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Exploration of the Public School Education: Still Perpetuating Indoctrination in our Modern World

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Exploration of the Public School Education:
Still Perpetuating Indoctrination in our Modern World

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

The idea of education as an institution for learning (Lawson, 2022) is an innovation (Protestant Museum 2022) popularized during the 1600's as a solution to reorganizing a way of life on land that would soon be known as the United States of America (Roos, 2021). However, the origins of this innovation has a long entangled genealogy with modes of power, such as with systems of religion and government, to name two of the most prominent at the time. Since the implementation of the education system, slavery, which was America's prominent labor system, was abolished. Over time, coupled with increased immigration, a significant presence of non-European citizens formed in America, but even now, despite emancipation, POC feel disproportionately affected by a lingering reputation for maintaining double standards in this country. Specifically, when it comes to those we've labeled as Black people, also known as African Americans (and sometimes BIPOC or people of color (POC), which I will be using interchangeably for the purpose of this paper), whose experience on which this project will focus, many POC are not fully trusting of the return on investment as it relates to achieving an education. Those who identify with the effects of critical race theory have had to contend with the education system being riddled with systemic racism and functioning as a covert stratification system to the detriment of BIPOC children in various ways. Although some manage to bypass the educational system, usually those with a lot of money and clout, which speaks to the fact that this isn't always a fair or equal process. But when referring to POC who are targeted and penalized most heavily, for them the pathway to success has been made almost impossible to achieve.

When I was in elementary school I thought it was designed to teach me things I did not know, but in hindsight, I've come to understand how imperative schooling has been in the conditioning and programming of young and impressionable minds. Within the parameters of this project, the questions I seek to answer are, *What is this process all for?* and *Who does it truly benefit the most?* Today's society sees education by way of schooling and the role of the public school system as a staple practice—as if a natural process of life. However, schooling and learning have their differences. In fact, schooling is a modern construct, a tool that our government holds superior to the family-based and natural ways of learning practiced by many pre-colonial civilizations. We've been told that schools should functionally stand to “educate,” but as it turns out, that has been a subjective concept—having different meanings for different people. And regardless of those individual notions, what really matters is how the overarching machine that influences the masses decides to execute the term “to educate” and the process by which this duty is performed.

I'm definitely one who loves learning new and interesting things, but when I think about today's standardized school system and how it's administered, weaponized even, I think about a labyrinth of navigation and transformation that isn't necessarily a healthy regimen for all. Its hegemonic nature creates many social complexities and barriers to learning for POC who often feel unsupported in critical ways to aid their success. And it is precisely the lack of this kind of support that has brought many educational journeys to a premature halt, including my own. So many times I've heard my peers declare, “*School just isn't for me.*” Pondering that statement deeply, and examining my own intermittent journey, I've since gone down the rabbit hole in order to closely examine the role of the

public school system as it relates to the apparatus of ideology used to reinforce and strengthen systems perpetuating racism, labor and capitalism in America, while indirectly involving other entities that work in tandem to support its effectiveness. And I seek to explore how our beliefs and values influence student behaviors.

Methodology

Throughout the process of exploring the literature and conducting on the ground interviews, instead of being an observer whose aim is to reproduce a product of difference (Abu-Lughod 1991: 53), and as an aspiring “native” anthropologist (halfie) (Abu-Lughod 1991: 53) whose perspective is entangled with the discourse I seek to study, this project will include a methodology that welcomes self examination, active participation and radical listening, which means I seek to be enlightened and changed by what I learn (James Baldwin). And much like the description of autoethnography by Irma McClaurin I’m using “a particular methodological strategy...that allows [me] an arena within which to bring together identity, scholarship, and knowledge production” (McClaurin p.61), included will be experiences from my own lifetime within the American school system. Borrowing more from McClaurin’s work as she identifies a methodological practice from bell hooks, at times I will also be including the use of “black vernacular speech” (McClaurin p.51) as a way of honoring and participating in the on-going process of decolonizing knowledge production and dismantling the conventions of academic discourse. To accompany the goal of decolonization, my goal here is to increase access via my ideas and readability honoring non-academics and interlocutors across the world from whom academia typically extracts content and wisdom for the purpose of production and critique. And for that reason I’ve decided to follow an adjacent angle for the ethnographic portion of this project. Instead of triggering and repackaging trauma of the historically marginalized and reproducing victimization, I’ve chosen to discuss my inquiries with an allied group of educators, most of whom are currently working within the educational system they’d like to change. This work will be

buttressed by a combination of scholarly works, including those of John Ogbu, Signithia Fordham, Paulo Freire, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Cheryl Harris, Ivan Illich, Jean Comaroff, Vandana Shiva and W.E.B. Du Bois, to critically illuminate and further the work of decolonizing the field of anthropology.

Chapter 1: Arrival Story

To further explain my investment into this inquiry of education on a deeper, more personal level, I'd like to share a vignette that might convey the feelings of bewilderment I've grown up with that have been hard for me to identify and name coming out of my early childhood. It relates to the times you're compelled to stop and ask yourself, *why is my life the way it is?* I've since come to view these circumstances as a deep inhabitant of "intense confusion" (bell hooks) that I seek to evict in order to make space for stories and truths that liberate me. Focusing primarily on just *some* of the devastating effects of disproportionality, that is, the deliberate creation of disproportionate conditions, one thing to note is that these bouts of intense confusion accompanied by misfortune, are not unique to my experience. POC children all over the world have been managing inhabitants of intense confusion (bell hooks), ambiguity and sometimes the harboring of resentment, trauma and anger, brought to them by macrosystemic influences deliberately orchestrated to ensure their incarceration to the ground floor of the White man's ponzi scheme. Keep in mind that this is something we all deal with differently—*some* of us even find a way out.

As a kid I excelled in school, and as long as I could abide by the "stay-in-school" "Say No to drugs" propaganda I saw on television, I felt like I was doing the right thing. I grew up in a weird way and school was my only passtime away from my house and away from the stranger that had been raising me. But little did I know that as life changed and circumstances compounded, obstacles opposing my participation began to make staying in school more difficult for me in time.

My mother was consumed by the drug epidemic in the 1980's that wiped out nearly an entire generation. I can say that fluently now that I'm an adult and have become aware that I share this experience with many others that have had similar or worse childhood memories due to drugs ravaging poor and urban neighborhoods. But at the time, when I was a confused kid, I couldn't help but blame myself for what I couldn't do to make my mother better. Raised by my grandparents, my father abruptly removed me from my mom's care and shipped me off to the south to save what he thought was left of my life. I was just six years old when that relationship was severed, and after more tragic occurrences, my mother was finally laid to rest. I was fourteen years old then—she was just 37. And as if that wasn't bad enough, my younger sister was just three years old (confusion continues to live with her till this day).

Although I was physically being looked after, the next decade was a mental and emotional battle at home. As soon as I became of age I raced back to New York to finish high school. It was rough dealing with the culture shock of living in a big city with multiple, appealing distractions and pressures of all kinds to manage. I had an extremely independent personality and the only thing I was certain of was school being a formality that measured my sensibility to be in control of my own life. I felt if I couldn't graduate, I couldn't prove that I could take care of myself. So essentially, that was the primary reason I went to school—to prove to myself that I was ready to be in charge of my own destiny.

I've always shied away from people and crowds and I struggled to connect to something that would make me feel secure. I remember having one African American teacher who started an afterschool group called Shades. Joining helped me gain confidence as the club became an outlet for my talent of singing. Additionally, there were

dance and rap groups that also intrigued my interest and I joined all of them. It wasn't that I was good at dancing, but I finally found a connection to people I liked and that's something I didn't have at home. This group helped me find a place where I felt like I belonged. It also helped me to learn about the culture of Blackness and having pride in that. There was a feeling of camaraderie with my peers outside of church alliances that I wasn't getting anywhere else. Before I knew it I had won the battle to graduate. Without that group helping me to hold myself together I don't know exactly how things would have ended.

Looking back I think of my high school experience as very traumatizing overall and grade school wasn't that much better. Actually it was my grade school experience I was aiming to escape that led me to the city. I remember back in fourth grade harassing the white kids everyday just to raise ice cream money—which at the time I just called it aggressive fundraising. I was certain the world owed me, and supporting my cause was the least anyone with parents could do, especially a set of well-to-do white ones. At the time my best friend and I were scraping together a quarter, nickel, dime—Anything! All I needed was forty cents a day to change my life. It was like one of those Ethiopian charities from the eighties. It all seemed so unfair as I peered into the wallets of classmates who God had endowed with a reason to carry a change purse at nine years old.

What disturbs me is how much emotional baggage I was carrying around that went unaddressed and no one knew much about what I was dealing with. I even remember when my high school clinic began offering therapy sessions. I signed up because it was free and I was curious to see what it was like. I don't think it really helped, but I appreciated being able to try it. Now in hindsight I cringe at some of the things I told this person—this young white girl trying to

complete her internship by having to inquire into the reckless behavior of the lost Black girl. She couldn't understand and neither could I explain myself to her. She was from another world, one with support, and a future, and I had no idea who I was and why things were the way they were in my world that felt like the upside down (Netflix series: Stranger Things). Blaming my parents was my best way of explaining why I felt like no one loved me. As much time as I spent in school, but yet the educational curriculum didn't offer solutions to the kinds of problems I had, nor did it offer emotional support, hope, let alone love. If nothing else, going to school was a constant reminder of all those things and people who, in my reality, had lives better than mine. And absent a better intervention, I continued to grow up with confusion, envy, blame and discontent for the way things were.

Naively, I used to think college degrees and credentials were so important because of the emphasis I saw others put on them. But what I couldn't figure out was, if degrees were so important then why haven't any of these scholars managed to fix the world by now? And then I thought, I'm going to have to be the anomaly. How can I go to college and not graduate with the answer to finding the utopia I've been looking for my whole life? But now that I'm in college, only now can I truly understand that this system is built in such a way that it doesn't want answers. What I didn't realize at the time, education being just one influential part of a larger system, is the existence of de facto discrimination and obstacles purposely created in such a way that you end up blaming yourself for the unforeseen circumstances you experience. You tell yourself that you are bad because bad things have happened to you. But in actuality, thank God I learned that who you are and the things that have happened to you are entirely different things. In other words, you are not your circumstances. And it is by the design of this system, and the way it needs to feed into the other systems, like labor, capitalism and the school-to-prison pipeline, to

name a couple of significant intersections, that one has to overcome a series of circumstantial challenges, usually economic, just to stay on the path. And it's ironic that these existential circumstances can have nothing to do with your academic performance, but everything to do with your ability to just *be* in the classroom. Like me, despite being a smart and capable student, you end up dropping out, or perhaps falling out at some point when life's current sweeps you off your feet and your point of return is a mystery. And it doesn't seem to matter *when* you drop out, (before or after achieving a high school diploma, or an associates degree at college) the messaging you get is that no amount of schooling is ever enough. And what's worse is constantly living with the feeling that nothing is ever enough and *you're* never enough.

It's been said that *you need to know where you come from in order to know where you're going*. I see the relevancy in that, but when I sit and listen to the greats, Malcolm X, Assatu Shakur, and Angela Davis speak about the struggles of the civil rights era, it puzzles me as to why those moments back in the 1960's feels so recognizable to the injustices of our present day, even though it's been more than six decades later. Only those who have the cheat codes or special know-how can bypass the system. But what's sad is that while we all faithfully send our kids to school everyday, most people are still none the wiser about how or why our participation is negatively affecting them or even the educators themselves even though they often feel like something's got to change. After reviewing the origins of our education system and connecting some of those pertinent dots, soon we will discuss how value systems can become inverted as a result of our ongoing participation in public schooling.

Reviewing the History

Taking African artist Wangechi Muti's words into account within the telling of my version of the following historical accounts, she confirms the following sentiment through her lens, “There isn’t one particular way of seeing things. And in fact, when there is a singular voice or singular story, it tends to be domineering, problematic, and often fictional. There’s no way there can be only one way to tell the whole story.” (Art21, YouTube 2022). In recognition of how history lives in our memories in non-linear ways, the following section is not provided as an empirically accurate historical account but used to bring to our attention some of the major events that have worked to shape today’s versions of our present society. As a result of our rapid progression, some genealogies have gone unknown, overlooked and unacknowledged regarding how things have come to be the way they are, and some have been told from debated points of view from which we don’t all agree.

His-story tells us that in the early days, Europeans entering this new land came here for religious freedom, but as folks began settling in, there was lots of movement and change around governance, which back in Europe, was completely controlled by religion. So there were many conflicts stemming from that residual lifestyle and how life would now proceed, including ideas that would soon form a new government structure. Mann saw the opportunity for education to play a key role in this formation as a mechanism that would function more opportunistically from that of the inescapable caste system of serfs and lords back in Europe. He saw education as the “great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery...[which] does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich; it prevents being poor.” Mann felt this way as a result of having poor beginnings and having to educate himself in a library. He succeeded, later becoming a lawyer and believed in education as

the source of his salvation. Protestant Europeans who fled here to the “new world” seeking refuge from religious persecution, formed a new reliance on education after Martin Luther revealed the exploitation and domination they were subjected to by the church as a result of their illiteracy in Latin which was used like a secret language amongst priests. For the Protestants, this experience of facing life or death is precisely the kind of trauma that bled into the discourse around education today, helping to make the compelling argument for the insistence of schooling. Hence the saying, “Knowledge is power” or “Ignorance is no excuse.” It is in the existence of this kind of trauma where one’s humanity requires further examination.

It's been almost 400 years since the first public school was started in Massachusetts, and 170 years since attendance was made mandatory by law (Noel, 2018). Since that time, slavery was abolished and increased immigration produced a large presence of non-Europeans who felt disproportionately affected by America’s reputation for double standards (Ogbu, 2004) (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Specifically, when it comes to people of color (POC) achieving an education, many are not fully trusting of their return on investment, which speaks to the fact that this isn’t always a fair or even process, creating the lived experience of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings 2009). However, for those of us POC with whom the system penalizes most heavily, the path has been made almost impossible if deciding to avoid education, and so many must go through the process for that reason.

Once Mann became the secretary of the board of education in Massachusetts in 1837, as spokesperson, he built a passionate campaign on the charismatic rhetoric that schools could deliver consistency through well trained instructors, versus the inconsistency in skills that children inherited from a parent-based, family-driven process, that Mann did not support. Although parents were in a new land, they still revered religion heavily and schooling at the time

was family-directed and controlled. In that way, the importance of family traditions was understood and more fundamentally passed on. But still there were others, those interested in steering the direction of development, who had huge concerns about the persistence of religious practices and lessening the supremacy of family virtues. Simultaneously, the gradual progression of life and labor demands leading up to the industrial revolution tipped the scales against family-based culture.

Soon the institutionalization of schooling came to be seen as the nation's best recourse for free training and childcare. Massachusetts was the first state to make their school attendance mandatory by law in 1852 (Noel, 2018). Mississippi was the last in 1918 to adopt the compulsory schooling law (Noel, 2018). Take note, this is a critical period in history where evidence demonstrates the political system scaffolding education through the implementation of policies through the formation of the public school system. Parents were no match for Mann's persuasion, "Arguing that universal public education was the best way to turn the nation's unruly children into disciplined, judicious republican citizens, Mann won widespread approval for building public schools from modernizers, especially among fellow Whigs," said historian and Mann supporter, Ellwood P. Cubberley ([American History 2022](#)). As a result, the culmination of these decisions worked in tandem on behalf of the labor system, fusing a long fruitful relationship between the two. As the labor system grew and children were pushed off to schools, there was more of an opportunity for people to sell their labor in the market which made for a more robust labor system to support the progression of America as one of the most prominent nations in history.

Defining the Problem

As a result of compulsory schooling and mandating parents to outsource care for their own children onto others, the education system soon became one of the most prominent institutions as both a new profession for teaching and for childcare. This moment is the turning point where family values became dominated by the agenda for the establishment of a new government. What I mean by that is instead of functioning under a mindset that prioritized close-knit family structures and values, this is the beginning of a mass culture shift where people would soon become more invested in a lifestyle geared towards individualism and capitalism with the expansion of secularism and modernity. The institution of religion would become more private in people's lives than ever before, and some would find relief from the practice all together, paving the way for the practices of worship to be transferred into the development of what I see is a growing capitalist consciousness weakening the family structure through the reordering of their values, impinging on people's time, self-care and reprioritization of personal dedications (*Unschooling* by Kerry McDonald, *Creative Schools* by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica). With that pivot in the value system, the ascetic Protestant work ethic became uncoupled from religion and more closely aligned with capitalism (Weber, *Protestant Work Ethic*) which Freire pinpoints as “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated” (Freire 1996: 55). That means, instead of the settlers coming to a new land and creating a culture of real liberation for all (room for both them and the Indigenous people), the old structures of control became nuanced as settlers seized the opportunity to make this land their own and to set in motion the efforts that would oppress all other inhabitants. This new structure would be offered to look like pride and progress under the guise of totalitarianism

and authoritarianism, while using patriotism and capitalism as a Trojan horse. And this is what I call “a model that works.” It’s a model used by the dominant group to subjugate a subordinate group, but instead of abolishing the model to create pathways for equality, they instead maintain power by refacing it, but never completely eradicating its use because of how effectively the model has continued to work to accomplish their goals. Therefore, “changing the consciousness of the oppressed” as a tactic, was also used when Black slaves were emancipated, but instead of real and complete liberation, with their newly found “freedom” they got Jim Crow laws.

Freire says, “sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity, become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (Freire 2018). Had it not been for the existence of the first encounter between Europeans and the Indigenous people of “Turtle Island,” now known as the continent of North America (and Central America), there would exist the void of so many vital occurrences, altering the chain of events that has led to modernity as we know it today. Although many people would disagree with my statement—those who *agree* with the Doctrine of Discovery and with it the exile of our native brothers and sisters from their homeland, this “New World.” And for those who concur with this series of events and manner of ill-treatment, I ask if you are aware that on the more ironic side of his-story that’s less often told, it’s the natives we have to thank for the rebellion of the Boston Massacre, that led to the Revolutionary War, that led to America’s divorce and supposed “freedom” from the crown of England. And it’s the *noble savage* we have to thank for teaching the pilgrims where to hunt and fish, how to grow corn and farm this new land to stay alive. And most ironically, we wouldn’t have them to thank for the appropriated model, on which America’s revered Constitution of the United States was based

(Axtell 1987). With such an instrumental relationship, why then couldn't the colonists see the pathway of humanity and full on liberation as it had been offered to them? Or why couldn't they respect the beliefs of the Indigenous people as part of that collage? And why then, as people fleeing from injustice and persecution, would they, themselves, come into the haven of this new world and then replicate such violence as their own tormentors had bestowed unto them? Had not these lessons led to empathy? But instead the oppressed colonists did not take the high road, instead they became oppressors themselves. And so, as Freire warned, the trauma and dehumanization continued (Freire 2018).

Many of us indoctrinated in grade school with versions of his story believed America the settlers deserved religious freedom, but that opportunity soon gave way to greed and became secondary to the pursuit of prosperity through the possession of property, which later created undissolvable differences with the Indigenous population. The formation of American culture transformed into the more secular nation our forefathers felt could not be achieved without the containment and removal of religion from its public sphere. Although, once that became our definite trajectory, it bolstered a pathway for the rise of modernity, which subsequently smothered out the opportunity for widespread unity and native participation in exchange for securing prosperity through greed, theft, murder and displacement of settler colonialism. Underneath what appeared to be the weaponization of education, was actually the emerging power of socialization. The status quo had the foresight to reinforce their agenda with the massive construction of a menacing toolkit to include a methodology of racism, discrimination, patriarchy, sexism, classism, gender oppression and social policing, which has worked to undermine and suppress diversity controlling the narrative of normalcy. Presently, this toolkit remains unequivocally effective as generations later, people are still resisting the effects of these

prehistorical models of hate against layers upon layers of oppression some of us are still working to shed.

The Case for Examination

“There’s no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom.” - Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

I begin this exploration of the education system to examine just one of the microcosms within this overarching system that governs us. Subsequently, I also look to explore the common thread of responsibility public education has had in the steady enlistment of a passive citizenry (Freire 2018). This experience of being back in school again reminds me how the constraints of this conditioning starts early in life—the earlier one enters the classroom. I’m now over 40 years old and as a result of my return to college I’ve had to revert back to the practice of raising my hand and waiting to be called on before I can speak. It’s as if nothing has changed since I was in elementary. Meanwhile kids in grade school are still navigating the bottleneck created by an arbitrator in order to use the bathroom. It brings to mind an evangelist I knew, steadily trying to cure the paralysis of what he called “stand-still Christians.” These were the Christians of our congregation that wanted to light a fire under. It wasn’t enough that they would show up to church every week and pat their hands lightly to his song. What he wanted was *active* participation. “Jump out of your chair and scream if you love Jesus,” he’d say. “Show us that you’re on fire for the Lord!” I compare that thinking to someone, such as myself, who grew up trained in problem-solving and sacrifice. Conveniences were sparse and I learned to do most things on my own, the hard way, strongly relying upon resourcefulness, trial and error and

optimism to manifest solutions. With this contrasting perspective, I can't help but to be perplexed by the production of our "stand-still" citizenry who is not nearly on fire for their freedom.

I arrived at this inquiry through rumination on the root cause of the inertia from countless contemporaries struggling in their circumstances. The kind of inertia I speak of is derived from a culture of insidiousness and constantly functioning from a place of asking and never initiating, so most times, never receiving. Instead, requesting and waiting at bay in a liminal space for permission to fulfill one's dire needs. And we can't negate the residual role slavery has played in this conditioning. In Octavia Butler's book, *Kindred*, she refers to an enslaved woman's experience of longing she described as "dulling" (Butler 2003). A yearning that never goes away, but transforms into something worse as it's swallowed down into the lower depths of the diaphragm, gradually seeping into the soul, festering, adapting and growing under the radar like a cancer that thrives from a cycle of remembering and then forgetting, but ever so steadily and patiently eating away at the light that was once a beautiful spirit. And as a result of generational conditioning that creates something as complicated as dulling (Butler 2003), I can always find people part of our "stand-still" citizenry willing to complain about a situation until the cows come home, but finding resisters willing to work to change that situation are few and far between.

"People get used to anything. The less you think about your oppression, the more your tolerance for it grows. After a while, people just think oppression is the normal state of things. But to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave." (Assata, Goodreads 2023) But if it weren't for intuitive intervention by the courageous and true resisters who paved the roadway to bravery and purpose with their lives, like Jesus Christ, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, SoJourney Truth, Assata Shakur, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, we wouldn't know

what claiming and fighting for our own human rights looks like. Founders of the Black Panther Party Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale started the breakfast club program in 1969 feeding poor and urban youth before school to ensure they had a more fruitful learning experience is another example. This is what it looks like when the cycle is broken and finally we have a chance at doing it for ourselves.

Looking at the historic relationship between police, as a representation of government, and POC, there remains a long history of mistrust. Government is part of the framework that heavily influences peoples' lives and upholds the overarching illusion that reserves the power to decide if and when change is warranted. But obtaining government response on anything that really matters, especially to Black people, let alone issues of equity and human rights, is an intense process of bureaucracy and it thereby reinforces this culture of impotence for people with less faith than others, especially as it reoccurs on a constant and generational basis. This history includes police brutality that stems from slave patrols that started as early as the 1700's (Spruill, 1960; 48) FBI and the J. Edgar Hoover cases, the Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. & JFK assassinations, the promise of democracy has been riddled with skepticism. The performance of this system is another example of "a model that works" because it is steeped in opaque processes of indirectness, and its nature has worked to oppress people in the bowels of stagnation for years, disconnected from autonomy and the kind of creative ambition that sparks solutions to obtaining the freedom and autonomy we seek. It amazes me how simply citizens can lose their rights, compared to the long grueling process of gaining them, having to participate in protests and demonstrations, going to jail and even death. But our society has learned to function in accordance with this slow song and dance we're reassured is the way to get our needs met and avoid death. Even as I participate in higher education today, lots of inspiring topics make their

way onto the agenda and at times there are really inspirational discussions being had, in addition to the myriad of reading and writing that gets prescribed, but like the comparison of grade school to a helpless child, it's real action, and the implementation of transformational change that often falls by the waste side.

As a mother in college who is now a senior, I've been through the ropes, and I have an entire life outside of school. I've come to notice how our classroom discussions remain monitored and contained. Pardon the fact that I don't find hope in just the identification of a problem theoretically. I want to rap about God's honest solutions no matter how impossible, difficult or inconvenient they may seem—I'm 'bout it 'bout it, by any means necessary, and I want to talk about what we're really willing to go out and do. Theory without practice is just as incomplete as practice without theory. The two have to go together." (Assata, Goodreads 2023)

It's like starting a fire in the presence of a fire marshall—again like dulling (Butler 2003), you can only get but so far. And to ensure the kind of success that is systematically entrenched and held steadfast for generations, the earlier one undergoes indoctrination of this kind, the less resistance to this ritual they're expected to exhibit. This is one of the reasons that I see strong correlations with our entire system of schooling, from grade school to college, being a major contributor, if not the primary catalyst, for the deepening of inertia and the rising of citizen complacency through increased bureaucracy, the strengthening of societal norms, in the absence of encouragement towards self-reliance, resourcefulness and imagination and in the disinvestment of creative thinkers and nonconformists. These all lend to the hierarchical prioritization of systems, like education and labor, other systems can include religious institutions, media, cultural groups, political groups, legal groups etc.held superior to the well-being of people where people suffer through their circumstances while continuing to be

tools for the systems, like the labor system, meanwhile it's an unequal relationship that's taking the majority of their time and youth while they're getting very little in exchange for that.

To offer Freire's thoughts on my observation of inertia. He says, implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is spectator not recreator (P 56). This reminds me of the Bible verse that also refers to being "*in* the world, not be *of* the world." So that shows me that this is a concept that has been embedded subconsciously in people's psyche either from their conditioning in the classroom or from forms of religion or both. He goes on to explain that the way to create my "stand-still citizenry" is through "stand-still" education models which he describes as the following:

"the banking model of education where teachers are the depositors and students are the receptacles" and "the more students work at storing the deposits and entrusted to them, the less they develop critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have a world revealed nor to see it transformed. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment and education action which stimulates the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another" (Freire 1971).

It has taken quite some time for the progression of interdependence between our education system, government and society to converge, but these results we're seeing is yet another example of what I referred to previously as "a model that works."

Terry

I brought these queries up for discussion with a friend of my named Terry. Terry was born to be a child mentor (or what society calls teachers). She is a single mother raising her 13 year old son Colby in a semi-rural part of upstate New York. Terry, to me, is like a big kid—and I mean that in the nicest way. She’s gentle, playful and a good connector because of her personable nature. She reminds me of myself in some ways, except that she’s great with *all* the kids, not just her own. My daughter, who is the most reserved kid on Earth, *loves* her. Somehow Terry found out that art was the key to her heart and whenever they’re in a room together they’re off in a corner snickering like two schoolgirls. Terry proclaims to be a lifelong educator and rightfully so. She has worked in this capacity for over 25 years and today she’s designing a model for school reform with a prominent group of educators who are rethinking our school system. Here are some of her thoughts on the matter:

If you look at our school system you'll see the purpose was supposed to be for one thing, but it turns out it's really for the purpose of an agenda. As a result that dismisses the social emotional interaction with kids, and the ability to be creative. It forces them to be who you want them to be, not what they themselves want to be. Humans are not supposed to wake up in the morning and step right into this go go go, army-based schedule that doesn't care how they are feeling or anything like that. Functioning in this way stunts their growth as well as their imagination. And it's not working for kids. They want to drop out. Even the teachers don't like the system, but they go along with the system to get through their own lives by receiving a paycheck. But there's no thought about the actual human and what that human can offer. Such as the great ideas our kids can bring to a space. Except when they aren't allowed to express that, and then it feels to them like they are not worthy of their opinions and voices to be heard. And when they're ignored and unwelcomed it leads to depression down the line and why the system just isn't working for a lot of the kids. They're not happy. The teachers are not happy—I don't even think the admins are happy. But there's no one stepping

up to make the change even when there are people in positions who can make the change. It's work, and people don't want to do the work. It's a lot of work because there's layers and layers for how many years now, and it gets a little overwhelming when you think about it.

I'm a natural learner. I'm also an educator of natural learning. That's how I grew up. Even though I went to public school, that's not where the education stopped. I was in the garden with my grandparents every summer and all my cousins would come and spend their summers with my grandparents. Every moment was a learning moment and you learn those tools and trades on how to garden and how to run a farm and there are so many learning moments in those choices. So that's how I raised my son.

Yes, he does go to public school now, but in some sort of way he's getting to know that world. But I also educate him when he gets home to kind of undo all the brainwashing that he got. But a lot of parents can't do that and that's why the school system should really look at what they're teaching because they don't necessarily have to teach that way. Like I said, I feel like every moment is a learning moment. You can take anything and turn it into a curriculum. Anything! Because I can take a stick and do the whole curriculum, the math, the science, the social studies, you know. And I guess that comes natural for me because I was born an educator. But for some people I think if they just look at simple things and not make everything so complicated, there would be so much less stress with kids to internalize.

So that's why I don't understand. There's so many options of learning and teaching that we get stuck in this one-way because that's what society says is the "right way" when it's not the "right way" because we can see that it's why so many kids are depressed at school or have anxiety. Some don't even speak, or they're a completely different way when they're with their people that understand them. And we're all different, but we're also the same and we can't expect everyone to learn this way and there's no other option for public school. And that's pretty sad to me.

When I think about what Terry is saying, I agree—it *is* sad. It's sad that our world isn't built in a way that is more expansive and inspirational for diverse learners, allowing room to

accept the vast array of musings *all* personalities have to offer. And that this limitation is considered normal and not a far-fetched idea is equally as disturbing. In order to be effective projects require that I connect people with different skill sets to work towards a goal. In those groups we recognize the diversity that people bring to a particular setting as well as the different ways that we all learn. The latter is so important to the success of our goals. So what Terry is saying makes me wonder why schools are still perpetuating this antiquated model of education where students are conditioned to believe that there's an ideal character we're all aspiring to embody. But instead offering a hybrid curriculum that's conducive to different learning styles and that helps a student to cultivate their own creative talents and interests. As we can see, failing our kids is increasingly costing them their lives and/or mental stability. So why is this happening? If we all had enough this world would be a much different place.

The world we see today is shaped by a certain historical narrative and has influenced what is valued in society. And because that narrative is deliberately skewed and *not* all encompassing, the values we have been taught to prioritize are not expansive enough to make all its participants feel whole. Consider how our lives are very much focused around certain familiar dichotomies, like the “educated” vs. “uneducated.” For the purpose of this argument, it is very important to look more closely at these two, very distinct, life junctures. As Terry underscored, *anything* can be a curriculum. Therefore, one can learn and be taught knowledge and gain life skills naturally, outside of the institutional environment known as the classroom. If societal values were to expand, *people*, such as myself, who have experience navigating the intricacies of life, including motherhood, relying upon real world survival skills and adaptation, would be prioritized over systems that engrain us to believe otherwise.

This would also include folks who are self-taught, and have gained mastery skills through hands-on learning, or on-the-job training, apprenticeships, even tried and true knowledge that's generationally inherited. Indigenous people all over the world from tribes and villages were traditionally taught by working alongside parents and elders, learning what skills were necessary to contribute to the life systems of their environments (Lawson, 2022). Oral stories were also a vital part of passing on wisdoms and traditions and how they kept a record of what we call history. The bottom line I care deeply to underscore is that in a more expansive and diverse world we could easily respect that schools are not the only way to learn.

Finney

I spoke about this topic of expansive schooling next with Finney who became a preschool teacher 28 years ago at the age of twenty. Finney is a sweet lady, and one of the first people I met when I moved to Kingston just over ten years ago. She's very caring and she also has a timeless way about her, harnessing a young, energetic spirit that the kids just love about her. She teaches at our local Montessori school, which operates as a hybrid public school, and has become a wonderful resource to me for many reasons. As a person who strongly supports Montessori, she's not just another smiling white face taking up space in our school system, but an ally that fights for what I believe in, which is independent thinking and letting passion be your guide. She gave me some background on the school's history and periodic battles defending its curriculum.

“It's tricky,” Finney told me, “there's a lot of pressures from a public school standpoint, and then there's different ways of seeing how you can serve kids' academic needs in different ways, and that there's different structures for allowing kids freedom of movement, freedom of choice, creativity and following your passions, like all those things that Montessori does. If people don't have the lens for

it, like, if they don't see kids sitting in a row and doing what people have classically seen for many generations, then they don't know how to interpret it, and they don't know how to see it. And so then they want to just change it. And their answer is to bring in all of this scripted curriculum which actually destroys the program. Some people just believe that everything needs to look the same in order for it to be equitable. Although that is not equity. Equity instead is when you give more to those who need more. So when we work with faculty who don't philosophically believe in this type of learning and don't have the lens to view it, they're not a good match for the program. Montessori is teaching kids in individual and small groups, tracking and observing kids and giving them the next lessons and following their interests—very student directed. We address the same academic skills and needs but just in a different way if people could see that.”

Kids want to learn because they are excited and then they teach themselves to read because they like what they're reading about and then they discover parts of themselves in that, they discover interests they then can learn from one another, they see each other get inspired and that then inspires the whole group and then it shifts that locus of control as to who is deciding what's important to learn away from the adults and onto the kids. Montessori has a core curriculum, there's the study of biomes and life and all of that and at the same time there's so many open-ended parts where they can dive deep into the rock cycle. And like this year it's elements. I have kids who just want to learn about elements and then everything we learn that is somehow peripherally connected they start attaching all of that learning. It's really incredible to watch; they're third graders and to watch them sit and absorb, is incredible. Maria Montessori would say it's like you're sprinkling seedlings and the seedlings grow where they want to grow and you keep tending to them where they're growing.

I've now been teaching 20 years in a public school setting and I've seen now one generation become adults. And one of the teachers in our school is one of our younger teachers who also says she isn't going to get Montessori trained and she has some nice connections with the kids that are great and at other times she has done some things that I think are wildly inappropriate that she thinks she can take those kinds of liberties with and I'll be honest with you, there are some things that have happened where I'm just

like, yes, that's racist. But I think ultimately what I'm seeing when I look at people who are that age is a product of this "No-Child-Left-Behind". Because when I was going to school to be a teacher that's what was there, those were the standards, this idea that it was like all multiple choice driven, and that was the way to show your knowledge, very narrowly focused other than broad and expansive. And so we were looking at a system that got implemented that was very much like the "banking model" —the idea that the teachers have all the knowledge, you're all the vessels and you are going to regurgitate back in order to get your star or sticker and I'm going to tell you your worth. While I do work with some very amazing, free-thinking people, I do notice that some of these teachers just don't understand how to support a social emotional learning environment, they don't understand the nuances of interpersonal relationships and they don't know how to have conversations with the families that are difficult to have in adaptive and sensitive ways. You can't just come in in a forceful way to enforce a standard just because the district tells you that you can. Instead you have to be able to just listen and find out where we're each coming from and find a place where we have a common goal and then talk about that. And also check in and say, how does that feel for you? Right? Because it does matter to me. I will always support the children, but it's how we have conversations with people and teach children to have conversations with each other, I do see where skills are really lacking and so it's easier for the teachers to say to instruct the kids to sit at their desks and not talk to a particular student but it's then limiting the next generation. So that is what I think schools are failing to do. And all of this talk about social and emotional learning and talk about restorative justice, it is just a repeat, it's generational now, a reboxing of all of these old ways of being. We can give them new words and terms but it's the same types of ways of looking at kids and families and the same outcomes are happening where there's a lack of social and emotional intelligence really and skills being taught.

When we talk about the suicide rates are so high with these kids and bullying and all this cyberbullying, it's still a reflection and it's another way of bullying kids. It's the same thing but just another way of doing it. And when you look at our report cards and you see social and emotional learning, that's what it's called.

And what are the actual things we're giving grades for, which is just ridiculous, really what's being graded is all about compliance. How compliant are you? Do you follow directions? Do you listen to the teacher? And I'm like, all these are things we want them to do because it makes our job easier, but they're not social and emotional learning indicators— they're not. So they repackaged the name from when it used to say 'learning behaviors' to 'social and emotional learning' to go along with whatever the state push was. And there's also a lack of depth. We're not actually teaching the kids that they themselves can be the people who fuel their own learning and their own investigations—we don't teach them that at all.

Schools negate the opportunity to make use of a spiritual foundation which connects the child to their humanity, and human experience and tap into their own identity and uniqueness, but rather it's focused on conformity. This one-size-fits-all education does not work for everyone. It is as a result of these "social contracts" within this society that makes it so difficult to be an independent thinker who chooses to explore what learning really means, or to be, or an outlier of what I like to call herd mentality (Gustav Le Bon), and groupthink. The problem with social conditioning (predominantly maintained by schools) and how it strangles creativity and free will. What these two terms prove is that most people are always seeking a sense of belonging which gives them a general sense that they are right with the world because they are accepted. And it is in these settings that socialization and indoctrination team up in the classroom environment.

Feeling Finney's intense protestation, I began seeing our issues evermore clearly. Something very obvious that Finney mentioned has me thinking about something else that is very fundamental that's missing from the public school curriculum, if not all schools. And it's possible that most of us believe this exemption to be fundamental because it is by law that religion has been extracted from the experience of schooling—religion. And not that I'm advocating for religion, but for its authentic counterpart—spirituality. Spirituality is a foundation

of human existence and politics is the frame for the way the physical world is run. So the powers that be that are in control, they're giving us these laws and rules to follow that are absent of spirituality as the main piece of life. Therefore as Finney argues for social and emotional training, these are components of honoring and knowing the self, which are the elements that make up the basis of spirituality that have collectively been subtracted from the equation. And even as I mention these things from my current place of learning in higher education, and anthropology, it is as if I have bitten the forbidden fruit. The current parameters that we rely upon to produce education is not teaching the kids for the future, but rather teaching them in a way that's relevant to the current state we're in. By the time kids are ready to implement what they've learned, let's say approximately ten years from now, it will be knowledge from the past. Therefore our curriculums are outdated. This does a lot to offer an explanation as to why history manages to keep repeating itself, because we're stuck in a loop and everything kids are taught is in the past. In other words, the way we are schooling today is an antiquated education for our tomorrow—that is, if we ever *truly* want to change the world. A common hope we say is that the children are our future, however we're leaving them ill-equipped to do the job because they're carrying forth an already poisoned legacy. These are the ways in which white supremacy prevails. If not for the tainted legacy of education, children would play with whomever, whenever. If not for our influence they would love anybody they want, and they would give of themselves freely and ensure others are taken care of. Instead of actually nurturing the purity of our children and preparing them to lead, we've hijacked that birthright with our conditioning and process of indoctrination in order to create a place to embed our atrocities, our grudges (aka debt) and our hatreds (e.g. racism, classism, etc.) so they can act as a time-release surrogate to reenact our monstrously egregious past in *their* future.

Socialization or Indoctrination

According to Mann, the role of schools should also encompass the shaping of a child's character to accompany the ideas it helps to instill in a child's mind. That may have been a notion of nobility at the time, but I strongly challenge whether that is an appropriate role for educational institutions to perform. Essentially, I found it to be a conflict of interest upon understanding how the education system works in concert with government and other systems, funneling people into various degrees of laboriousness. If one's character is based on a person's habits and behavior and stems from their identity, taking on this role, it's as if the state is shaping your personality, and identity even. While parents get demoted to that of procreators, vessels that bear the child, society, whose values are capitalist-driven, programs their minds and capitalizes off the finished product. To believe this is what we still consider normal in the twenty-first century is what causes me to raise these kinds of questions: How did it become an attractive idea to build our education system in opposition to solid family values by elevating the state's role? And how did it become part of what we call normal, to take children away from their parents for daily reprogramming by a hired stranger who doesn't have a personal stake in their outcomes, or who is more loyal to a paycheck than the impressionable beings they mold?

Just this year, like Horace Mann, I too made the decision to homeschool my two daughters. And when I speak with other parents about it, they immediately acknowledge this as a position of power, the rarity of being able to cultivate your child's natural abilities and gifts and allowing them to hear their own voices. It allows them more autonomy to be their own person. One that's not bullied for having a unique sense of style and creativity, instead of losing themselves under the influence of what others think is important or beautiful or normal or not.

Perhaps this is why Mann and his wife homeschooled their three children (Gaither 2008, p 44), to avoid the detriment of the very system he had a hand in instilling. Besides complaining about the downside of it being a lot of work, the other most defensive comment I hear is about the lack of socialization my kids will experience in an at-home environment. As if I'm now raising them in a closet. And Frankly, it isn't true. Their social groups have actually expanded by the array of interactions they get to have with people all over the community which exposes them to broader conversations beyond their age group.

I actually believe that the school experience is an artificially simulated microenvironment that deliberately places 20 to 36 peers in a room together, labeling it the apotheosis of socialization—this thing we can't fathom being without. But in reality, there is no other environment that would naturally bring together so many kids of the same age, except for maybe a playground, which is also a man-made fabrication. It's a forged situation created to purposely produce the results they want. On the contrary, it is the process of “socialization” that parents rave about that actually works very well to reproduce oppression through bullying and endless opportunities for competition, pinning children against each other at every turn. Meanwhile, as children progress in age, playing and socialization nearly ceases as teachers' number one complaint about students talking too much in class soon becomes an attack on its most prized principle. This is another major point of irony—isn't socializing supposed to be the basis of socialization?

Let's explore the term “norm” which is central to socialization and the practices society has created, reserved and labeled that which we consider to be “normal”. We think of normal as something universal, common or well-known action, something familiar or regular (a regularity) that most of us do or have come to expect—perhaps we can call it a ritual of sorts. Through this

lens, perhaps this idea of socialization through the promotion of social norms, as Mann prescribes, was supposed to present as persuasive and beneficial, but as norms become invisible and hegemonic, I'm convinced it's problematic and should be heavily scrutinized. The etymology definition tells us the Latin understanding of normal refers to a mathematical term meaning "made according to a carpenter's square," from norma "rule, pattern," literally "carpenter's square," It wasn't until the nineteenth century that the meaning evolved into how we understand it today. [Barnhart - <https://www.etymonline.com/word/normal>]. Metaphorically speaking, this definition emphasizes another element I think is paradoxical about social norms, that is the formation of "the box" we claim to be thinking outside of. Parents who drink the Kool-Aid tend to believe that socialization will teach their kids how to form relationships, make friends and begin to have an understanding of general worldly expectations. As socialization functions as a mechanism of structure and order, it psychologically reinforces "the box" as we confine our children physically to the four walls of the classroom structure. And as an individual you achieve social standing, belonging and respect for your demonstration of obedience (Mauss 2002). But in juxtaposition to what seems like advantages, the aim for normalcy interferes with the aspiration for diversity because humans have been socialized to favor familiarity and with that comes built in advantages that for certain groups function as a privilege. In that same way "the box" has become this sort of cage where the further in we lean, the more we reify its existence; and the more we reify familiarity as a benefit, the more we see the unfamiliar in a position of indifference. If something is diverse it tends to have a kind of uniqueness, perhaps it's esoteric, and more than likely you may be seeing or experiencing it for the first time. Therefore, that which is normal enhances the binary of that which is distinct or singular (Caroline Bynum 2014: 345). And as part of "a model that works," society continues to produce the conditions of what is

normal and familiar in order to produce and justify the dichotomy of who gets privilege and who doesn't. In conclusion, that which becomes normal and worthy of change are selective ideals used in the assignment of power.

Erika Summers-Effler tells us ritual “is at the heart of all social dynamics. Rituals generate group emotions that are linked to symbols, forming the basis for beliefs, thinking, morality, and culture...[it] forms patterns of interaction over time. These patterns are the most basic structural force that organizes society” (Summers 2006). Going to school itself is a ritual that people find meaningful and transformative—making you part of the club. Anthropologist Anne Allison says school is used to symbolize the ideology of the state to indoctrinate children into systems of conformity and to obey authority. The entire process works as a training ground for the child's future membership in society. In her article, *Japanese Mothers and Obentōs: The Lunch-Box as Ideological State Apparatus*, Allison writes:

In modern capitalist societies...it is the school...which assumes the primary role of ideological state apparatus. A greater segment of the population spends longer hours and more years here than in previous historical periods. Also education has now taken over from other institutions, such as religion, the pedagogical function of being the major shaper and inculcator of knowledge for the society. Concurrently, as Althusser has pointed out for capitalist modernism (1971: 152, 156), there is the gradual replacement of repression by ideology as the prime mechanism for behavior enforcement. Influenced less by the threat of force and more by the devices that present and inform us of the world we live in and the subjectivities that world demands, knowledge and ideology become fused, and education emerges as the apparatus for pedagogical and ideological indoctrination. In practice, as school teaches children how and what to think, it also shapes them for the roles and positions they will later assume as adult members of the society. How the social order is organized through vectors of gender, power, labor, and/or class, in other words, is not only as important a lesson as the basics of reading and writing, but is transmitted through and embedded in those classroom lessons. Knowledge thus is not only socially constructed, but also differentially acquired according to who one is or will be in the

political society one will enter in later years. What precisely society requires in the way of workers, citizens, and parents will be the condition determining or influencing instruction in the schools.” (1991: 198)

also spend a little more time drawing out the implications of what Allison is arguing “Schools” are still being used to plant the seeds of white culture and the American dream, while offering social acceptance in exchange for compliance. Over time, and upon years of schooling, this training begins to cultivate the child’s narrative of the self as an individual that can be unhinged from a spiritual foundation. While growing up, if successful, the child becomes an engineered young adult and continues receiving incentives for increased levels of assimilation. He becomes bedazzled with modern conveniences, coupled with the pressures to choose a profession that will earn him money and more and more incentives in exchange for his deeds and his morals.

So I agree with Allison’s argument. So does Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich in his book, Deschooling Society, he says, “The pupil is thereby "schooled" to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is "schooled" to accept service in place of value.” (1970, pg. v) While knowledge is socially constructed and is acquired differently depending on one's identity, the education system is tailored to what the society needs in terms of workers, citizens, and parents. Students are cultivated to be tools of the system in one way or another, some play the role of gatekeeper or manager while others have more grueling assignments—but everyone is placed. Bottom line, I have found *nothing* about Western/American society’s “norms” that should be deemed normal, appropriate, or admirable by my standards. And to include morality and character to that list is questionable, if not appalling. What does this

country know about morals and character when it was founded on behavior of the worst kind—murder and slavery. *I'm almost too consumed by the irony of it all to properly lament. How is it that someone besides the people that gave you life, can hijack the ability to assert that kind of power and choice over someone else's development?* Having the power to pick and choose which parts of your identity should be valued, while it works to reform the rest, regardless of the pre-existing qualities that may be of great importance to a person's trajectory. The whole thing is down right oppressive. Needless to say the teachers themselves don't even have control over what they teach, or how anyone's time is spent, including their own. Teachers become the disgruntled wardens who keep children under arrest for six, sometimes ten, hours a day telling them what to do, when to do it, how to be, when to pee, what to think and everything else.

According to my friend Nikki's observation, she told me this:

Schools are not wonderful places. We are not creating environments of wonder for the kids or the adults. In order to address this challenge, there needs to be a new investment in education having more to do with the substance of our curricula. The history of school reform is replete with failures. Good intentions, great ideas, that dissipate.

The pressure of fitting into a social group can be overwhelming and emotionally damaging. Young people learn to habitually conform to these accepted norms to achieve the label of being the "cool kid". This leads to the reinforcement of homogeneous beliefs and behaviors inauthentic to yourself and others, with those who go against the grain being discouraged or punished. Socialization is a useful and manipulative mechanism of self-policing.

Chapter 2

As discussed thus far, socialization plays a major role in the framework of schooling, but it also transfers socially and culturally with students into their adult lives. As development progresses it is important to keep our eyes on the way socialization works to splinter power and privilege in certain directions according to the assignments of what is known to be “normal” and acceptable as we have been complicitly trained to expect. Subsequently those designations become protected by this shield of normalcy—a space meant to be void of question, critique, analysis and dialogue. In the following chapter, as I continue following this thread, I’ll also continue speaking with Terry and others to unpack the progression of socialization and how it transforms from a general sense of the term to a more individualized and targeted prescription that distributes allowances according to the classification by which its subjects are held.

Targeted Socialization: The Intersectionality of Race, Gender and Adolescence

Terry and I continued on to discuss an incident involving social and emotional conditioning in boys, and kids dealing with the social complexities of having a learning disability through the designation of special education. The following incident raised great concern for Terry as her son Colby confided in her about a locker room assault he witnessed:

I had a deep conversation on the way over here about the behavior that a kid was having towards another kid. I said well why is he having that behavior and what is the feeling or issue that is causing it? Then the adults or the administration only sees that behavior and they have to give you a consequence but no one ever addresses what the root cause was. Then that shuts a kid down and he feels compelled to act all tough and stuff as if it doesn't bother them. Meanwhile this particular kid is in the IEP (Individualized Education Program) and he's upset that he's in a separate class and it shouldn't be separate, they should all be inclusive and then you should have different ranges of the same work but different ways of getting there. A child should not be excluded from other

kids just because he learns in a different way. But instead now he has the stigma of being what they called “sped kids” so then the kid is angry because he gets all this abuse from all these other kids. All this is happening because someone chose to put him in a “special” class, saying that you deserve to be here because you can't follow our standards. However the kid could be the brightest kid but you haven't tapped into that because you want him to do what is impossible for the unique way his brain works. So then that's why you have so many kids committing suicide right now, the ages are coming down to 10 and 9 and 8 and it's happening because of something that happened in school that could have been addressed but wasn't addressed.

So there was a physical altercation that happened and I asked Colby where did this take place and he said the locker room. So after the kid punched the other kids six times or whatever and the kid didn't cry, he wanted to but he had to play tough and stuff. What happened then? Colby said that everyone just walked out of the locker room and the kid was just left there feeling crappy. So there's no help and now that just stays in the locker room and the kid doesn't get any outside support. And when they go home they may or may not feel safe enough to release all of this emotionally and that's when a child tells himself that he's going to hang himself.

As a person you're always putting up a shield of how the world wants you to be for school or whatever, but that's not a representation of who you truly are. So you're made to do things that's not according to who you really are and eventually you kind of lose what that actually means. And when it's time for you to get out into the world and make all of these decisions, you don't know how to do that because you were suppressed for all these years and that's how the path gets created for becoming a menace to society. Now you don't know how to do anything and you can only work at Burger King. And that's happening more and more.

After we had this talk, my son said, “Oh my gosh this is really hurting me to my heart and I want to cry.” But these are things that he can look at.

One point of tension Terry highlighted is the consequence of not addressing underlying issues when a child displays certain behaviors that may be stemming from emotional challenges. Addressing these kinds of issues could prevent a child from feeling shut down and misunderstood, leading to a greater sense of self-worth instead of the latter. Additionally, as

Terry warned, this lack of understanding can lead to a child feeling so overwhelmed that they may turn to suicide which is a real threat. For people in the United States between the ages of 15 and 24, suicide is the second-leading cause of death (UCLA, “Suicide Rate”). Therefore the need for understanding the root cause of their behavior and the importance of allowing children to be accepted and appreciated for who they truly are is paramount (Gilligan 1996: 238-39).

I believe all students who attend school have a right to feel safe and welcomed. I also believe that all students have a right to be treated with respect. To me feeling safe means the prevention of bullying and being in an environment where the parameters of humanity are extended to everyone. And feeling welcomed should mean that a student has the right to be authentic in bringing their whole selves to a space. With that said, I feel that the establishment of a safe space entails more mindfulness of the prisms that impress upon adolescent development which also have a tendency to overlap with factors of race and gender cultivation. Colby may be feeling as disciplinary and masculinity pressures are impacting him all at once, and while there are dynamics at play here specifically because he is Black, which we’ll talk more about later, there are *also* dynamics at play because he is male, and directed at males in general regarding their conditioning into patriarchy. Learning from psychologist Carol Gilligan’s work, she states, “To be a real boy or man...means to be able to be hurt without feeling hurt, to separate without feeling sadness or loss, and then to inflict hurt and separation on others. What is at stake is boys’ manhood, boys’ masculinity, their birthright in a patriarchal social order” (1996: 251). It is very disturbing that boys have been socialized to disassociate themselves from their emotions of pain and are a reflection of the world we live in, with egotistical male authoritarians emotionlessly prescribing consequences on

people, with no empathy for treating people the way they would want to be treated.

However, once these habitual behaviors are introduced, they then take on a mind of their own. Staying aware of these practices and operating on a conscious plain is the best way to steer conditioning in another direction.

If you believe this conditioning is specific to just boys, I can't repudiate the immense importance of recognizing the culminating effects of everything in our universe. Just as females are reacting to and indirectly learning from the socialization of their male counterparts, more and more girls are beginning to mimic the behavior of boys to buffer their own consequences of association. And so what we have seen in our reality is the development of tension and distrust between the sexes causing negative interactions.

“The study of girls elucidates the development of the human capacity for psychological connection: the ability to be in touch with the human world by feeling feelings, picking up resonances, noticing edges, registering psychological changes, responding to relational breaks. Within a culture or civilization that is rooted psychologically in the experiences of power...” (Gilligan 1996: 251).

Females and males are being socialized accordingly in order to comply with the predetermined societal roles assigned to each (Gilligan 1996: 251). This is best explained by Carol Gilligan who coined the term “developmental asymmetry” (Gilligan 1996: 238). Research shows that during childhood, boys tend to have higher rates of depression, suicidal behavior, and conduct problems than girls (Gilligan 1996: 238-39). However, during early adolescence, the rates of depression and suicidal behavior rapidly rise for girls, and by age sixteen, there are twice as many girls with depression than boys (Gilligan 1996: 238-39). Stemming from increased relational complexities in early adolescence, anxiety, disordered eating, substance abuse, and self-injury all increase for girls (Gilligan 1996: 238-39). Girls, moreover, are especially susceptible to post-traumatic stress

as a result of the high incidence of sexual assault, sexual abuse, and experiences with violence resulting from teen dating (Gilligan). Trying to learn in a complicated social environment such as this while navigating such intense social pressures is more than challenging, it can be psychologically damaging. So many curious and eager youth are being mentally controlled and disempowered by social complexities they are unaware of.

Associate Dean of Bard College and (Associate) Professor in the Master of Arts in Teaching Program, Michael Sadowski, begs the following questions about identity in his book, Adolescents at School:

Is it really possible to substantially rework the damages of childhood via a successful identity struggle in adolescence? And is it really the case that the unsuccessful negotiation of adolescent identity leaves one fated to a lifetime of confusion, failure, and despair? (2020: 17)

Sadowski says the answer can be found somewhere in between the two. I think these questions really prompt the reevaluation of something that has been virtually ignored in classrooms which is identity formation. I've come to see that experience is everything. Having experience with various situations that foster emotional intelligence allows for the kinds of polarity that gives us comparisons we can learn from. If not, you can find examples of our future fate in plenty of adults who have become encapsulated by what can be considered amateur levels of development, compared to others who have had enough positive exercise and practice for their confidence to mature. In learning about how a person forms their own identity, Erik Homburger Erikson, a German-American developmental psychologist named as the most profound psychoanalyst of the twentieth century tells us the following:

“in psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges

himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to them and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him” (1968; 22).

Thus, identity is reciprocal (Erikson, 1968; 22). Furthermore, it's very difficult to be immersed in a microcosm like high school or middle school pretending you are not bound by its rules of operation. Confidence is such an important ingredient of one's identity that can assist with ambiguity. Most people believe confidence is a quality that develops all on its own. However, life has proven to me that confidence is not necessarily universal and upon closer examination of gender norms cultivation we see that it only works that way in rare cases. And especially during adolescent stages of development, confidence is something that grows and benefits from nurturing. This is where the growth happens.

Terry and I switched gears to speak more specifically about Colby and the conflicting experiences with intersectionality he's having. As an average 13-year old adolescent of color attending eighth grade at a predominantly White middle school, this dynamic has definitely presented some challenges. Terry:

“I also realize now that with raising a son, there's so much going on around that and critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy. Colby went to a private school until he was in the fourth grade and then after the fourth grade when he started going to public school our whole life changed. So it's been this battle for the last 3 years now.”

Terry was upset about how she felt disciplinary incidents were disproportionately being handled by the administration. She explained that Colby and a friend had a minor altercation which to Terry's surprise ended in a 3-day suspension to go on his record. She thought this consequence was excessive, especially seeing that the boys made up pretty quickly because of their close friendship, that is, if anyone really cared that even friends have bad days sometimes and instead

this could serve as a lesson for better communication. Nonetheless suspension remained the precedent. A while later, when Colby was the victim of a physical altercation, a mob of boys physically roughed him up and slapped him around. Unlike the previous situation, yes he knew some of the boys, but many of them he didn't know, and he repeatedly shouted to stop their flogging. But when he went to the principal's office to protest what was done to him, he was told that rough-housing was to be expected and boys will be boys. All eight, White offenders walked away with a little detention to ponder their actions.

Terry expressed her frustration with the typical ways in which she felt disciplinary issues concerning her Black son and his biracial friend had been handled unevenly in comparison to the White children who were given a slap on the wrist. Present in this manner of unfolding is the reenacting of the historical racial narratives POC have seen repeatedly. And, on the more extreme side of circumstances, my mind easily conjures up images of Rodney King, George Floyd and Trayvon Martin. I even think about the Central Park Five, the 1989 case of five black and Latino teenagers who were convicted of raping a White woman in Central Park. After they had spent up to 13 years in prison, a serial rapist confessed to the crime. And what do these men have in common besides race, you may ask? How about the excessive punishment they experienced as a *result* of their race, which is far too simple of an explanation for those who lost their lives. I assure you Terry does not want her son anywhere in the vicinity of this trajectory. But this is where racial targeting starts, in early adolescence. Some of those boys in the Central Park case weren't much older than Colby when they were tried and convicted as adults.

Finney, my friend and Montessori teacher for twenty years, explained that as Black children increase in age they more easily become associated with adulthood which doesn't work in their favor as disciplinary repercussions become harsher for them than for their White

contemporaries. African Americans who were suspended by stating that “blacks tend to be more boisterous,” “black students are much more trouble prone,” and “some black males are more physical.” In Ann Ferguson’s ethnography, Bad Boys, she says disciplinary methods are a key stage for the examination of the systemic inequalities embedded in “institutional norms and procedures in the field of education that both operate in a covert and informal manner...to maintain a racial order...and how we see ourselves and others in a racial hierarchy” (Ferguson 2001). This brings us to what Terry was alluding to in her mention of critical race theory (CRT): a set of ideas holding that racial bias is inherent in many parts of western society, especially in its legal and social institutions, on the basis of their having been primarily designed for and implemented by white people, and having different outcomes for different people, as it pertains to race (Ladson-Billings 2009). And we are seeing a prime example of applied CRT in the disciplinary handling of Colby.

Carla

I’d like to introduce another school reform advocate, Carla Adams, who I met through her activism on behalf of the school board. Carla was a librarian in the district for 18 years and I’ve always been attracted to her passion. She’s the spiciest and most active librarian I know, who always manages to surprise me with the range of atypical experiences she’s had in her life. And because she has a way with words, I love the way she so eloquently articulates what she supports. Carla and I recently connected around her latest work on the NYS Solutions Not Suspensions Bill because of her belief that schools should be places where students are included, respected and supported - not pushed out. Carla shared this story with me about her experience working for the district:

Nobody cares about libraries—the administration doesn't actually care about the role of the library—kids love it, but in regards to funding it's the first thing that undergoes budget cuts, meanwhile we're tracking their ability to read with Starr testing. There's a real antagonism coming from the administration towards the work of librarians that I could never quite put my finger on. I would gladly do my job simply because I cared, otherwise no one looks. Kids were coming to me whose test scores showed an unbelievable amount of kids were reading well, well below grade level and I would just wonder what was more important than teaching kids not only to read but to love reading. I was so puzzled by why kids hated reading. It was because they struggled with it and were bored by it because it was not given to them in a way that interested them, and it was the same with writing. Kids just couldn't write and it was one of the hardest things to accept about our educational system, the loss of passion around that.

I think to be a good teacher you have to remember every day what it was like to be a kid, you know. It was hard work being a kid, hard work!, and even better if you were a kind of messed up kid. It's like my kids who were the most complicated, I loved the best. Because I remember that from my own life, and I was like you'll survive. And as a teacher you can empathize by saying it's going to be okay, life does suck right now but someday you're going to be in charge and it's not always going to be this way. And that's the thing as a kid you don't always have that perspective. When I was a kid I thought I would never live to be twenty. Twenty seemed really old, and now today I'm sixty-two.

As a retired professional, today I am working on a committee for equity and education. The school district has it in writing that they're committed to equity, diversity and inclusion, but they don't always meet it. And who's watching, who's saying hey how about this and what about the fact that there's disproportionality throughout the system? How are you addressing this? It's like people need to pay attention and so our group was developed to pay attention. And parents are busy, I get it, they are working a job, helping kids with homework, sometimes they have more than one child, and it's a lot keeping all the balls in the air. So we're doing these solutions-not-suspension teachings and we'd like to say that we are aware of the data that shows disproportionate suspensions for Black and Brown students with disabilities and economic disadvantages are suspended at way higher rates than White privileged kids and that's not okay. Yes the district needs to close that gap but we also know historically that may not happen tomorrow.

In the meantime, as a community, how do we come together to keep kids connected. When we push kids out, they end up on the

street and end up getting into more trouble. They tend to come back with a bad attitude, reacting to the trauma, and they're more likely to drop out and more likely end up going to prison. As opposed to saying goodbye, we don't want you anymore, it is still the administration's responsibility to play a role in getting kids back on track. And what we're totally disregarding is the fact that our kids are getting into trouble because they're asking for help. Something obviously is going on, kids don't just act out because they are evil. They act out because something is going on, there is trauma in their lives and their education system has failed them.

*The ideal situation would be that we transform our school culture—it has to be. No more police in our schools, preferably. Which happens to be a very touchy subject that I've found is not necessarily divided along black white conservative liberal. There's a difference of opinion that's not easily addressed because fear is the common denominator. Meanwhile the latinx community is terrified of police officers and most students of color feel very targeted, and again, not all but we also do not speak to the students about it. We speak to the parents who are the holders of fear. But when you look at you've already and parkland you've already SROs didn't do s***. And when you look at the research again taking emotion out of it, the research doesn't show that kids are any safer with armed policeman's in the school and it also impacts primarily again that disproportionate treatment that mostly the kids who are targeted are black and brown and students in special education and those are the kids, and again those are the voices that we don't get to hear because the voices screaming the loudest are mostly White and they don't get it what it's like for people to be around an armed police officer, what historically has happened, that feeling that comes with it. So ideally we would have a school culture where everyone feels like they belong and we find ways to reach kids. Traditional education isn't for everyone; we should have more options for school districts this size. As of last year our student population was up to 49% of color, our professional teaching staff was about 6%. What does that look like? You are a kid and you look around and everyone practically in charge is white. What is the message, that right there says a lot to a child. But then the janitors are all Black.*

According to the data, our school district, KCSD, suspends BIPOC students, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities at a much higher rate than students who are white, economically secure, and without disabilities. My understanding is that KCSD is not unique in our state, and hence the desperate need for a statewide bill would at least mark a starting place for someday eliminating suspensions altogether and

replacing them, instead, with restorative practices. What do we think happens to most of these children when we push them out? At best, we hope they are in a safe and supervised setting, as my son was. At worst, they are out on the street getting into even more trouble. And then, of course, there is the transition back from suspension which I've observed can be so troublesome for students because of the stigma of suspension and because they've missed so much time in their classrooms (the education schools are required to provide during suspension is hardly adequate). Students then become even more vulnerable to cyclical suspensions, dropping out of school, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

My conversation with Carla to me was eye-opening and startling. I was hoping it was a rumor when I heard that states prepare prison beds based on fourth grade test scores. And then I learned that in 2010, across the United States, illiteracy is found in up to 60% of prison inmates (Forbes 2010). Additionally, a high percentage of juvenile offenders, estimated to be around 85%, were also found to have difficulty with reading (Forbes 2010). These figures suggest that inadequate reading skills at an early age can predict the likelihood of incarceration in one's future (Forbes 2010). As I continued to research, I came across another article about a study demonstrating how early schooling affects kids who enter as young as 3-years old. For Black and minority children who are already statistically over-disciplined, it means a world of difference. The study showed that as a result of going to school at earlier ages, these kids become almost "allergic to control". It went on to explain the difficulty in trying to train children that young to sit for long periods of the day and constantly berating them with commands. I call this the war on play. When I think about the idea of children becoming allergic to control, I can see why they would have problems with authority. It causes me to wonder about the reasons we need to send our kids to school in the first place? Maybe because we're stuck in the rat race, therefore the number one reason is because we have to go to work everyday.

When I think about all the desperate parents eager to find affordable child care, enrolling children in free Universal Pre-K at 4 years old, and now at 3! Parents of low income families trying to make ends meet think this service is a God send. And then I ask myself, what does the government get out of spending the tax dollars to offer an additional year of education to families for free? Just think, as children start having behavioral issues at younger ages because they've become allergic to being controlled by authority, this will start them down the wrong path even earlier in life (Forbes 2010). This is an example of how the school system grooms students to feed the prison industrial complex—from Pre-K to Prison. In less than 18 years the state would recoup their return on investment tenfold.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, let's take a closer look at the kinship between schools and prisons through this phenomenon called the school to prison pipeline. Statistics show that Black and Brown children, primarily boys, are disproportionately singled out of classrooms for minor behavioral offenses at three times the rate of white students which is astonishing when considering Blacks only make up a fraction of the population. And as a result of not seeing adequate role-models, feeling alienated, and not being mentally engaged with the curriculum, Black and Brown boys are often the first to fail out or drop out of learning altogether. This is the strategy for eradicating Black people out of educational opportunity, leaving only menial opportunities available or a life of crime that leads to residency in a criminal institution. With the lack of adequate education and actual life preparation, the kids that are pushed out of school have very little job skills for the future in-turn, leaving them ripe for a life of criminalization. And thanks to the induction of School Resource Officers (SRO), which are law enforcement officers

stationed in schools. Now it's even easier to keep the prison systems full when SRO's are inappropriately used as outsourcing for disciplinary actions. In 2011-12 the Department of Education reported approximately 92,000 student arrests for the school year nationally. In 2018 Black males accounted for 33% of the total male prison population which is, "...nearly triple their 12% share of the U.S. adult population. Whites accounted for 30% of prisoners, about half their 63% share of the adult population." (Gramlich, 2020) And Black women, catching up to their male counterparts, had an incarceration rate of 29% in 2019. Think about it, in 2014 African Americans made up 2.3 million, of the total 6.8 million correctional population (not including all the people identifying as BIPOC, just Black). Now compared to the amount of slaves reported in the census of 1850, being 3.6 million, it's nearly the same. Which means America has practically recaptured its slave labor force back through the PIC.

Prison, parole, and probation operations generate an \$81 billion annual cost to U.S. taxpayers, while police and court costs, bail bond fees, and prison phone fees generate another \$100 billion in costs that are paid by individuals. According to journalist Matt Taibbi, major investors in the prison industry include Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Fidelity Investments, General Electric and The Vanguard Group. *Bloomberg report* also notes that in the past decade the number of inmates in for-profit prisons throughout the U.S. rose 44 percent. [Additionally] both CCA and GEO Group, the two largest operators of private facilities, have been expanding

into the immigrant detention market. Although the combined revenues of CCA and GEO Group were about \$4 billion in 2017 from private prison contracts, their number one customer was ICE. Corporations that utilize prison labor include Walmart, Eddie Bauer, Victoria's Secret, Microsoft, Starbucks, McDonald's, Nintendo, Chevron Corporation, Bank of America, Koch Industries, Boeing and Costco Wholesale. (Adams, Klinsky, and Chhetri 2020)

All of these stats and facts are examples of the extension of Blackness used for the modern assignment of labor. The paradox is that while Blacks bring in billions for the prison industrial complex (PIC) and the judicial system, they themselves don't directly profit from any of it. Patrick Wolfe stated, "Even after slavery, Black people continued to have value as a source of super-cheap labour (providing an incitement to poor Whites), so their dispensability was tempered." (Wolfe, 2006) And since the passing of the thirteenth amendment, this immoral form of modern slavery is completely legal, according to those who wrote the constitution. "If every state had to pay workers to do the jobs prisoners are forced to do, the salaries would amount to billions... Prisons are a profitable business. They are a way of legally perpetuating slavery. In every state more and more prisons are being built and even more are on the drawing board. Who are they for? They certainly aren't planning to put white people in them. Prisons are part of this government's genocidal war against Black and Third World people." (Goodreads)

Subsequently, racism and the perpetual predation of communities of color are invaluable to the interests of the PIC as well as the maintenance of the American economy at large.

Chapter 3: White Supremacy Culture

Throughout this body of work, I have presented a critical analysis as it pertains to the role of the public school system in society. As a reminder to how we got here, this inquiry originally began as a result of having curiosity around our modern day school system and how the practice of attending school became integral in our lives. In the ways I have previously described, our public school system is a construct of social conditioning, racism and self-policing that is extremely inadequate at encouraging diversity and a facade for teaching real critical thinking skills. Instead, what we see is the role of school as an injection tool for conformity by the dominant culture causing identity challenges and duality in a child's mind (Du Bois 1968). So in recognition of the previous chapters, I have brought to bear a concluding theme of white supremacy as a final lens through which we can look closer at the insidious ways systematic racism and the culture of whiteness penetrates our lives, our beingness and influences us daily. In an attempt to contemplate this issue as more than a question of methodology, I begin by simply asking, *What is it all for?* As in, what is the purpose of all this trickery, these illusions, smoke and mirrors of misinformation? *And who does it benefit?*

White supremacy is not just an idea in people's heads that I'm superior to you. The kind of white supremacy that stagnates Black people in our country is applied supremacy. It prioritizes whiteness in our daily interactions; that's white skin in the job market, in real estate deals, and in the domination of our decision-making process where white ideals dictate the trajectory of progress, etc. It directs how we move in the world, whereby it dominates methodology.

“In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise—a conceptual nucleus—of a right to exclude. This conceptual nucleus has proven to be a powerful center around which whiteness as property has taken shape. Following the period of slavery and

conquest, white identity became the basis of racialized privilege that was ratified and legitimized in law as a type of status property. After legalized segregation was overturned, whiteness as property evolved into a more modern form through the law's ratification of the settled expectations of relative White privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline.” (Harris, 1993)

Our laws and systems by which the government operates, put in place prior to Black emancipation, were inherently embedded in this skewed methodology of white supremacy that remains present till this very day, and continues to be modified to function with the intention of ensuring Black people are last in the lineup of humanity and therefore resources. Which is why there exists the deep confusion I spoke about in chapter one where this system doesn't always make sense, especially to POC. We're talking about ways of living, for example including the taking of lives that is and has been incentivized for whites where they can easily justify the need to commit such acts, while Blacks, those who still retain their humanity, are in shock as to the purpose for living this way. Hence the system at hand makes sense to whites as a result of material incentives and remains bizarre to the perspective of their victims.

Schools are used to train and condition young humans into these systems at an age when we feel they are powerless and too impressionable to question and reject these ways of being. And by introducing white supremacy culture at this susceptible stage, it's more likely to become internalized and habitual—essentially all they know. “Race continues to be a ready-made filter for interpreting events, informing social interactions, and grounding identities and identification in school” (Ferguson 2001). White people learn that they are important and prioritized in the order of things, juxtaposed to Black people who learn that being Black is an extension of diversity, which by default from the status quo, falls in the territory of the unfamiliar. And unlike how society has been taught to embrace norms and the familiar, Blacks have been made to reside in

the territory of the unfamiliar, that which is different, problematic, not the norm and therefore counternormal. “Racism is not only history and sociology, economics and politics. Racism is also the psychology of subjugation. The inferior must be made to feel inferior every day, to suffer their subjugation, to be dehumanized in accordance with the colonizer's rules. Thus, as Frantz Fanon so eloquently argued, colonized people, like colonized cultures, are no longer open, dynamic, and fertile.” (Smith, 2016) Rather, Blacks are complicated, not easy to understand or work with, not favored and therefore their trajectory of building confidence and a sense of self-belonging is stunted throughout their engagement with not only the education system, but subsequent systems as well. This is the systemic reason why nonwhite children do not see reflections of him or herself represented in the leadership and faculty, and aren't taught adequate history. And thanks to the lack of Black and Indigenous stories taught in schools, this long process of cultural divorce and erasure, and most times, the pressure to escape poverty makes people prime candidates to embrace indoctrination as a vehicle of transcendence. Due to the social construct that is reinforced everyday, the child just wants to find acceptance and belonging so that they are not being labeled. Meanwhile schools reinforce all parts of this messaging through their process of socialization and those that don't fit the status quo are purposely made to feel as if they don't belong.

The system of racism, being an essential apparatus of white supremacy, is not just a demonstration of America's culture of cruelty. More than anything else, it is the system by which material things, necessities and all resources are distributed. In other words racism is America's default distribution system which manages the incentives that ensures the investment of all its stakeholders. Therefore when POC point to systemic racism as the central obstacle to their progress, what we're illustrating are the extensive cases where Blackness is neither prioritized

nor considered, even as a matter of human rights. Hence the famous phrase following the Dred Scott v. Sandford case that Blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (ACSLaw, “No Rights” 2020). This is a poignant example of our judicial system being the White man’s apparatus for upholding White supremacy as the ultimate law of the land. Therefore, the mass of beneficiaries (of color) cheated out of various forms of ownership aren't in a position today to secure their own sustenance and nurture themselves, but forced to depend on the systems that function according to the parameters of white supremacy that preside over their livelihoods as a result of historic manipulation. These systems are how we have chosen to organize people in order to control their fate through the control of their means for self-sufficiency. It’s present in the wage Gap, the wealth Gap, the education Gap—they are all proof of how White supremacy serves and prioritizes White people versus all others.

Rob

I remember asking Rob Whittaker about all of this because as an African American male, he’s pretty successful for someone who holds a skeptical outlook on education. Rob is a dedicated community member, the founder and executive director of a not-for-profit organization and an overall good guy. I would also say he is the apotheosis of Black resistance at its finest on a grassroots level. I describe him as an actioneer. That’s his innate gift—schooling can’t take credit for teaching him that. He’s the number one person to speak with if you; A, want to get something done, and B, need encouragement or advice about how to get something done by very creative, unconventional means because that often seems like the only way to do anything when you're a POC and not monetarily endowed. Rob is also a very humble human being who has worked very hard in his life to engineer the opportunities that allow you to know a little

something about *everything*. And I know we all know someone like that, but I really admire the organic nature of how he's gathered his skills while being very skeptical of formal education. Born and raised in the South Bronx by a single father who's best parenting advice was to go explore life and aim to be anything you want to be, Robert has done precisely that. Today, through all his accomplishments; author, printer, publisher, marketer, rapper, songwriter, actor, producer, artist, radio show host and DJ, graphic and web designer, father, award-winning business owner and visionary, entrepreneur and now fashion designer. It all sounds very glamorous, but none of it is what you would imagine when one accomplishes these things unconventionally. I chose to interview Robert because he has all the characteristics of a self-motivated, independent thinker from knowing him personally for fourteen years as my partner and friend.

During our talk, Rob innocently peered at me from underneath a vibrant purple baseball cap that adorned his newest collection. It had bright red letters across the front matching his custom red shoes, paired with a vibrant purple hoodie that married the ensemble like a match made in heaven, Robert said:

Education to me is the corporate construct of learning. Original learning for us was our acts of survival. Looking at slavery and those of us who made it through that time, everything we did and learned to do was about surviving. Reading was survival, cooking was survival, songs, even arts and crafts was all survival. While white people were living we were doing that. How to maneuver and lie to them was the learning we had to do to survive. That was our "education."

Education today is like the racially inequitable portion of learning. It's like that we were all learning, both Blacks and Whites, but it's almost as if they stole a part of learning and set it aside in a structured way and called it education—purposefully dressing it up to be inaccessible. My father encouraged me to go to college, but I didn't care to go because it represented a game that I didn't care to play. I just knew that what I wanted to learn, I could

get it without college. And once I realized that, I saw examples of how to do that everywhere.

Like Rob, in my experience I was also too busy living in the real world tackling *homelessness*—school was not on my purview. I had no financial support while I went to school, so I had to get a job immediately. It almost seemed like real people didn't bother with college. As if it was a fabricated reality set aside for people who had perfect circumstances to waste time meandering with required courses, like math and science, that folks in the *real world* couldn't spare time to benefit from. For me, just like Robert, experience was everything. If I just knew how to do stuff, I could get by. Eat, play, and live—that was the goal. So I ended up going to a trade school to learn computer operating systems like Microsoft and DOS. Again, it seemed logical to me that having the experience to get a job done should have been everything. But even when you have the knowledge and plenty of experience, that all gets ignored in exchange for this arbitrary requirement to produce a piece of paper from an “accredited” institution that supposedly declares you have achieved an “education.” Although there’s no proof that you have actually learned anything. This causes me to question the deliberate facades in society that “confuses schooling with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new,” pointed out in chapter one (Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 1970). Through this competition, the educated vs. the experienced, history has revealed that the things we have been taught to covet, like college degrees and private school educations, are obtained by those with privilege, and privilege is reserved for the White and the rich. And it is for the benefit of these assignments that the school system, being a mirror of our society and working in support of our political system, continues to perpetuate racism. And as it is subsequently set up, those who don't follow can increase their chances

of finding a home in prison as their alternative. But then there's people like Rob who are an example of being neither here nor there.

Have you ever wondered what's a career but endless work? And who wants to work endlessly? Can we work just enough to eat, play and live? Living is that free time when you do whatever, whenever and there's no commitment to responsibilities. Living life for yourself, not to perform labor for others. Some people call this freedom. Careers are full of responsibilities following you and calling you back from living. Society tries to bestow just enough consequences on living to make sure you have no other choice but to follow the most charted pathway to career-building. However, career-building isn't just linked to a fancy title and a way to make a living, but also responsibilities and other entanglements, like status and reputation—inextricably an entire web of societal intricacies (Geertz 2017) and a lifestyle that accompanies society's standard of success. I remember reading the Debt: The First 5,000 Years and The Dawn of Everything by Graeber and it was so eye-opening to understand there had to have been a time in history before people held grudges against each other called debt. As with the reading of Body of Power Spirit of Resistance by Jean Comaroff, I got to read about the Tswana people of South Africa and actually fathom a moment in history before labor became commodified time that we sold in the market (2005: 71). Instead, it was something normally kept to oneself unless there was a need to share labor with loved ones through certain additional deeds (Comaroff: 2005: 71). And during those occurrences, it was understood as the giving of a piece of one's spirit because of the spiritual significance it held (Comaroff: 2005: 71). Those books gave me a perspective on precolonial history that changed my life. Now in today's world when I see our media outlets tracking the unemployment rate as something negative and messages about labor rights and equal opportunity employment I see how the right to keep your labor is a

narrative that's been excluded from the conversation. It's so long gone that again, not having to work has become another privilege reserved for the White and the rich. Unless you're a kid, but yet schooling then becomes your job. Ironic how it follows nearly the same schedule, it also comes with attendance mandates and kids are just as exhausted as adults.

Education is an apparatus of power and dominance, a “model that works”, brought here from European nations used to reproduce the existing systems of organization we live by. Schools are used to subliminally condition young humans with mindsets that will support systems like capitalism and labor at an age when they are powerless and too impressionable to question and reject these ways of being. I love learning new and interesting things. Especially when I have control over those things and my interaction with them. I also control the way in which I can use information or not; in that way informal learning has served me well. When I think about our educational system, though, I don't think about enjoyment and autonomy. Instead, I seriously wonder why courses are so rushed and replete with unrealistic amounts of information to retain in unrealistic time frames—it's a downright stressful process. I think about a labyrinth at the end of the hallway that I'm being forced into and the way it attempts to shape and reform me out of the person that has already been formed. Only people who have the cheat codes can bypass it. For those of us who can't go around the process, we have to go through it. And that means to voluntarily join the social cult and try to survive indoctrination.

And by introducing a gateway into “grind culture” at a young age, it's more likely to become habitual—all they know. Grind culture, also known as burnout culture, says that our self-worth is directly linked to our rate of productivity (Hersey 2022).

So many of us desperately say we want to break free, but none of us quite know what freedom really looks or feels like, so we do what we know and try to make it tolerable.

Sometimes in our confusion we think making more money is going to be the answer, or we conjure up other solutions. This cycle is like a ritual of spark and smother—an idea or inspiration sparks and we smother out the flame with “good reasoning” and justification—dreams deferred (Hughes 1994). But what we’re really saying in this act of self-denial is that I don’t deserve time off and I don’t deserve to spend time with the people I love, because earning a living is the most important task of my time here on earth. In some aspects of our very narrow viewpoint, making money to cover our so-called responsibilities does make sense, but thinking out of that colonial framework allows us to think more expansively as to just why is it that human beings have to *earn* the right to live? Exploring such inquiries helps us to see how warped our world reality really can be. And these are the habits and messages our children inherit in our footsteps. These are the lessons that get ingrained everyday that we use to deny ourselves happiness, ignore our inner voice and participate in herding our children off to the schoolhouse for their dose of conditioning. How many times have you wanted to do something, but you believed you just couldn't *make* the time? And time is the *most* precious thing we have to share, our most scarce resource that salaries cannot buy.

When will we see the proof in the pudding that our humanity is under attack? Do we truly believe that we'll ever pay enough dues for “the man” to release us from the go-go-go machine-type culture (Hersey, 2022) that insulates his own experience of the American Dream? Assata Shakur tells us, “No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes, if they know that that knowledge will help set you free” (Goodreads 2023). Our innate intelligence (and consciousness) is at war, we are heading to our own extinction as a result of the chronic disrespect and heavy exploitative practices that support capitalistic pathologies against the land, our mother (Shiva &

Shiva 2020). In (White) man's law he has set in motion agreements that are contrary to nature's law and to say it isn't fair, is an immense understatement. And as a result we are now struggling to survive our current state of global warming and bio genocide, such as the sixth mass extinction (Shiva & Shiva 2020) we are in the midst of at this very moment in time. But we're told it's okay in the name of money and technology.

“White supremacy is a project of colonization - a project of "appropriating a place or domain for one's use" (according to the Oxford Dictionary). White supremacy colonizes our minds, our bodies, our psyches, our spirits, our emotions ... as well as the land and the water and the sky and the air we breathe. White supremacy tells us who has value, who doesn't, what has value, what doesn't in ways that reinforce a racial hierarchy of power and control that dis-eases and destroys all it touches. When I say...that our goal is to get free, what I mean is that we are engaged in the collective project of freeing ourselves from this project of colonization. We are decolonizing ourselves - our minds, our bodies, our psyches, our spirits, our emotions, our work, our homes, and the land, water, sky, and air” (Tema, 2021: 3-4).

We are sick and infected by the way colonialism affects us not just in the physical sense, or spatially, it also affects us intellectually—as in intellectual, cognitive colonization. And as a result we have a colonized consciousness. The invasiveness of white supremacy permeates our consciousness, thereby we've developed a colonized consciousness. In public school white supremacy shows up in messages like, *“ignore how you feel, obey, don't think for yourself, listen to others, don't trust yourself. It says to find your confidence in competition, otherwise known as, in opposition to others. Camaraderie is worthless and what really matters is finding the weaknesses of others so you can be better than them,”* Finney added to the latter segment of our interview. *“We're not connecting to the kids and giving them a foundation, a dimension of themselves that matters.”* This very important piece Finney pointed out is the most crucial

element missing in our public schools and that's human connection. If only we took the time to acknowledge emotions and feelings and tended to them with compassion, this world would be a different place. *"It's not just about severing the brain to discard the rest of the body. It should be about how to embrace the self holistically with empathy, compassion and appreciation as equally valid actions of learning."*

When I ask the question, what is it all for, referring to the fast pace, hustle and bustle lifestyle—it's so easy to conjure up a belief of our entitlement to what's called the American dream. We all want to live a good life, but how do we each define a good life? Once again, we're told to work hard and we can achieve anything we want and we believe it. Typically, for a woman, the concern is whether you can have a family and a career to follow your good education. Maybe a house with a white picket fence, 2.5 children, a dog and a minivan? If I dream it, I can achieve it, right? And in doing that, so many people are unhappy and depressed, buried in credit card debt and student loans. And for those of us who can't cash out on Whiteness as property (Harris 1993), I think you know that this so-called "dream" is farther away for us than it is for others. We have to work twice as hard in hopes of defying the odds to achieve the ultimate dream, which should be twice as sweet, but instead, it's really all an illusion. So chasing the "dream" becomes another "model that works". If this country is a melting pot of everyone who's chasing that dream, couldn't this place be a coming together of different cultures that recognize mutual respect—an example of cultural relativism at its finest (Abu-Lughod 2002: 786-87)? We're in this together both blacks and white, all tools of the system in some way. In my final thoughts I feel I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that culturally relevant teaching counters traditional education and raises students' critical consciousness by addressing issues of social justice and racial inequality in the classroom - something presented by Watson and Wiggan is the

idea of the whole self which contrasts education's ignorance of this lens (2016). "Both Smitherman (1977, p. 75) and Boykin (1986, p. 63) describe Black culture as characterized by spirituality, harmony with nature, and being "in time" rather than "on time." Boykin (1986, p. 63)" (Ogbu, 2004).

In these closing remarks I'd also like to introduce a special more expansive kind of ideology that I would be doing a disservice to myself, my readers and all African Americans if I failed to mention that I am piggybacking on the shoulders of Tricia Hersey who is an outlier, and a rule-breaker, chaplain, poet, theatermaker, performance artist, teaching artist and community organizer (Hersey, 2022). As I attempt to encapsulate and convey the spirit and essence of her work, I'm finding the tools of academia to be an inadequate apparatus for this translation. So I guess what may be of arbitrary importance to this academic arena is not that Hersey has saved and impacted millions of lives with her message, but whether or not she did a bid in higher education. Yes, Tricia Hersey went to college, if you must know—divinity school at that. Despite the merits we attach to certain accolades, I say Hersey is an important scholar, among her other titles to include angel or profit, that literally saved my life from being taken by White supremacy. In the education system, we are penalized for the recognition of spiritual matters, instead taught that our self-worth is tied to our use-value (Marx 2007) and level of productivity. Case in point, I am up now at 4:47 in the morning because I can't sleep due to worrying about the conclusion of this project and the capturing of fading thoughts in the moment. No one cares whether I sleep, or if the stress of turning in a 60 to 80-page log to sit on someone's shelf will cause me to lose my life. That is precisely why I chose this topic at hand, which is to express what I think is a hazard to humanity is that White supremacy has a blatant abuse and disregard for what is sacred against that which is instrumental (Hersey, 2022). As we move closer to modern ways of living that are

less spiritual and more rational, I believe our bodies become storage facilities for all the toxins we take on in the overload of junk media, junk information, junk food, junk energy and I could go on (Shiva & Shiva 2020). I eat and breathe toxins. As a matter of fact, my toxin storage facility has increased by 30 lbs since returning to college. They are a part of me mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally, consciously and subconsciously. Even as I write this, like Hersey, I am on my own pilgrimage (Hersey, 2022), acknowledging myself as a spiritual being on a spiritual journey using anthropology as an apparatus through education to learn, enlighten, decolonize (McClaurin, 2001) and teach. What rejuvenates my soul is that I am thumbing my way through the combination of all of this information to forge a new pathway that will re-engage with the tools that white supremacy has denounced, discredited and ignored. There is no tool like honoring the self and knowing the self and going within my lived experience to find the truth that settles my life-long confusion. As a person of color with this lived experience, because I am closer to the trauma, I assure you that I am closer to the answer. Throughout my educational training I've been told that spiritual matters can not be a contender when in fact I believe this creates a discourse that is most prominent in the decolonization of anthropology and to the acknowledgment of Indigenous wisdom that recognizes spirituality in all things. I believe spirituality is the nexus and the basis of all things such as our entire human existence (Hersey, 2022). I've been told that matters of religion and spirituality can only be studied as subjects of anthropology. This reminds me of how Black people and so many unnamed Indigenous tribes across the world were only worthy of becoming subjects for the production of knowledge furthering the harms induced by this branch of education. And I believe it is also the same with matters of the land, which is also a living being but would only be recognized as a subject negating its role as my relative and the foundation of everything, just as spirituality is also the

foundation. Again, as I have discussed throughout this manuscript, the foundation of education and schooling stems from the culture of White supremacy and I'd like to acknowledge the instruments of measurement supplied by academia are inadequate as an attempt to offer a diagnosis in that it fails to acknowledge matters of the spirit and if I had the sources and the time to elaborate on this point I would have loved to expanded this work in that way.

Hersey believes capitalism and white supremacy disregard humanness, because both encourage people to overwork and overproduce at a machine-level pace even when exhausted (Hersey, 2022). To push back against these two violent systems, she says people must prioritize rest and not tie their worth to the quantity of production (Hersey, 2022). We must understand that we are spiritual beings navigating life in a material world, and that opens us to the possibility of rest as a spiritual practice rather than our obsession with individualism and our disconnection from spirituality (Hersey, 2022). White supremacy has a way of manifesting itself in many, many different ways on account the magnitude in which it permeates everything (Hersey, 2022). White culture has a way of keeping us busy accomplishing goals, climbing the ladder, aiming to be a mother, wife, student, employee, like myself (Hersey, 2022). But in examining my lifestyle very closely throughout the course of this project, especially as it relates to the upbringing of my own children, being a mother is an immensely important duty, and I find it bizarre that caring for them is a responsibility that should be outsourced to strangers. One of the most precious qualities of homeschooling has been having the power over where I choose to spend my time and spending it with them. I'm always reminiscing with parents that tell me stories about when their kids were little, and so I'm not there yet and therefore I still have time to make it count. The way this world has been designed, my children are my refuge, making memories with them is the one thing I look forward to most that feels like it really counts. Meanwhile the corporations I've

dedicated my life to over the years, they won't technically miss me when I'm gone, they'll just replace me. But my children can't replace their mother. I am the only one like me. So in talking about time and the various directions our attention is being pulled and divided as part of the attention economy, I'd like to offer a cautionary provision that self-care is warfare (Odell 2019). And as someone whose very existence is an act of resistance that guides everything I do and all the ways I must resist white supremacy culture in order to retain the quality of life that I believe I should have, I believe in The Nap Ministry in which rest is resistance (Hersey, 2022). Hersey says we don't know what sufficient rest looks like because "everything we've been told about rest is a lie" (Hersey, 2022). Similarly, I believe everything we've been told about freedom is also a lie. And rest *is* warfare (Odell 2019). So with that, I will remain here - resisting (Hersey, 2022).

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