are undeniably concerning. However, when we frame the problem in education only in terms of how inadequate Black children are by the standards of a *failing school system*, we lose sight of the real problem. And, even when we attempt to point out the failures of the system by broadcasting statistics about our schools' disproportionate uses of discipline, we only compartmentalize a systemic issue rather than recognize it in its totality. I have found a home in African American Studies because it is a discipline that insists on always seeing Black people holistically and humanely, even as we attempt to study, analyze and solve their problems.

Though Black Studies was first established with an explicit focus on recovering and redeeming Black history, the aim of the field is not merely to freeze Black life in the past. Instead, scholars study Black life as part of an unfolding continuum that holds the past, present and future in constant (but not necessarily linear) relation. This means that historians in the discipline are often interested in how a study of the past might illuminate new possibilities for the future or make sense of the present. For example, one of the most important concepts that scholars have extensively researched, theorized and written about is the continuing impact of slavery on the lives of Black Americans. Black feminist historian Saidiya Hartman was the first to use a now famous term to describe this phenomenon: “the afterlife of slavery.” In her 2006 book, *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman introduces the concept in this passage:

If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery— skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.<sup>7</sup>

For years, Hartman’s words have critically shaped the way that people in and out of academia understand the relationship between America’s violent past and its violent present. While the chains that once shackled Black bodies to white land may no longer exist, the “racial calculus” and “political arithmetic” that justified the enslavement of Black people is still being used to rationalize the persistence of Black oppression into the present. Hartman accounts for this oppression in two ways: institutionalized racism and embodied/affective racism.

The first form of racism (“skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment”)<sup>8</sup> is best captured by the kinds of statistics that commonly make their way into mainstream political discourse. For a staggering example, take a look at the “wealth gap” between Black and white Americans that has persisted as the centuries-old product of America’s racist history. Research shows that in 2016, the net worth of the average white family was nearly ten times that of the average Black family. Researchers at the Brookings Institute conclude that the single factor which best accounts for this gap is the racial disparity in intergenerational wealth.<sup>9</sup> “Inheritances and other intergenerational transfers” allow white families to build wealth, which has “benefits that go beyond those that come with

---

<sup>7</sup> Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

<sup>8</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Kriston McIntosh Shambaugh Emily Moss, Ryan Nunn, and Jay, “Examining the Black-White Wealth Gap,” *Brookings* (blog), February 27, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>.

family income.”<sup>10</sup> According to researchers, intergenerational wealth “allows people to access housing in safe neighborhoods with good schools, thereby enhancing the prospects of their own children.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, “wealth begets more wealth.”<sup>12</sup> White Americans inherit their history as a form financial capital. Black Americans on the other hand, inherit a history of debt and financial disenfranchisement that began with the rise of racial slavery but continued for centuries through segregation, red-lining and mass incarceration.<sup>13</sup> Racist practices like these have ensured that the effects of slavery on our nation’s economic and political systems never died.

Though the horrific crime of enslavement may be America’s original sin, it is important to understand that slavery’s afterlife refers to the many oppressive practices that followed in the wake of emancipation. For example, in her well-known book *The New Jim Crow*, scholar Michelle Alexander tracks how the “legal framework of American society” has continuously adapted from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration in order to maintain a racial hierarchy whose purposes extend far beyond the prison or the plantation. Alexander was one of the first to explain modern mass incarceration as “a system that locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls...[that] function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship.”<sup>14</sup> This same sort of adaptation has happened in our school system. The legal framework of society has been adapted to, at different times, justify

---

<sup>10</sup> Shambaugh.

<sup>11</sup> Shambaugh.

<sup>12</sup> Shambaugh.

<sup>13</sup> “Why the Racial Wealth Gap Persists, More than 150 Years after Emancipation - The Washington Post,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/06/19/why-racial-wealth-gap-persists-more-than-years-after-emancipation/>.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

completely denying education to Black people; allowing them to be educated in menial skills by segregating them into inferior schools; legally forcing them to integrate white schools while legally permitting white people to self-segregate; and now offering them choice without equality—individual responsibility without societal accountability. Every new change to the rules is justified by “new rhetoric, new language, and a new social consensus, while producing many of the same results.”<sup>15</sup> Although we are more than 150 years post-emancipation, an enormous racial wealth gap still exists. Even though this country has seen its first Black president, nearly 21% of all Black Americans still live in poverty.<sup>16</sup> Although civil rights were supposedly won back in the 60s, Black people still make up 33% of the prison population.<sup>17</sup> We are still not free. We are still living in the afterlife of slavery.

It is impossible to understate the effect of institutionalized racism on the lives of Black children in school. Plenty of existing research shows that living in poverty negatively impacts children’s ability to learn in school.<sup>18</sup> Rather than validate dog-whistle arguments about the cultural and biological reasons why Black children in poverty tend to perform poorly in school, I find it important instead to reckon with the structural barriers that preclude many students from success. For example, the very structure of our nation’s school funding system deeply disadvantages students who live in low-income areas.<sup>19</sup> Decades worth of attempts to even-out funding across school

---

<sup>15</sup> Alexander.

<sup>16</sup> “Poverty USA,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.povertyusa.org/facts>.

<sup>17</sup> “Gap between Number of Blacks, Whites in Prison Narrows | Pew Research Center,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>.

<sup>18</sup> Joaquina Palomar-Lever and Amparo Victorio-Estrada, “Academic Success of Adolescents in Poverty,” *Social Psychology of Education* 20, no. 3 (September 2017): 669–91, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9389-7>.

<sup>19</sup> “How School Funding’s Reliance On Property Taxes Fails Children : NPR,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/18/474256366/why-americas-schools-have-a-money-problem>.

districts have never even come close to equalizing the playing field. To make matters worse, discrepancies in school funding disproportionately hurt Black students even without considering their level of income. Researchers at EdBuild, a nonprofit focused on education spending, reported that even when they “disregarded income levels, they found that districts serving large numbers of students of color receive, on average, 16 percent, or about \$2,200, less per student than largely white districts.”<sup>20</sup> In the words of EdBuild’s CEO, “The wrenching reality is that, from any angle, America is investing billions more in the future of white children.”<sup>21</sup>

Of course however, disproportionate school spending is not the only place where we can see institutionalized racism at work on Black students. The earlier cited statistics about rates of Black poverty and incarceration are often directly linked to learning outcomes for Black children. For example, persistent food insecurity<sup>22</sup> and limited access to high-quality healthcare<sup>23</sup> are two common results of living in poverty that can help to explain why children from impoverished families tend to underperform in school. The logic is simple: healthy, well-fed children can learn better than sick or starving ones. Though many white children also live below the poverty line, Black children along with other children of color, are not only more likely to live in poverty,<sup>24</sup> but they are also

---

<sup>20</sup> “White Students Get More K-12 Funding Than Students of Color: Report,” US News & World Report, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-02-26/white-students-get-more-k-12-funding-than-students-of-color-report>.

<sup>21</sup> “White Students Get More K-12 Funding Than Students of Color.”

<sup>22</sup> “Food for Thought: How Food Insecurity Affects a Child’s Education - American Youth Policy Forum,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.aypf.org/blog/food-for-thought-how-food-insecurity-affects-a-childs-education/>.

<sup>23</sup> “What’s at Stake for Schools and Students in Health Care Debate? – Center For Children and Families,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2017/03/22/whats-at-stake-for-schools-and-students-in-health-care-debate/>.

<sup>24</sup> “Faces of Poverty: What Social Groups Are More Likely to Experience It?,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/economy/2018/10/10/faces-poverty-social-racial-factors/37977173/>.

more severely impacted by its structural disadvantages.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in today’s era of racialized mass incarceration, Black children are six times more likely than white children to have an incarcerated parent.<sup>26</sup> A large body of research exists to confirm that student achievement and well-being are negatively impacted by the incarceration of a family member in a myriad of ways.<sup>27,28</sup> All of this matters because it is proof that before we can even talk about the problem with our schools, it is absolutely essential that we understand that the problem is much, much bigger than them alone.

Hartman’s concept does not end with the idea of institutionalized racism: “I, too, am the afterlife of slavery,” she writes. This is where theories of embodied and affective racism becomes useful. Embodiment and affect are two terms commonly used by academics—and maybe not by anyone else. However, I am using them here because I find them to be distinct and helpful in understanding the less obvious impact that slavery has had on Black life. Some people might define this impact as the psychological trauma that enslavement has inflicted on generations of Black Americans. Embodied and affective racism encompass this, but are not limited to it. Embodiment in particular refers to the very specific way that racism affects, alters and lives in, the body. In African American Studies, scholars often theorize about “the body,” as a concept or an idea that goes beyond simply referring to the physical human form. In *Keywords for African American Studies* the entry defining the term “Body” writes that, the “‘body’ takes on a

---

<sup>25</sup> “Examining the Impact of Structural Racism on Food Insecurity: Implications for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5823283/>.

<sup>26</sup> “Mass Incarceration and Children’s Outcomes: Criminal Justice Policy Is Education Policy,” *Economic Policy Institute* (blog), accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/mass-incarceration-and-childrens-outcomes/>.

<sup>27</sup> Rebecca J. Schlafer, Tyler Reedy, and Laurel Davis, “School-Based Outcomes among Youth with Incarcerated Parents: Differences by School Setting,” *The Journal of School Health* 87, no. 9 (September 2017): 687–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12539>.

<sup>28</sup> “Mass Incarceration and Children’s Outcomes.”

particular resonance as it is used to draw attention to the visceral nature of racism.”<sup>29</sup>

This is to say that when scholars center the “body” in discussions of Black life, they often do so to highlight the fact that racism is not just abstractly structural or systemic. Nor is it purely about material disparities in wealth or resources. Racism impacts Black life on a personal level. It always takes a toll on the hearts, minds and bodies of those it affects.

From rape, enslavement and lynching to street harassment and police shootings, there are a of myriad ways to understand how Black bodies have been subjected to the physical ramifications of racism. Once upon a time, Black bodies were commodities to be bought, sold and owned. But, of course Black *people* have never been chattel—we have always been human. We have always lived and breathed, thought and felt, loved and hated, resisted and refused. It is important to understand that this country’s long history of anti-Black violence stems from this fundamental tension—white people have long had a desperate need to commodify and dehumanize Black bodies, but despite their best efforts Black people remain stubbornly, beautifully and immutably human. What has emerged from this tension is the need for a system of racial control that works not by denying Black humanity, but by exploiting it.

Fear is one of the most powerful and fundamentally human emotions in existence. Acts of racial violence such as the whippings and lynchings of disobedient slaves were explicitly weaponized to create a culture or system of fear among enslaved people.<sup>30</sup> Lynchings were often conducted in public places in front of large crowds and later, would be publicized in graphic detail in local and even national newspapers.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> *Keywords for African American Studies*.

<sup>30</sup> “Slavery and Fear,” obo, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0308.xml>.

<sup>31</sup> “Lynching in America | American Experience | PBS,” accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-lynching-america/>.

Such deliberate choices were made in order to scare Black people into compliance with strict racial codes that policed everything from how they could dress and speak to where and how they could move. Their impact was powerful. In his famous autobiography *Black Boy*, author Richard Wright describes growing up in Mississippi in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the peak years of American lynchings:

The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew.<sup>32</sup>

What Wright expresses here speaks to the effectiveness of the culture of violence and fear that white Americans put into place to exploit enslaved people nearly a century before *Black Boy* was even written. Its persistence post-emancipation and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century merely underscores its usefulness as a tool of racial control that was capable of evolving and adapting to the changing conditions of Black life. What the symbol of the whip once represented to a generation of Black people, came to be replaced by the symbol of the noose, the hood and the burning cross. And, just as Richard Wright described, Black Americans “needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects.”

Black people’s awareness of their vulnerability to violence is not limited only to the moments in which extreme acts of violence are experienced. Instead, the anxieties that come with this awareness are always present—they live in the body and need only be stoked by small reminders. This means that systems of discipline and punishment which once relied on outright forms of violence to control Black behavior, have been able to adapt with time to become less explicit, and more insidious. For example, most scholars of Black history recognize the current state of the criminal justice system as the

---

<sup>32</sup> Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, n.d.

modern day product of America's long history of anti-Black violence and persecution. From the slave patrol origins of policing<sup>33</sup> and the myth of Black criminality,<sup>34</sup> to the rise of mass incarceration<sup>35</sup> and the increased acceptance of capital punishment,<sup>36</sup> historians have been able to trace the influence of 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century racism on law enforcement today. In fact, we can see clear parallels between then and now when we consider how the state's ability to control Black bodies by way of fear has consistently evolved with time.

In 2018, two researchers conducted a qualitative study of Black college students and police encounters that illustrates this parallel. One Black male participant in the study complained that, "You can't do anything if you're out in public and there's police officers like you have to be careful of ... what you do because anything could get you locked up."<sup>37</sup> What is notable here is not just that this complaint highlights the participant's awareness of racial violence, but also that it details his physical response to that violence. ("You can't *do* anything if you're out in public.") Even in an instance where the participant has not experienced outright harassment or brutality, he understands that his behavior is limited, constrained or policed. Rather, he understands that *he* must limit, constrain or police *his own* behavior for fear of being "locked up", assaulted or shot and killed by the police like 1 out of every 1000 Black men<sup>38</sup> will be.

---

<sup>33</sup> "A Brief History of Slavery and the Origins of American Policing | Police Studies Online," accessed April 19, 2020, <https://plsonline.eku.edu/insidelook/brief-history-slavery-and-origins-american-policing>.

<sup>34</sup> "A Brief History of Slavery and the Origins of American Policing | Police Studies Online."

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> "A History of Tolerance for Violence Has Laid the Groundwork for Injustice Today," accessed April 19, 2020, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human\\_rights\\_magazine\\_home/black-to-the-future/tolerance-for-violence/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/black-to-the-future/tolerance-for-violence/).

<sup>37</sup> Nordberg et al., "Precarity and Structural Racism in Black Youth Encounters with Police."

<sup>38</sup> Frank Edwards, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito, "Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race–Ethnicity, and Sex," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 34 (August 20, 2019): 16793–98, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>.

The mere gaze of the police turns the streets, and other sites of everyday living into minefields where Black people must remain vigilant at all times. Police presence anywhere “out in public” is enough to keep Black bodies in line—to restrict their freedom to move, act or *be* without fear.

In their 2018 book *Policing the Black Body*, scholars Angela Hattery and Earl Smith introduce the term “symbolic policing” to mean,

not only the literal use of police force to control the behavior of Black people ... but also to mean the control, regulation, and surveilling of Black bodies: how Black people are allowed to “be,” where Black people are allowed to go and when, and what choices Black people are allowed to make.<sup>39</sup>

They argue that “symbolic policing” operates similarly to the kind of policing described by the participant of the earlier cited study. In that example, the police did not need to exert authority through violence because their mere presence lets people know that their behavior is being watched and evaluated at every moment. In the same way, different forms of “symbolic policing” are effective at controlling Black behavior even in the absence of police or other authority figures because Black people are constantly aware of the fact that their bodies are excessively scrutinized, judged and stigmatized because of the color of their skin.

To illustrate this concept, Hattery and Smith present readers with the everyday example of how Black women are often forced to wear their hair in socially “acceptable” (read, white-washed) styles in the workplace, rather than in natural styles that are deemed unprofessional.<sup>40</sup> Even in the absence of explicitly enforced rules or policies about how employees should wear their hair, most Black women implicitly understand

---

<sup>39</sup> “Policing Black Bodies: How Black Lives Are Surveilled and How to Work for Change,” n.d.

<sup>40</sup> “New Evidence Shows There’s Still Bias Against Black Natural Hair,” NPR.org, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/02/06/512943035/new-evidence-shows-theres-still-bias-against-black-natural-hair>.

that bosses and colleagues will view their natural hair with a racist stigma that may literally prevent them from being hired, promoted or paid fairly.<sup>41</sup> As a result, they learn to constantly police and alter their own natural appearance without ever even having to be coached. Another common example of this is “code-switching”—when Black people consciously or unconsciously police their natural way of speaking in order to be deemed intelligent or acceptable in majority white spaces. What is important to note is that, while these forms of symbolic policing may not operate using the fear or threat of violence, they are still motivated by an embodied understanding of racism and a fear of experiencing its repercussions. This is evidenced by the fact that practices such as code switching have actually proven to be psychologically damaging to those who rely on them regularly.<sup>42</sup> Black people are not motivated to police their speech because they enjoy adjusting to white expectations, but because they fear the impact of failing to do so.

It may seem like a far reach to compare discriminatory hair practices to a history of lynching or police brutality, but the thread that connects these experiences is the fact that racism operates by disciplining Black bodies through a system of fear. Today this system often operates in invisible or implicit ways, but its impact on people is real and tangible. It is impossible to fully address how racism works on Black people, and specifically Black children, without understanding that it is more than just what a collection of statistics about inequality can tell us. Racism does not always look like something that happens *to* Black people. Often, it is experienced as a feeling of fear that

---

<sup>41</sup> Minda Honey, “8 Black Women Talk About Being Discriminated Against for Having Natural Hair,” *Teen Vogue*, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/black-women-natural-hair-bias-discrimination>.

<sup>42</sup> “The Costs of Code-Switching,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 15, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>.

is everywhere around, and even inside of them—something that they simply learn to become accustomed to. This, too, is the afterlife of slavery. In Hartman’s own words, “Even as slavery’s afterlife is crushing, visible, and pervasive, it also looks like dust floating in the air.”<sup>43</sup>

Understanding racism in this way has important implications for how we should view many of the problems with the systems of discipline and punishment that schools employ to manage Black children. It is widely recognized that children of color, and especially Black children, are disproportionately impacted by harsh school disciplinary policies that lead to a dramatic range of negative outcomes. Scholars and education activists have long pushed the public to take seriously alarming national statistics which tell us that Black children are much more likely to be suspended, expelled and pushed out of school and into the criminal justice system than their white peers.<sup>44</sup>

The theory of embodied racism helps us to understand how racism operates to control Black life in unseen ways. Reckoning with racism as more than just an institutional force is an important part of understanding how the legacy of enslavement lives on.

One of the most famous definitions of racism written by scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore provides a helpful way of understanding affective racism in relation to institutionalized and embodied racism. Gilmore wrote, that “Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”<sup>45</sup> This definition refers to how institutionalized

---

<sup>43</sup> Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

<sup>44</sup> Flannery, M. (2015, January 5). The school-to-prison pipeline: Time to shut it down. NEA Today.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*.

racism produces conditions of inequality that result in the ultimate physical manifestation of oppression—death. Black proximity to death is clearly related to the idea of embodiment because it links the experience of racism to its fatal repercussions on and in the body. However, as with any experience of death, there is also an enormous emotional toll that cannot be forgotten. This is where the concept of affective racism has its place. Affect is a term used in a variety of academic disciplines from psychology and neuroscience to literary theory and gender studies. In each field, its meaning takes on different nuances and complexities but here I want to refer to the most fundamental understanding of the term. Affect describes, “any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, affective racism describes an emotional experience that often stems from an awareness of or encounter with racism that is structural or embodied.

A New York Times essay by famous Black feminist poet Claudia Rankine opens with a short anecdote that succinctly captures the emotional weight of affective racism: “I asked another friend what it’s like being the mother of a black son. ‘The condition of black life is one of mourning,’ she said bluntly. For her, mourning lived in real time inside her and her son’s reality: At any moment she might lose her reason for living.”<sup>47</sup>

What does it do to Black people to live at all times with the knowledge of not just their own “vulnerability to premature death”, but the vulnerability of those they love?

Rankine writes,

Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this

---

<sup>46</sup> “Affect – APA Dictionary of Psychology.”

<sup>47</sup> “‘The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning’ - The New York Times.”

street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black.

How does “the daily strain of knowing”—all of the small reflexive emotional responses and behaviors that such knowing provokes—build up over the course of someone’s life? Where does all of the stress go? Does it clog arteries? Pressurize the brain? Form ulcers in the stomach? In this way, the line between embodied and affective racism is blurred as the two mutually reinforce one another. This too, is the afterlife of slavery.

Author Christina Sharpe grapples with the affective reality of racism in her book *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*. The book introduces the concept of “life in the wake of slavery” as very closely related to Saidiya Hartman’s theory of the afterlife of slavery. She uses “the wake” as a metaphor to contain a variety of meanings about how Black people experience life and death in a country whose racist past is still so present. Though the book is heavily theoretical and published for a mostly scholarly audience, she opens with a long personal narrative that details her experience losing four Black family members in a matter of years. Some of these were race-related deaths, such as the loss of her brother Stephen to sickle-cell anemia or her schizophrenic cousin Robert to a shooting by the police. Some, like the mysteriously sudden death of her sister, were seemingly more benign. She uses these personal examples in part to make a point similar to Rankine’s assertion that “The condition of Black life is one of mourning.”<sup>48</sup> However, her examples also work to emphasize that an affective experience of racism is extremely personal, because it is felt at the level of individual emotion. This experience cannot be seen or understood when we talk about racism only in terms of giant systems

---

<sup>48</sup> “‘The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning’ - The New York Times.”

of power or material inequalities. We must pay attention to the specific, the particular, the human, to see it. Sharpe writes,

I include the personal here to ... mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery. The “autobiographical example,” says Saidiya Hartman, “is not ... about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at ... one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them”<sup>49</sup>

In this quote, institutionalized, embodied and affective racism are collapsed. Sharpe uses her personal story, one that centers her family’s physical suffering and her own emotional turmoil, as a small, but powerful, example of the much larger, but still parallel, “social and historical processes” that have shaped this country in the afterlife of slavery. In other words, she uses her experience of affective and embodied racism as a “window onto” the structures and systems of institutionalized racism.

So what does this all have to do with Black kids in school? What do all of these theoretical concepts—“afterlife of slavery”, embodied and affective racism, “life in the wake”—have to do with real kids with real problems in the real world? Ironically enough, to answer this question I want to use more theory. In *In The Wake*, Sharpe reminds her readers that, “Our knowledge, of slavery and Black being in slavery, is gained from our studies, yes, but also in excess of those studies; it is gained through the kinds of knowledge from and of the everyday, from what Dionne Brand calls “sitting in the room with history.”<sup>50</sup> My ability to theorize about and explain embodied and affective racism is thanks in large part to my studies—to all the history I have learned, the books I have read, the theories I have made sense of. However, I can also theorize about these things because I have lived them. My family too has been haunted by the

---

<sup>49</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*.

<sup>50</sup> Sharpe.

afterlife of slavery. I too have suffered in the wake. These theories give me words to elaborate my pain and to make sense of how the things I have experienced are connected to larger histories and systems. Claudia Rankine once wrote that Americans have two selves: the “historical self,” and the “self self”.<sup>51</sup> These different selves ensure that America can never be rid of its racial past because we can never be rid of our own racial histories. Every Black American child has a historical self. Every Black American child lives in the wake of slavery. Until our schools can reckon with this truth—until our efforts at reform can effectively use history and theory to make sense of our social and political landscape—we will never understand the full magnitude of the problem, or come close to designing an effective solution.

Only when we treat the crisis in education as a crisis of humanity can we understand that the real problem is both bigger and smaller than our country has ever been capable of imagining. It is smaller because we must remember at every moment that a Black child is not a statistic but a person—a human being as unimaginably complex and unbelievably fragile as all others on earth. If we believe that being human is about more than working until you die, then we must believe that Black children’s success in life exceeds test scores, admissions rates or future earnings. We must develop new standards for our schools—ones that judge how they degrade or protect Black children’s humanity. Once we reckon with education at the level of the human, only then will we be forced to face the magnitude of the systemic problem. Why do we teach Black children to follow a straight line to success with no detours allowed; to play the role of the perpetual underdog working twice as hard, being twice as good; to expect no breaks,

---

<sup>51</sup> Rankine, *Citizen*.

no relief, no excuses? Just unrelenting persistence in the face of struggle. Why do we teach Black children to be so hard; so callous; so gritty? Is it because we know deep down, that the country they live in is designed to break them? We must be honest with ourselves. The failure of Black children to close the achievement gap is related to the school system's failure to truly care for them, which is related to this country's failure to ever atone for its sins by realizing freedom and equality for all. If we are ever going to truly improve education for Black students, we must start by reckoning with this country's racial history and the way it lives on in our children's lives today.

Imagine a world in which school is a place where students go to feel free. Really try to envision it. Perhaps freedom is a hard thing to see clearly. Maybe it's easier to imagine its opposite—kids stuffed in stiff uniforms and trapped behind desks learning to regurgitate dry lessons, take tests that quantify their worth and perfect the art of subservience. So what then would freedom look like? Like shedding uniforms and scrapping desks and changing curricula and debunking testing? Or does it run deeper than that? Black feminist theory teaches us to understand freedom as a state of being that can only be arrived at through radical acts of loving and being loved. No matter what it is that one desires freedom from, love for oneself, for humanity, for the world, for *something*, must be the force that inspires change. My project hinges on this simple idea. If we want to make our schools better, we cannot abandon love as a driving force or freedom as an aspiration. But, in a country whose greatness has always been dependent on the unfreedom of Black people, this has proven incredibly difficult to do. Now try to imagine a world in which school is a place where students learn to love something with a passion. What if school taught them to harness that passion and channel it into the creation of art, ideas, and tools—things so powerfully imaginative that they might help

our children begin to reinvent themselves, and the world, in a freer way. For most students, it is rare that school is designed to do this, and this is one of the massive failures of American education. Yet the bigger tragedy within this failure is that those students who need freedom most—those who are owed it most urgently—are those least likely to be deemed worthy of it in schools. Our Black children need loving. They are the ones who give the act of freedom dreaming salience, urgency and radical potential. They are the ones who force us to recognize that freedom in education must move beyond making reforms to a broken system and towards an ethics of care that holds this country accountable for the protection and empowerment of those it has dispossessed.

## **II. The Ghost of a Black Radical Past**

“We looked back in search of a better future.”

Robin D.G. Kelley

It’s important not to overstate the impact of oppression on Black life. Blackness always exceeds and transcends the limitations placed upon it. Robin D.G. Kelley

addresses the question of how in his book *Freedom Dreams*. Kelley argues that Black people have always relied on the power of imagination to dream themselves free. These freedom dreams are at the core of every social movement in America. He traces out a long history of Black liberation movements from abolitionism and Pan-Africanism to Black Feminism and surrealism in order to recover the dreams and visions of freedom at the core of each one. He writes that, “Once we strip radical social movements down to their bare essence and understand the collective desires of people in motion, freedom and love lay at the very heart of the matter.”<sup>52</sup> This may seem simple, but Kelley was writing against an academic tradition wherein scholars of history were more focused on recovering theories of oppression and strategies of resistance than dreams of freedom. They hoped that these would offer contemporary activists the intellectual tools to build new movements based on the framework of old ones. But Kelley’s work in *Freedom Dreams* is based on the premise that collective Black social movements have relied on more than strong intellectual frameworks. They have been spawned by “revolutionary dreams” that “transport us to another place... enable us to imagine a new society... [and] to realize that things need not always be this way.”<sup>53</sup> He reminds us that looking to the past is important because in it, we find our ancestors visions of the future. And, “Without new visions we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down.”

In the U.S., this tradition begins with the tenacity of enslaved Black people, who seized every opportunity through education to control their own fate. Though the right to be educated was violently denied to Black people for more than a century, as early as

---

<sup>52</sup> Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002. pp

<sup>53</sup> Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination*. p 9.

1819, history shows that enslaved people often secretly ran their own schools with the very literal hope that education could lead to liberation.<sup>54</sup> Nothing was more unlikely or more viciously opposed than freedom and education for Black Americans. Yet, “the very feeling of inferiority which slavery forced upon them fathered an intense desire to rise out of their condition by means of education.”<sup>55</sup> This desire was only heightened during the Civil War when the prospect of full emancipation “transformed an ideology of education for freedom into a demand for an education, with or without the munificence of the federal government and sympathetic whites.”<sup>56</sup> This demand ultimately resulted in the creation of “freedom schools” that formed the basis of the first public school system to ever operate in the South. Even before white Northern philanthropists working with the federal government took over the Southern school system, the “educational movement among the freedmen ha[d] in it a self-sustaining element.”<sup>57</sup> From 1860 to 1880, Black people across the South essentially “developed a parallel system of free schools,”<sup>58</sup> many of which were “organized solely by black communities whose children attended them.”<sup>59</sup> These schools represented the radical hopes and dreams of a powerfully oppressed people. The formally enslaved were materially impoverished, politically disenfranchised and perpetually exploited. Through education, however, they dared to imagine themselves into a brighter and more free future. They

---

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, *A Second Home*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

<sup>56</sup> Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*, chap. The Pathway from Slavery to Freedom.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*, chap. The Pathway from Slavery to Freedom.

refused to let the conditions of their lives under white supremacy hinder their ability to dream of freedom from it.

Nearly a century later, Civil Rights activists revived this spirit of defiance with the birth of their new-age Freedom Schools. While desegregating mainstream public schools was a major goal of the Civil Rights Movement, activists with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were also concerned with how alternative forms of education could be weaponized as part of a long-term political strategy. In Mississippi during the Freedom Summer of 1964, student activists called for the organization of “a statewide, grassroots, and independent school system that ran parallel to the state-supported public schools.”<sup>60</sup> This new school system was to serve an explicitly political function, acting as a sort of ideological training ground for the activists of the future. The Freedom Schools that resulted combined a curriculum that “focused on citizenship, civil rights history, and African American literature, politics, and culture,” with opportunities to conduct “field work... [that] guided ‘student action’ toward voter registration projects in the community.”<sup>61</sup> These schools were radically oriented around Black culture and politics at a time when liberal political rhetoric lauded integration and assimilation as educational panaceas. Freedom School activists and educators understood however that such white liberal logics were “often incongruent with ideals of freedom and the aspirations of local black communities.” As a result, Freedom Schools were designed to teach Black students to understand themselves as empowered citizens actively engaged in the fight for their own freedom. They were designed to teach them

---

<sup>60</sup> Hale, chap. The Student as a Force for Social Change.

<sup>61</sup> Hale, chap. The Student As a Force for Social Change.

ideas about themselves, the world and their history that they could not learn anywhere else.

Though the Freedom Schools were largely ideologically motivated, they also addressed an undeniably practical need for better quality education for poor Black students in rural Mississippi. They offered an alternative to schools where “students were educated to assimilate into society as laborers, and vocational education was the prototype used across the South.” Critics of the schools were skeptical of the idea that an education in political activity could adequately replace traditional academic curricula and standards. However, the reality is that the traditional schools being replaced by Freedom Schools were often far from adequate themselves. Since 1960, the state government of Mississippi had declared the *Brown* decision unconstitutional and reduced the free public school system to a “discretionary function” of the legislature. In response, white Mississippians built a white-only private school system that left Black students to learn in abandoned and under-funded public schools. SNCC’s Freedom Schools were built in large part as a direct response to the failings of the education system that already existed. Furthermore, Freedom School educators had both political and educational goals for their students. They operated with the belief that “working for social and political change would itself be a transformative educational experience.”<sup>62</sup> In this way, activist educators were engaged in political work that tended to the needs of the present *and* the future. They recognized the need to provide Black students with the skills and knowledge to survive in the face of white supremacy. But they also recognized the need to arm them with the tools to actively fight against it.

---

<sup>62</sup> Hale, chap. The Student As a Force for Social Change.

Revolutionizing schooling was also an essential goal of the Black Power agenda in the 1970s. Inspired Black educators across the U.S. were engaged in the creative work of reimagining classrooms, uniforms, pedagogies, textbooks and curriculum to prove that education, if done right, could be liberating. Between 19xx and 19xx, x's of Black owned independent schools were founded. These schools were “dynamic social and intellectual experiments”<sup>63</sup> that sought to radicalize and empower Black children by exposing them to an education free of all racist, capitalist and Eurocentric influences. Yet, they were more than just intellectual fantasies or “sources of theory.” They were also “pragmatic...direct responses to material and other deficiencies in urban schooling.”<sup>64</sup> They, like The Black School, were “radical alternatives” to the state-controlled schools that have been failing Black communities for generations.

Though it might be difficult to imagine today, the political and social climate created by the end of the Civil Rights Movement made the 1970s a fertile moment for imaginative institution building. By the end of the 1960s, many African Americans living in crowded and impoverished urban enclaves understood that there were serious limitations to the decade's civil victories. Racial reform had largely failed to alleviate “the suffering of the slums.”<sup>65</sup> As a result, many Black activists had lost faith in federal programs that made false promises of creating equality. Instead, they increasingly began to believe in the power of independent grassroots institutions to help Black people revive and take control of their own communities. This separatist spirit is an important part of what would come to define the Black Power movement of the 70s. For example,

---

<sup>63</sup> Rickford, *We Are An African People: Independent Education, Black Power, And the Radical Imagination*.

<sup>64</sup> Rickford.

<sup>65</sup> Rickford.

the Black Panther Party, probably the most famous activist organization to come out of the 70s, was well-known for building its own community-wellness institutions. They established and ran everything from health clinics and free food programs to a full-time day school. These “survival programs” were designed to, “meet the needs of the community until we can all move to change the social conditions that make it impossible for the people to afford the things they need and desire.”<sup>66</sup> When state-sponsored institutions like hospitals and schools failed to provide basic care and services to Black residents, the Panthers stepped in and built “parallel institutions” to supplant inadequate government support. They understood that these programs were incomplete solutions to deeply structural problems. Yet, they were important because they “offered a means of pursuing self-reliance, meeting social needs and conveying moral and political principles.”<sup>67</sup>

The Panthers were not alone in the turn towards building grassroots alternatives to state-sponsored services. In the 1970s, “the construction of parallel institutions [was] a cornerstone of black nationalist practice,”<sup>68</sup> that radically changed how activists struggled for freedom in every terrain of Black life—including in school.

In 2016, in the middle of Harlem, a small group of artists founded an organization called The Black School. As the name might suggest, The Black School is radically different from most other new schools that have proliferated in Harlem in the past few years. For one, it is not a charter school. In fact, it is not formally associated with the public school system at all. The Black School is an independently owned art

---

<sup>66</sup> Hillard and Huey P Newton Foundation, *The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs*.

<sup>67</sup> Rickford, *We Are An African People: Independent Education, Black Power, And the Radical Imagination*.

<sup>68</sup> Rickford.

school that teaches radical Black history and politics to students of color across New York City. The artists who run the school lead after-school workshops, facilitate community discussions and host public events and exhibitions that are all centered on “core principles of Black love, wellness, and self-determination.” The mission of the Black School is revolutionary. It operates on the belief that “the traditional factory system of education is [not only] broken, but broken beyond repair and the answer is not equipping students with the skills they need to integrate and repair the system, but instead total dissolution and the creation of a new system of equity and innovation in its place.”<sup>69</sup> As a result, the Black School aspires to do more than close the achievement gap or even “critique the current conditions of the school [system].” Its goal is to “use art...to propose radical alternatives to the current systems of injustice.”<sup>70</sup> It is not about education for the purpose of assimilation, integration, capital accumulation, or reform. It is about education for change, for liberation, for revolution.

The mission of the Black School may seem far-fetched, unrealistic, even paradoxical. Today, we rarely think of school as a place for students to learn radical or revolutionary new ideas. We live in an age where even the “best” and most “innovative” schools are judged primarily by their ability to serve a narrow purpose like raising test scores or increasing college and career readiness. Our ideas about what makes a school good, or an education effective are usually far from revolutionary, and this is especially true when it comes to how we educate students of color. In the context of this educational landscape, The Black School seems almost too revolutionary to be real. Next to the mammoth charter school complexes that sprawl across Harlem blocks attracting

---

<sup>69</sup> Sutton, “Class Is in Session at New York’s First Alternative Art School Fair.” *HyperAllergic*.

<sup>70</sup> Sutton.

thousands of students, The Black School may look like a small intellectual side project, or an isolated experiment in idealism. However, the reality is that it is part of a long and established tradition of radical Black experimentation and activism in education.

### III. Dreams of a Black Radical Future

“Imagination fosters real possibilities: you can’t imagine it, you can’t have it.”

Toni Morrison

“The Source of Self-Regard”

Last month in Flatbush, Brooklyn, a charter school well-known for serving Black and brown students in a low-income neighborhood got some good news. Every single third-grader at Success Academy Flatbush passed their state tests in math and English Language Arts. Meanwhile, across the rest of Brooklyn, less than half of all other students who took the test managed to make passing scores. Parents and teachers at Success have been nothing short of elated with news of the achievement. In an article published in local online paper the Bklyner, many were moved to tears as they described their pride at having proven to the world that low-income students of color are capable of being pushed to achieve success “with the right ingredients.”<sup>71</sup> According to the article, at Success Academy Flatbush those ingredients include nearly nine hour school days, lots of reading, year-long data collection to monitor students’ strengths and weakness, exam dress-rehearsals to put students in the right mindset for testing and binding contracts that obligate parents to keep their students on track in and out of the classroom. As a result, the third-graders’ success was seen largely as the accomplishment of the “entire school community”<sup>72</sup>. It is no wonder then that the responses of parents and teachers were so strong. “It was like a miracle,” said one parent “I couldn’t believe it. It’s a dream.”<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> McGibney, Megan. “The Success of Success Academy Flatbush.” BKLYNER, October 17, 2019. <https://bklyner.com/the-success-of-success-academy-flatbush/>.

<sup>72</sup> McGibney, Megan. “The Success of Success Academy Flatbush.”

<sup>73</sup> McGibney, Megan. “The Success of Success Academy Flatbush.”

I dream of many things for the kids at Success Academy Flatbush. I dream that they will grow up to be empowered, self-actualized, freedom-loving humans. I dream that they will make the world a better place than it was when they got here. I dream that they will recognize themselves as limitless and learn to see others the same way. Most of all, I dream that they will be free. I dream of these things because in the words of Toni Morrison, “dreaming is not irresponsible; it is first-order human business. It is not entertainment; it is work.”<sup>74</sup> We dream to imagine the world as it should be, not merely as it is. In fact, we dream to explode the world as it is and then to create new alternatives in the wake. So when Flatbush parents describe Black students passing state standardized exams as “a dream,” I can’t help but wince. Why should our dreams of what Black students can accomplish be so mundane? Why should our ability to imagine their success be so limited by what we’ve been told their failures are? Isn’t it possible to want something more? To dream more freely? Morrison said that “When Martin Luther King Jr. said, “I have a dream,” he was not playing; he was serious. When he imagined it, envisioned it, and created it in his own mind, it began to be.” It began to be. The things we want for our children might also begin to be, but first we must have the courage to imagine that they are possible.

Imagination is essential to life. It is the stuff of childhood fantasies and international revolutions. It took imagination to build the first fire, construct the first city and fly the first plane. Whenever the world seems small, dark or narrow, imagination is the force that allows us to transcend it. It is what gives us the power to

---

<sup>74</sup> Morrison, Toni. “Sarah Lawrence Commencement Address.” *The Source of Self-Regard*, Penguin Random House, 2019, pp. 127-140.

dream that impossible things might happen. In the history of this country, no one has needed to rely on that power more consistently than Black Americans. When African people were made captives and brought to this country as slaves their lives were suddenly violently constrained to the darkness of the ship, the boundaries of the plantation and the fear of the unknown. They were stripped of everything--freedom, family, dignity, autonomy--in an effort to render them broken, hopeless and inhumane. When they first arrived, most did not even share a common language, and learning to read or write in English was strictly forbidden. Without even this most basic ability to communicate, enslaved people must have felt it was impossible to comprehend their new reality, let alone get free of it. And yet, as we well know, this is precisely what they did. Enslaved people constantly refused to accept the terms of the world as it was, or as it had been decided for them. They struggled for freedom in a myriad of creative ways from teaching one another to read in the secrecy of the night, to creating languages out of song and dance that allowed them to communicate their desires and plans for revolt in broad daylight. Their ability to imagine new forms of resistance meant that the power of white supremacy over them was never absolute--it kept the seemingly impossible dream of freedom alive. This dream, fueled by indignity, suffering, sacrifice and endurance as much as by hope, faith and imaginative capacity, is what gave Black people the individual, collective and generational strength to push this country to the point of emancipation. And we have not stopped dreaming of freedom since.

In his book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, scholar Robin D.G. Kelley makes a strong case for the centrality of dreams and imaginative power to the social and political history of Black people in America. He traces out a long history of Black liberation movements from abolitionism and Pan-Africanism to Black Feminism

and surrealism in order to recover the dreams and visions of freedom at the core of each one. He writes that, “Once we strip radical social movements down to their bare essence and understand the collective desires of people in motion, freedom and love lay at the very heart of the matter.”<sup>75</sup> This may seem simple, but Kelley was writing against an academic tradition wherein scholars of history were more focused on recovering theories of oppression and strategies of resistance than dreams of freedom. They hoped that these would offer contemporary activists the intellectual tools to build new movements based on the framework of old ones. But Kelley’s work in *Freedom Dreams* is based on the premise that collective Black social movements have relied on more than strong intellectual frameworks. They have been spawned by “revolutionary dreams” that “transport us to another place... enable us to imagine a new society... [and] to realize that things need not always be this way.”<sup>76</sup> He reminds us that Black imagination is important because, “Without new visions we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down.” Without imagination it’s impossible to know what kind of world we want to build for our children.

When we put Success Academy’s dream of Black kids achieving passing scores in the context of Kelley’s call to imagine a future where Black freedom is made possible through revolution, the stakes might seem to be drastically uneven. Yet, Kelley’s radical freedom dreams must begin somewhere, and our children are the beginning of everything. Black people in America have always known this. It is the reason why education was one of the foremost goals of Black Reconstruction in the 1870s (which

---

<sup>75</sup> Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002. pp

<sup>76</sup> Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination*. p 9.

resulted in the creation of the first public school system the South had ever seen), and the reason why despite the gendered barriers to political participation, generations of Black women joined the teaching force to play their part in the fight for freedom. Education has long been seen as the key to Black liberation, and schools have often been made the sites of Black education. Yet today, Black communities often understand the purpose of our schools very differently.

In her brilliant book *We Want To Do More Than Survive*, author Bettina L. Love argues that for “dark” children, whose Black and brown identities intersect with a range of different “culture(s), language(s), race(s), gender(s), sexuality(ies), ability(ies), religion(s), and spirituality(ies),”<sup>77</sup> the purpose of school is to teach survival. Inside of what she calls the “educational survival complex”, dark students find that “schools mimic the [unjust] world they live in.”<sup>78</sup> They learn that, as in the world, success in school requires suffering. It requires subservience to authority even at the price of basic dignity. It requires settling for mindless, unimaginative work because it is all you have been deemed capable or worthy of. It requires conceding to being measured by racist and classist standards that masquerade behind claims to objectivity. Schools effectively become “a training site for a life of exhaustion.”<sup>79</sup> The most cruel part is that we have learned to see this training as necessary, even benevolent, for dark children. We learn to believe that what our children sacrifice in youth, creativity and freedom, is made up for by the survival skills they gain. These skills ensure that at least they will have the right test scores to check a box on an admissions portfolio; the basic competency to earn a job

---

<sup>77</sup> Love, Bettina. *We Want To Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. S.l.: Beacon, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Love, Bettina. *We Want To Do More Than Survive*.

<sup>79</sup> Love, Bettina. *We Want To Do More Than Survive*.

where they might one day be paid a living wage; and the perfect amount of fear of authority to keep them from being shot in the streets by a trigger-happy cop. We want so badly to believe “that our schools can repair the sins of our nation,” that we have been willing to accept “one short-sighted, often racist, education reform model after another.”

<sup>80</sup> Each one makes new promises to teach our kids how best to swallow their suffering and survive in an unjust world. What would it take to create a model of educational change that teaches dark children not to merely accept the capitalist, racist and patriarchal conditions of the world, but to reimagine them?

Supporting our children’s imaginative power starts with allowing them the luxury of fantasy. In her book *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination* author Ebony Elizabeth Taylor opens with a wistful reflection on the lack of magic in her childhood.

[As] the eldest daughter of an African American, working-class, Detroit family... I was warned against walking through metaphoric looking glasses...and assured that no gallant princes were ever coming to my rescue. The existential concerns of our family, my neighbors, and city left little room for Neverlands, Middle-Earths, or Fantasias. In order to survive, I had to face reality. <sup>81</sup>

Taylor learned from a young age to internalize the idea that being Black and working-class is a burden so heavy that it weighs you down to Earth and traps you there. She, like author Zetta Elliott, “learned early on that only white children had wonderful adventures in distant lands... were magically transported through time and space... [or] found the buried key that unlocked their own private Eden.” <sup>82</sup> This idea that Taylor like many Black kids, first learned from her family, was reinforced throughout her life in many

---

<sup>80</sup> Love, Bettina. *We Want To Do More Than Survive*.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019.

<sup>82</sup> “Decolonizing the Imagination.” Zetta Elliott, May 16, 2016. <https://www.zettaelliott.com/decolonizing-the-imagination/>.

ways. In particular she writes about how the conspicuous lack of diversity in fantasy books and media renders Blackness a sort of imaginative void out of which only narratives about hard social realities can be produced. The books that Black kids often get to read about themselves retell stories of oppression and trauma without offering the possibility of escape through magic powers or imagination. Part of what produces this void is what Taylor calls the “imagination gap.” Unlike the achievement gap, the concept of the imagination gap refers not to an inadequacy on the part of young people, but to the inability of our society to imagine that Black and brown children are capable of feeling, dreaming, doing and being fantastic things. This gap is the reason why Black and brown kids cannot find “diverse images in the mirrors, windows and doors”<sup>83</sup> of the fantasy worlds they read watch and encounter. Taylor powerfully uses the concept of the imagination gap to suggest that low literacy attainment in communities of color “may be ultimately rooted in a massive failure of the collective imagination.”<sup>84</sup> When viewed this way, the key to raising Black kids’ literacy levels is not to rigorously train them for exams in English Language Arts. It is to do the radical act of imagining and rendering their interiorities with complexity. Once we can do this in our books, in our schools and in our national discourse we might be able to protect, nurture and teach Black kids more effectively.

One unintended consequence of the imagination gap for some Black children is what author Zetta Elliot describes as the need for “to dream myself into existence.”<sup>85</sup> Because all of the books Elliot loved were set in whimsical European places filled with

---

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic*.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic*.

<sup>85</sup> “Decolonizing the Imagination.” Zetta Elliott, May 16, 2016.

magical white characters, she writes that “My imagination went into overdrive trying to picture a girl like me living inside my beloved books.”<sup>86</sup> Her youthful eagerness exemplifies the power of imagination to transgress the boundaries of what is allowed or possible. Just as Black Americans throughout history have used imagination to resist their marginalization and dehumanization by white society, Elliot here uses imagination to resist her exclusion from the world of the fantastic. Society may not have supported her ability to dream, but it could not stop her. So, Elliot learned to dream herself beyond the racially biased and imaginatively limited boundaries set for her. Magical Black girls may not have been in any of the books she loved as a child, but she grew up to write her own young adult fantasy novels full of Black characters discovering new worlds through secret portals. She writes these books to remind Black children that, “they need not look to a castle in England to find magic; there are wonders to discover and adventures to be had right here at home.”<sup>87</sup> She seeks to inspire in Black kids the same imaginative fire that allowed her to dream herself into existence without needing the sting of exclusion to be the spark.

This imaginative fire that Elliott wants for Black kids today is the same fire that allowed enslaved people to dream of freedom two centuries ago. It is the same fire that gave Southern college students the courage to become Civil Rights freedom fighters and inspired the Black Panthers to build their own Community Schools in Oakland. The fire has been burning at the center of Black life in this country for generations. To stifle it in ourselves—to forget that we are capable of using creativity, imagination and hope to make decisions about the future—is to condemn ourselves to darkness. It is to move into

---

<sup>86</sup> “Decolonizing the Imagination.” Zetta Elliott, May 16, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> “Decolonizing the Imagination.” Zetta Elliott, May 16, 2016.

an ominous future, with our hands tied behind our backs, unable to hope for anything more than survival. To stifle this imaginative fire in our children is to commit an even more serious crime. It is to rob them of their defense mechanism against the cruelty of the world. We offer our children no chance of freedom when we tell them that their dreams are unrealistic and unimportant. They cannot have what they cannot dream. So if there is any chance of making the world a better place, we must start from a place of imaginative possibility.

## References

- “A Brief History of Slavery and the Origins of American Policing | Police Studies Online.” Accessed April 19, 2020. <https://plsonline.eku.edu/insidelook/brief-history-slavery-and-origins-american-policing>.
- “A History of Tolerance for Violence Has Laid the Groundwork for Injustice Today.” Accessed April 19, 2020. [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human\\_rights\\_magazine\\_home/black-to-the-future/tolerance-for-violence/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/black-to-the-future/tolerance-for-violence/).
- “Affect – APA Dictionary of Psychology.” Accessed February 17, 2020. <https://dictionary.apa.org/affect>.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C., ed. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2004.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*, n.d.
- Anderson, James D. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. The University of North Carolina Press, n.d.
- The Sentencing Project. “Black Disparities in Youth Incarceration.” Accessed February 13, 2020. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-disparities-youth-incarceration/>.
- Cox, Aimee Meredith. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- “Critical Conversation: Toxic Stress in Children Living in Poverty - Nursing Outlook.” Accessed April 1, 2020. [https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554\(18\)30100-3/abstract](https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554(18)30100-3/abstract).
- “Data Shows Black Boys Punished at High Rate in New Haven Schools - New Haven Register.” Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/Data-shows-black-boys-punished-disproportionately-13629084.php>.
- DuBois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. The Free Press, 1993.
- Dyke, Meyerhoff, and Evol. “Radical Imagination as Pedagogy.” *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 28, no. 2 (2018): 160. <https://doi.org/10.5325/trajincschped.28.2.0160>.
- “Education Week.” Accessed March 3, 2020. <https://mobile.edweek.org/c.jsp?cid=25920011&item=http%3A%2F%2Fapi.edweek.org%2Fv1%2Fblogs%2F197%2F%3Fuuid%3D78488>.
- Edwards, Frank, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito. “Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race–Ethnicity, and Sex.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 34 (August 20, 2019): 16793–98. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>.
- equityXdesign. “Racism and Inequity Are Products of Design. They Can Be Redesigned.” Medium, January 30, 2019. <https://medium.com/equity-design/racism-and-inequity-are-products-of-design-they-can-be-redesigned-12188363cc6a>.
- Ettlinger, Nancy. “Precarity Unbound.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 32, no. 3 (July 2007): 319–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540703200303>.
- “Examining the Impact of Structural Racism on Food Insecurity: Implications for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities.” Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5823283/>.

- “Faces of Poverty: What Social Groups Are More Likely to Experience It?” Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/economy/2018/10/10/faces-poverty-social-racial-factors/37977173/>.
- “Food for Thought: How Food Insecurity Affects a Child’s Education - American Youth Policy Forum.” Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.aypf.org/blog/food-for-thought-how-food-insecurity-affects-a-childs-education/>.
- Foucault, Michel. “DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH,” n.d., 349.
- “Gap between Number of Blacks, Whites in Prison Narrows | Pew Research Center.” Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>.
- Givens, Jarvis R. “‘There Would Be No Lynching If It Did Not Start in the Schoolroom’: Carter G. Woodson and the Occasion of Negro History Week, 1926–1950.” *American Educational Research Journal* 56, no. 4 (August 1, 2019): 1457–94. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218818454>.
- Golann, Joanne W. “The Paradox of Success at a No-Excuses School.” *Sociology of Education* 88, no. 2 (April 2015): 103–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040714567866>.
- Goosby, Bridget J., Elizabeth Straley, and Jacob E. Cheadle. “Discrimination, Sleep, and Stress Reactivity: Pathways to African American-White Cardiometabolic Risk Inequities.” *Population Research and Policy Review* 36, no. 5 (October 2017): 699–716. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-017-9439-z>.
- Gordon, Beverly M. “THE NECESSITY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN EPISTEMOLOGY FOR EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE.” *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990): 88–106.
- Haiven, M. “What Is the Radical Imagination,” n.d., 37.
- Hale, John N. *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*, n.d. <https://columbia.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7312/columbia/9780231175685.001.0001/upso-9780231175685-chapter-2>.
- Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*, 2006.
- Hilliard, David, and Huey P Newton Foundation. *The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs*. University of New Mexico, n.d. <https://caringlabor.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/hilliard-ed-the-black-panther-party-service-to-the-people-programs.pdf>.
- Hinton, Elizabeth Kai. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Honey, Minda. “8 Black Women Talk About Being Discriminated Against for Having Natural Hair.” *Teen Vogue*. Accessed April 19, 2020. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/black-women-natural-hair-bias-discrimination>.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- “Hortense\_spillers\_-\_mamas\_baby\_papas\_maybe.Pdf.” Accessed February 28, 2020. [https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense\\_spillers\\_-\\_mamas\\_baby\\_papas\\_maybe.pdf](https://people.ucsc.edu/~nmitchel/hortense_spillers_-_mamas_baby_papas_maybe.pdf).
- Edutopia. “How Does Poverty Influence Learning?” Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/how-does-poverty-influence-learning-william-parrett-kathleen-budge>.

- “How School Funding’s Reliance On Property Taxes Fails Children : NPR.” Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/18/474256366/why-americas-schools-have-a-money-problem>.
- Chalkbeat. “How Turmoil at One School Could Shake up This Big Charter Network,” February 28, 2019. <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2019/02/28/achievement-first-amistad-discipline-no-excuses-changes/>.
- “Immediate College Enrollment Rate - Indicator February (2019).” Accessed January 27, 2020. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cpa.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp).
- “Indicator 30: Earnings and Employment.” Accessed January 27, 2020. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator\\_RFD.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_RFD.asp).
- Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Keywords for African American Studies*, n.d.
- “Kindle Cloud Reader.” Accessed February 14, 2020. <https://read.amazon.com/>.
- Lomotey, Kofi. “Independent Black Institutions: African-Centered Education Models.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 4 (1992): 455–62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295363>.
- “Lynching in America | American Experience | PBS.” Accessed April 19, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-lynching-america/>.
- Macedonia, Manuela. “Embodied Learning: Why at School the Mind Needs the Body.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02098>.
- Chalkbeat. “Major New Study Finds Restorative Justice Led to Safer Schools, but Hurt Black Students’ Test Scores,” January 4, 2019. <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2019/01/04/the-first-gold-standard-study-of-restorative-justice-is-out-heres-what-it-tells-us/>.
- Economic Policy Institute. “Mass Incarceration and Children’s Outcomes: Criminal Justice Policy Is Education Policy.” Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.epi.org/publication/mass-incarceration-and-childrens-outcomes/>.
- Mead, Rebecca. “Success Academy’s Radical Educational Experiment.” *The New Yorker*. Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/success-academys-radical-educational-experiment>.
- Mehta, Jal, and Sarah Fine. *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School*. Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Miller. “[Document] Afrosurreal Manifesto: Black Is the New Black—a 21st-Century Manifesto.” *Black Camera* 5, no. 1 (2013): 113. <https://doi.org/10.2979/blackcamera.5.1.113>.
- “Modern+Learners+10+Principles+for+Schools+of+Modern+Learning+whitepaper.Pdf.” Accessed January 28, 2020. <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/modernlearners/Modern+Learners+10+Principles+for+Schools+of+Modern+Learning+whitepaper.pdf>.
- “NAEP Reading: National Achievement-Level Results.” Accessed February 10, 2020. [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_2017/nation/achievement/?grade=8](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2017/nation/achievement/?grade=8).
- NPR.org. “New Evidence Shows There’s Still Bias Against Black Natural Hair.” Accessed April 19, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/02/06/512943035/new-evidence-shows-theres-still-bias-against-black-natural-hair>.
- Nordberg, Anne, Mary K. Twis, Mark A. Stevens, and Schnavia Smith Hatcher. “Precarity and Structural Racism in Black Youth Encounters with Police.” *Child and Adolescent Social*

- Work Journal* 35, no. 5 (October 1, 2018): 511–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0540-x>.
- Palomar-Lever, Joaquina, and Amparo Victorio-Estrada. “Academic Success of Adolescents in Poverty.” *Social Psychology of Education* 20, no. 3 (September 2017): 669–91. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9389-7>.
- Paoletti, Isabella, and Giolo Fele. “Order and Disorder in the Classroom.” *Pragmatics* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.14.1.03pao>.
- “Policing Black Bodies: How Black Lives Are Surveilled and How to Work for Change,” n.d. “Public High School Graduation Rates - Indicator May (2019).” Accessed January 27, 2020. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_coi.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp).
- Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen*. Graywolf Press, 2014.
- Rickford, Russel. *We Are An African People: Independent Education, Black Power, And the Radical Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- “Robin D.G. Kelley - Freedom Dreams\_ The Black Radical Imagination (2003).Pdf,” n.d.
- Rødø, Synne Alette, and Jørgen Baskår Pedersen. “Embodied Knowledge in High-School Dance Students; Communicating the Bodily Experience,” n.d., 64.
- “SAT ‘Adversity Score’: Sincere Effort to Address Diversity or PR Stunt? | Education News | US News.” Accessed February 3, 2020. <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-05-16/sat-adversity-score-sincere-effort-to-address-diversity-or-pr-stunt>.
- US News & World Report. “SAT’s New ‘Adversity Score’ Draws Mixed Reviews.” Accessed February 3, 2020. <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-05-16/sat-adversity-score-sincere-effort-to-address-diversity-or-pr-stunt>.
- Sawchuk, Stephen. “How History Class Divides Us.” *Education Week*. Accessed January 27, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/projects/how-history-class-divides-us.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB>.
- American Civil Liberties Union. “School-to-Prison Pipeline [Infographic].” Accessed February 13, 2020. <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/school-prison-pipeline-infographic>.
- Shambaugh, Kriston McIntosh, Emily Moss, Ryan Nunn, and Jay. “Examining the Black-White Wealth Gap.” *Brookings* (blog), February 27, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>.
- Shange, Savannah. “Black Girl Ordinary: Flesh, Carcerality, and the Refusal of Ethnography.” *Transforming Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (April 2019): 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/traa.12143>.
- . *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Anti-Blackness and Schooling in San Fransisco*. Duke University Press, 2019.
- Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Shkurovich, Marc. “Forget the Future. First We Have to Interpret Our Culture.” Accessed April 19, 2020. <https://sintext.substack.com/p/forget-the-future-first-we-have-to>.
- Shlafer, Rebecca J., Tyler Reedy, and Laurel Davis. “School-Based Outcomes among Youth with Incarcerated Parents: Differences by School Setting.” *The Journal of School Health* 87, no. 9 (September 2017): 687–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12539>.

- obo. "Slavery and Fear." Accessed April 19, 2020.  
<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0308.xml>.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics, Culture and Counteremory: The "American" Connection*, Vol. 17, no. No. 2 (1987).
- "The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning" - The New York Times." Accessed February 17, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html>.
- "The Costs of Code-Switching." *Harvard Business Review*, November 15, 2019.  
<https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>.
- Decolonization. "The Fleishy Excess of Black Life: Mike Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice," January 2, 2015. <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/the-fleishy-excess-of-black-life-mike-brown-eric-garner-and-tamir-rice/>.
- Thomas, Sue. *A Second Home: Missouri's Early Schools*. University of Missouri Press, 2006.
- Umberson, Debra. "Black Deaths Matter: Race, Relationship Loss, and Effects on Survivors." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 58, no. 4 (December 1, 2017): 405–20.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146517739317>.
- Valant, Michael Hansen, Elizabeth Mann, Diana Quintero, and Jon. "Have We Made Progress on Achievement Gaps? Looking at Evidence from the New NAEP Results." *Brookings* (blog), April 17, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/04/17/have-we-made-progress-on-achievement-gaps-looking-at-evidence-from-the-new-naep-results/>.
- Wadsworth, Martha E., Brian Wolff, Catherine DeCarlo Santiago, and Erica G. Moran. "Adolescent Coping with Poverty-Related Stress." *The Prevention Researcher* 15, no. 4 (November 2008): 13-.
- Weheliye, Alexander G. "Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human," 2014.
- "What's at Stake for Schools and Students in Health Care Debate? – Center For Children and Families." Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2017/03/22/whats-at-stake-for-schools-and-students-in-health-care-debate/>.
- US News & World Report. "White Students Get More K-12 Funding Than Students of Color: Report." Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-02-26/white-students-get-more-k-12-funding-than-students-of-color-report>.
- "Why the Racial Wealth Gap Persists, More than 150 Years after Emancipation - The Washington Post." Accessed April 1, 2020.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/06/19/why-racial-wealth-gap-persists-more-than-years-after-emancipation/>.
- Wilson Gilmore, Ruth. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, n.d.
- Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*, n.d.
- Wun, Connie. "Against Captivity:Black Girls and School Discipline Policies in the Afterlife of Slavery." *Sage*, n.d. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815615439>.
- Zahn, Brian. "Data Shows Black Boys Punished at High Rate in New Haven Schools." *New Haven Register*, February 19, 2019. <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/Data-shows-black-boys-punished-disproportionately-13629084.php>.

Elliott, Zetta. "Decolonizing the Imagination." May 16, 2016. <https://www.zettaelliott.com/decolonizing-the-imagination/>.

Love, Bettina. *We Want To Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. S.l.: Beacon, 2019.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002.

pp

McGibney, Megan. "The Success of Success Academy Flatbush." BKLYNER, October 17, 2019.

<https://bklyner.com/the-success-of-success-academy-flatbush/>.

Morrison, Toni. "Sarah Lawrence Commencement Address." *The Source of Self-Regard*, Penguin Random House, 2019, pp. 127-140.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019.