

9-30-2024

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Recommended Citation

Ali, Sunni (2024) "Critical Literacy and Hip Hop," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 8: Iss. 4, Article 11. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol8/iss4/11>

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Critical Literacy and Hip Hop

About the Author(s)



Sunni Ali's Zoom Advising Meeting

Sunni Ali is an associate professor of Northeastern Illinois University's (NEIU) Goodwin College of

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He earned his Doctorate in Educational Administration from Roosevelt University and holds a Type 75 Principal's Certificate, Type 9 Social Science Certificate, and LBS1 Special Education Certificate Endorsement.

Professor Ali's career is a testament to his versatility. With 26 years of experience as a high school social science and special education instructor and two years as a district administrator, he has demonstrated his ability to excel in diverse roles.

Since his tenure at NEIU, he has produced thirteen [published journal articles and five texts](#).

Texts:

- Upcoming Book: The Public School System Got Me F'd Up!
- [An American Love Story: Islam and the Black Experience](#)
- [Lessons Learned: Critical Conversations in Hip-Hop & Social Justice](#)
- [Here's to This Flag of Mine](#)
- [My Schoolhouse is a Ghost Town](#)

Despite his role at NEIU, Sunni Ali's influence extends beyond the university. He dedicates his time to mentoring and working with a diverse group of high school students at Chicago High School for the Arts. His unwavering passion, dedication, and commitment to youth and adult learners are a testament to his profound impact on education.

Keywords

Hip Hop, Culturally Responsive Teaching



Critical Literacy & Hip-Hop

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Abstract

Integrating critical literacy and conscious Hip-Hop in the classroom setting offers numerous benefits. It allows students to engage more effectively in conversations about contemporary topics, enhances their ability to integrate cultural perspectives, and provides a fresh perspective on the challenges they face in school and within their communities.

When teachers apply a diverse curriculum that resonates with young people, it enhances their ability to better engage students in learning. Ultimately, this should be the academic norm in school and exist as part of the teaching culture to challenge traditional framings that have neglected and disregarded minority people's culture. Combining critical literacy with conscience Hip-Hop allows the two to intersect and enhance a teacher's pedagogical practice.

Keywords: Hip Hop, Culturally Responsive Teaching

Introduction

Reading is fundamental—or it once was. Most books are written intentionally to enlighten and empower a person's intellectual capital. Reading alone opens a Pandora's Box into other worlds, perspectives, and realities that spark an imagination.

It builds an understanding of the unknown, allowing people to discover new information, perspectives, and insights on topics they know little about. Reading further expands comprehension and the conscious mind to think critically and find solutions to complex and challenging problems. Without reading, what type of world would we have today?

Nevertheless, reading, like everything else these days, has decreased. More people are paying attention to their smartphones, social media accounts, and other technologically savvy instruments that have diminished people's ability to digest information through a book.

The data from a survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) revealed that: *"In 2022, 53% of U.S. adults read literature and/or books of some kind (compared to 57.1% in 2017). Data indicate a sharp decline in reading over the last decade. The percent of*

U.S. adults who read at least one book (in print or electronically) in 2022 was 48.5, 6.1 percentage points lower than in 2012” (2023, pg, 1).

With folks reading less to discover important information and fact-based valid sources, people are more likely to get information from biased, skewed, and deceptive online references. Critical reading and digesting knowledge have helped education evolve. Critical thinking from literacy has encouraged many schools to reform archaic professional practices. Through literary lenses and scholarship, the field of education has grown in many school districts, improving how they treat kids and work with minority populations.

Professional development education workshops continue to involve teachers reading books and discussing strategies they have discovered to implement best practices in their buildings and classrooms. In addition, school policies have been able to change due to scholarship in the field where former teachers, professors, or educational think tanks have written about the need for schools to improve their practices toward families, students, and communities.

As such, special education continues to develop and improve, and culturally responsive practices have advanced the curriculum and instruction. Teacher-student relationships and parental-teacher-administrator connections also continue to progress. Although the field still needs to improve, critical literacy has unquestionably helped spur school development. Hip-hop has also transformed educational development and environments. Conscience rap, which emerged in the late 1970s through the 2000s, attempted to address the issues and concerns that challenged marginalized communities. In hip-hop songs, institutions like schools were attacked for dumbing down and miseducating Black and brown kids.

Through its lyrics, hip-hop messaging said that education was weaponized to keep certain groups of people from knowing the truth. The Five-Percenter, a Muslim religious group originating from New York, claimed that education was designed to teach 95% lies and 5% truth (Muhammad, 2008). Only people with low incomes and righteous teachers could change the formula to overturn or alter a disinformation system for children.

Not surprisingly, several famous Hip-Hop artists are Five-Percenter who discussed the problems with education and what it will take to reform the system, e.g., *J. Cole, Jay-Z, Method Man, Rakim, Wu-Tang Clan, Brand Nubian, Nas, Mos Def, Common, Poor Righteous Teachers.*

Other artists and groups also discussed the flaws with the educational system and how it remains a vital tool of white supremacy to misguide and miseducate Black and brown children, e.g., *Dead Prez*, *Public Enemy*, and *De La Soul*.

Critical literacy and Hip-Hop intersect with informing people about school conditions and why change is necessary to transform how we educate people. Specifically, it addresses how Black and brown children are mistreated in public schools that have failed them. Also, it challenges the school community, local leaders, and activists to work together to create a design that nurtures, loves, empowers, and re-educates the masses.

The Need for School Reform

David Levine, Robert Lowe, Bob Peterson, and Rita Tenorio have written about the need for school reform since the mid-1980s. In their classic educational piece, *Rethinking Schools*, they attack the biases in the curriculum and explain why there remains a need to diversify, magnify, and celebrate people of color who have been written out of history since the founding of the American public school system.

Stories from their books, articles, and magazines capture what teachers have done to change how they teach while instructing educators on best practices that transform learning in the classroom. These scholars' efforts to implement school reform have resulted in many more books, conferences, and teacher workshops.

Susan Wise Baur (2019) goes on to elaborate on the importance of establishing organizations and scholarship that push back on inequitable teaching practices, indicating:

“When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world, and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing” (pg. 24).

She even goes further, stating:

“Our K–12 school system is an artificial product of market forces. It isn’t a good fit for all—or even most—students. It prioritizes a single way of understanding the world over all others, pushes children into a rigid set of grades with little regard for individual maturity, and slaps “disability” labels over differences in learning style” (pg. iv).

Both quotes clarify the need for educators and students to reread history, create and develop welcoming cultural conversations that provide an alternative lens away from an overbearing

Eurocentric perspective, encourage intellectual activism and discovery, and build a vision around the instructional community and student-centered instruction.

‘They’ Schools

Hip-hop group *Dead Prez* wrote a song from the mid-90s called ‘*They Schools.*’ In it, they capture the horror children encounter when entering a school building on a typical day. They are first met by mean, grinning security guards with sophisticated metal detectors behind them. They must remove their belts and lift their shirt as they enter the building. They wear a school-issued uniform and place an issued I.D. card around their neck. Believe it or not, many students attending urban public schools go through this daily, which is much worse than traveling through an airport before *September 9, 2001*. As the artists say in the song,

*“That's why my niggas got a problem with this shit
That's why niggas be droppin' out that shit because it don't relate
You go to school, the fuckin' police searchin' you
You walkin' in your shit like this a military compound
Know what I'm sayin'?”*

Students undergoing this type of interaction are exhausted even before they start their school day. Some had already escaped other trappings from their neighborhood and dealt with family challenges before entering a school building.

A school should be inviting and embracing toward learners as they enter to start their day. It should not terrorize and traumatize them even further. What happened to "Good Morning" to start a person's day and apply it to them all day? However, for some kids attending urban schools, entering a schoolhouse is similar to entering a major airport or modern-day prison. *Dez Prez* goes on to tell us why Black and brown kids hate school,

*"Cause see, the schools ain't teachin' us nothin
They aren't teachin' us nothing but how not to be slaves and hard workers. For white
people to build up their shit
Make the businesses successful while it is exploiting us
Know what I am sayin'?"*

And they aren't teaching us anything related to solving our own problems. Know what I'm sayin'?

Ain't teaching us how to get crack out of the ghetto

They ain't teaching us how to stop the police from murdering us

And brutalizing us, they ain't teaching us how to get our rent paid."

Suppose we continue exposing children to a curriculum where they do not see themselves, where schools do not offer relevant courses such as financial literacy, vocational training, accounting, critical and relevant literacy, entrepreneurship, health and modern science, contemporary history, and film studies. What is the purpose of having the buildings open? To test Black and brown kids to see how far they lag behind their white counterparts? Or better yet, close their schools because they were not learning anyway.

Rethinking Schools and *Dead Prez* shared similar thoughts and perspectives about why school reform is necessary and dire. Without doing so, students attending urban schools will remain hostage to a building that neither values their presence nor considers them essential to learn about in the curriculum.

How You See Me Is How You Teach Me

Theresa Perry and Lisa Delpit have argued for years about the importance of educators connecting and engaging with Black and brown students in a classroom. Their research has asserted the importance of teachers building relationships with students and believing in their abilities as learners. Unfortunately, some educators continue to be led by tropes about minority communities. When teachers harbor such biases, kids immediately pick up on them and know they do not expect much from them. This especially shows up when Black children are disproportionately the "only one" or the chosen few in a predominately white class (Delpit, 2006). Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa Hillard III (2003), in their book *Young Gifted and Black*, explored several stories of noted African Americans who experienced misconceptions about their intelligence and worthiness while sitting in educational spaces dominated by whites. Perry specifically noted the cases of Malcolm X, Jocelyn Elders, Gwendolyn Parker, Haki Mahabutti, and others. Each of their school incidents involved their intelligence being on trial or having to prove themselves in class to counter the stereotypes about Black people.

She discusses the case of Gwendolyn Parker, an author and T.V. producer, who attended North Carolina public schools and came from a middle-class family. Her father was a pharmacist, and her mother was a teacher.

Despite her background and the great pride Gwendolyn's family taught her while attending the school, she constantly received messages of being a nobody or invisible. Only during Black History Month was she shown exceptional Blacks she could imitate, e.g., Benjamin Banneker, Crispus Attucks George Washington Carver, and Dr. Daniel Hale Williams. Parker describes a story about an excellent essay she wrote in her English class but received a C- because the teacher did not believe she had written it. When she protested the grade and declared that she had written it, the teacher negatively reacted by saying, " You are lucky I gave you a C-" because he asserted that she plagiarized it (pg. 35).

Regardless of the challenges she underwent in finding teachers who believed in her, ultimately, it was her family—her grandmother and mother—who taught her to dive more deeply beyond how someone else chose to define her. They professed that " when you believe in yourself, your heritage, your poetry, your music, your stories, you can grow beyond how someone else chooses to see you" (pg. 36).

Parker saw something different in herself when she learned to discover and tell her story through literacy, family conversations, and a commitment to education. This allowed her to extend her intellectual talent and academic abilities beyond what her public school building allowed her to do.

Each of the narratives, like Parker's, defined how either Blacks succumbed to the pressures of stereotypes or countered them by reconnecting to their own biographies, literacy, and family conversations to understand that they come from influential people and that it is only by believing in themselves that they can extinguish any barriers or misperceptions that attempt to hold them back. It also speaks to the philosophy that teachers who hold mediocre opinions toward students are not only felt by them but also disable their ability to see the value in learning. This remains an important topic because in many urban spaces, few Black and brown instructors run classes, and the majority of teachers are white women. It remains essential for educators, regardless of race, to embellish robust positive attitudes toward Black learners and explicitly counter-narratives and diagnoses that assume an inferior perception of them. If not,

kids can quickly pick up on these pre-existing dispositions and attitudes and will either falter or push back in those situations.

Lisa Delpit (1996) emphasizes the importance of providing Black and brown children with a culturally relevant and responsive education, which is healthy and needed for students and teachers to learn. Too often, white educators have grown up receiving a Eurocentric lens that centers their accomplishments and hardly anyone else's.

Providing a culturally responsive education means that children learn about the importance of their stories, and the educators who build the lessons discover things they were never taught. As a result, a learning community is formed where students and teachers learn together, creating connections between them.

Her most important quote from her book, *Other People's Children* mentioned that:

"We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment - and that is not easy" (p.112).

How we see people is how we teach them and ourselves. Believing in others or people different from you opens a world of possibilities to discover things you never thought existed or knew. This explains why teachers adopting culturally relevant texts and responsive practices in a classroom remain essential to rebuilding curriculums and adding value to students who otherwise would have remained hidden and discarded. As a result, internalized stereotypes and misnomers diminish, and teachers and students feel connected in discovering and learning unknown facts and information. They work together to tap their brilliance, disregarding notions of dominance or superiority one person has over another.

Don't Like

Rappers Chief Keefe, Kanye West, and several other artists teamed up to produce the song *Don't Like*. The explicitly charged lyrics, in short, detail how these artists hate when people make assumptions about them. As such, they become supercharged about who they are while disliking those people.

In a war-like, accusatory tone, Kanye West declares:

*"They smile in my face is what I don't like
They steal your whole sound: that's a soundbite*

The media crucify me like they did Christ

They want to find me not breathin' like they found Mike.”

Kanye's lyrics assert that he knows when people hate him and want nothing to do with him. However, they are forced to deal with his talent. Although the media continues tearing him down while other artists steal and sample his work, giving him no credit, he continues to achieve and perform exceptional music.

In many ways, *Don't Like* profanity-laced lyrics capture how some young people feel toward teachers they believe want nothing to do with them and see no value in their presence in the classroom. As a result, a clash between these two parties, the student and teacher, ensues. Herbert Kohl, in his book, *I Won't Learn From You*, describes what this looks like in classrooms and schools where the teachers do not like their students and the kids do not care for them either. Kohl points out that children intentionally fail and do terribly in class as payback to the teacher. Their refusal to learn and act out in many ways is a way of giving teachers “the finger.” Kohl describes the stories of Barry and Akmir's refusal to learn from him and how they either threw tantrums or intentionally opposed everything he said or did in the classroom. When Kohl reflected on his practices and interactions, he realized the children felt rejected. They had no faith or belief in Kohl and did not think he would treat them differently from what they experienced in school. Acting out and being dismissive was a way for them to define their presence and existence in class.

He goes on to say,

“They accepted the failing grades it produced in exchange for the passive defense of their personal and cultural integrity. This was a class of school failures, and perhaps, I believed then and still believe, the repository for their generation's positive leadership and intelligence” (pg. 45).

The students embraced failure because they felt their teachers and peers saw them in a diminished way, which provoked them to portray such extremes to become visible. Their purpose as students, as they thought, was to be non-compliant. Kohl asserts that the students put a lot of energy into misbehaving and failing to react to how others view them. This caused them to avoid learning.

Like Chief Keef and Kanye, Barry and Akmir disdainfully view schools and teachers. *Don't Like* results in them rebelling against norms and teacher practices. As Gloria Lance Billings (2009) argues, Black kids have to like you for you to teach them. Black children especially must feel you care and believe in them; otherwise, that teacher will catch “hell.” However, how a teacher responds, embraces, and communicates with that child or children remains even more critical. Patience, tolerance, and acceptance of where that child is remain the keys to working with them. They should be given space, boundaries established, and encouraged to work wonders to return them to the fold (Shor, 1992; Foster, 1997). Avoidance, caving in, and rejection add fire to their dislike.

It is complicated, but it remains essential to understand why teachers cannot personalize everything in the classroom and how children grow from their experiences and interactions with people. Eventually, Kohl was able to tap into both Barry and Akmir, allowing them to add value to his space. Kohl learned as much from them as he did from anyone else. By diffusing his attitudes, perceptions, and disgust toward their antics, he could recognize their talents, tap into them, and see the world through their lens, not his own. As such, he developed as a better person and classroom teacher.

Value of Culturally Responsive Practices: Stopping the Attack on Black Girls and Women

Recognizing cultural differences empowers a teacher to distinguish and identify the differences between what is considered obstinate, anxious, frustrated, or playful behavior from children. Too often, Black girls' behaviors or agitations are taken out of context and appear threatening to teachers who do not know how to pick up on social cues. Indeed, the adultification of Black girls remains problematic, as Meyerson (2017) professes in an article entitled, *Adults Think Black Girls Are Older Than They Are- And It Matters*, indicating that:

“Adults impose differential views and expectations about the development of Black girls, stripping them of their identity and innocence as children and potentially diminishing their access to the very rights the system was designed to protect” (pg. 3).

Black girls are more likely to be seen misbehaving in a classroom when their behavioral cues, such as eye-rolling, neck jittering, and sighs, are taken out of context. This criminalizes their

behaviors, restricting the teachers' ability to better communicate with them to understand their challenges, build connectedness, and foster improved interactions.

The disparities in understanding Black and brown behaviors suffer from ignorance by some white educators' unawareness and inability to understand the culture and not reading critical literacy on this topic, which would undoubtedly enlighten and foster an improved understanding of how to differentiate and diffuse these students' behaviors.

As Morris suggests (2019),

“A school discipline continuum should include mentoring, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), restorative conferencing, and an advisory program that starts girls off each day by promoting their self-worth, communication skills, and goal-setting.

Only if absolutely necessary — after everything else had been explored and exhausted — were suspensions used as a last-resort intervention” (pg. 2).

However, because this is not happening in too many public schools, Black girls' suspension rates are going through the roof. According to the *New York Times* summary report from the *Department of Education*,

“Black girls are more than five times more likely than white girls to be suspended at least once from school and are seven times more likely to receive multiple out- of-school suspensions” (Sarai, 2024, pg. 3).

Unfortunately, without teachers provided with culturally responsive literacy and appropriate training, this problem will continue to surface and remain a struggle for Black girls in the classroom. This means that teachers need to know when students require corrective actions. Improving kids' behaviors in a classroom does not always have to be punitive, especially toward Black girls. Fostering understanding and appreciation and establishing agreed-upon norms reduces conflict and disengagement and helps the teachers and students recover from their challenges (Muhammad, 2023).

However, it does not just stop there, as Black women also face the same disparaging challenges of being seen as acting out or misbehaving in professional settings such as schools. With more Black women educated, achieving high marks, and promoted in their professions, it is

not unusual today to see Black women leaders in many urban schools as principals or superintendents. However, again, because some people have not achieved an understanding of how to distinguish Black girls' behaviors, this has also unfortunately been transferred to Black women. Black women in school authority positions over mostly white female teachers are encountering incredible microaggressions and negative interactions with their colleagues, resulting in either higher turnover in these roles or leaving the profession altogether (Morris, 2019).

Barrett (2021) suggests that too often, white people are unaware of their cultural misunderstanding and lack of awareness about Black behaviors, especially toward Black women who supervise them. Their implicit biases make them think Black women have an attitude problem when interacting with them. Because of this gaslighting, Black women administrators find it to be an "occupational hazard," trying to communicate their expectations and requirements to them. The distrust between these parties only increases, creating a wedge as neither party trusts nor endorses their interaction. And the goals and professional benchmarks predicted or desired wane. The gaslighting of Black women administrators who are alleged to have attitudes and do not know how to communicate their expectations ultimately leads to microaggressions from their employees or workers whom they supervise as they act out of frustration, disputing their every move while attacking them for being incompetent.

The results of some white educators not knowing how to talk to Black women or understand who they are have made many urban school environments toxic places to work. If white employees are not receiving proper training or reading literature that addresses how to pick up on cultural and social cues to improve their communication with Black and brown folks, this problem will only worsen.

As Barratt suggests,

“The lack of diversity within businesses - especially in leadership - should be an ongoing discussion, rather than a reactive response to what is happening around us - leaders must become accountable for there to be real change through education, insights, and data. This requires a long-term approach and cannot be fixed overnight” (pg. 4).

Education is a profession that is supposed to embrace long-term or lifelong learning and strive for knowledge and information to improve its practice. As such, all educators should read

culturally responsive literature to understand better how to work with diverse groups to maximize their educational relationships.

I know I Can

In his song, *I Know I Can*, famous Hip-Hop artist Nas speaks to the importance of teaching Black children the history of who they are and where they come from. The music, an edutainment production, infuses a melo pulse-sating beat of drumming mixed with self-empowerment messaging that celebrates West African achievements... Nas' lyrical bars assert:

*"I know I can (I know I can)
Be what I wanna be (be what I wanna be)
If I work hard at it (If I work hard it)
I'll be where I wanna be (I'll be where I wanna be)."*

Nas takes people on a journey to believe in *Black excellence* and understand that they can accomplish similar feats. However, to do so, it remains crucial for educators to teach historical truths over lies and misnomers, which builds cultural capital in their students and taps into their hidden abilities (Billings, 2009).

Nas Continues his teaching,

*"Be, before we came to this country
We were kings and queens, never porch monkeys
There were empires in Africa called Kush
Timbuktu, where every race came to get books
To learn from Black teachers who taught Greeks, Romans, Asians, and Arabs and gave them gold
Gold was converted to money, and it all changed
Money then became empowerment for Europeans."*

The steady robbing, cultural invasions, and colonization of African people led to their demise. Europeans strengthened their underpinning off of the backs of Africans who had become enslaved.

Nas asserts that all students and teachers must be "woke" of how such teachings can help everyone understand their importance, especially Black children who came from remarkable people who built civilizations long before the United States existed.

Geographically speaking, there are no jungles in Africa. The continent is a beautiful land that Africans relied on to usher grand structures, institutions, and infrastructure. The Tarzan myth is an audacious lie with a white man swinging from tree vines, yelling as he controls all the wild animals throughout the continent (Akbar, 1996).

Learning and discovering who they are allows them to arm themselves against teachings that profess their irrelevance. It further educates the educator to gain new insights, knowledge, and information they were never taught to counter the lies (Delpit, 1996).

Nas not only helps to reveal to children that they do not come from “gangstas” or “hoes” but that they need to:

“Read more, learn more, change the globe”

Critical thinking and literacy will fuel their achievement and empower the educator and student to discover a better overall engagement in the classroom. When teachers devise a curriculum that empowers, inspires, and celebrates the students in front of them, they are teaching the children to *“Hold your head up.” 1619 vs. 2025*

Several noted scholars designed the *1619 Project* to enhance curriculums nationwide and make Black American History more inclusive. The project, a historical script and accurate novelty of the journey of Black Americans from Africa to the present day, reviews the challenges, triumphs, and critical figures that ushered forth contemporary Black Americans. Too often, U.S. History omits the struggles and sacrifices that Black Americans endured to exist in the U.S. successfully. The project brings to life the tales of figures like Crispus Attucks, a former enslaved person who became a merchant and supported the colonial rebellion against taxation (Bennett, 2016).

His sacrifice clarified the challenges of the British Crown's economic policies toward the colonies. As a former enslaved person, Attucks participated in the rebellion because he did not want others to exist under the yoke of any oppression that limited their liberty.

Like Attucks, many more Black Americans stood alongside white colonists in the war with England, which validated their patriotic heritage and confirmed their input in helping to lay the foundation of the nation. Moreover, the *1619 Project* discusses the challenges of the Republic actualizing democracy and how Black Americans endured and worked alongside whites to improve the country's policies toward minority groups. Abolitionists, women's suffrage activists,

Civil Rights legal think tanks, and labor rights advocates owe much to the men and women from these eras who tirelessly worked and sacrificed their time to improve the U.S.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era of the 1960s emerged from the exercises of these previous efforts, laying the foundation for change. Take the case of Ida B. Wells, a Black woman born in 1862 in Mississippi. She was raised in the South and saw chattel slavery abolished. She attended Freedmen Bureau Schools, experienced Reconstruction, witnessed the 14th and 15th Amendments manifest, and watched the demise of Reconstruction and the beginning of Jim Crow Laws (Mitchell, 1979).

Seemingly before Wells hit her 30s, she had seen and experienced so much. The emergence of the Jim Crow Era would cause the rise of white supremacist organizations, most notably the Klan, who forcibly terrorized their way back to obtain Southern Power and restricted Blacks from voting. Wells, as a child, saw her father stand up against this terrorist organization and repression and crusade for Black enfranchisement. Unfortunately, her parents and a sibling would eventually die from the Yellow Fever outbreak that occurred in 1877. Wells moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and began working for a newspaper company, *The Memphis Free Speech*, and soon co-owned it (Ibid).

She became a critical writer and antagonist toward Jim Crow Laws, especially disenfranchisement, which violated the 15th Amendment. The one thing that charged her activist soul was the terrorist practices and ritualistic killings of Blacks that seemed normalized in the South. She boldly investigated and wrote about the murders and how folks who committed these heinous acts needed to be prosecuted.

The one event that strikingly defines Wells' narrative occurred on a train, the *Chesapeake and Ohio Railway*, where she refused to abide by the state's segregation policy. Wells protested the law while on the train, like Rosa Parks would do 60 years later. She was violently removed from the train because she refused to sit in the colored section. Wells would sue the train company and win. However, an appellate ruling rescinded her victory. (Fradin & Fradin, 2000).

Wells would soon move to Chicago to escape the apartheid South, only to realize many of its tentacles existed up North. She would go on to publish a newspaper that continued to protest lynching in the South, pushing for an anti-lynching bill, developing several organizations to support new Black American immigrants to the city, and actively advocating for the

enfranchisement of women. Wells' story is fascinating and should, beyond question, be learned and revealed to students as they read about the challenges minorities face trying to improve the country. However, some people are afraid of such dialogue happening in the classroom, believing that it draws too much attention to the past and paints white Americans as mischievous.

Enter the intent of *Project 2025*, which seeks to eliminate teaching about individuals like Ida B. Wells and refocus the curriculum toward a heavy emphasis on Eurocentrism. Moreover, the drafted policy plan primarily intends to turn back the clock on numerous legal DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) guidelines that leveraged minorities' status, e.g., affirmative action, abortion, and queer rights (Witherspoon Jr., 2024). Some of these laws have already been successfully contested and repealed by a majority conservative Supreme Court that seemingly upholds many of the right-wing conservative fringe group perspectives. Education remains a vital institution under attack by extreme conservatives who assert that DEI in education is disastrous because it teaches American children that the U.S. is an evil country that derived its existence from slavery and murdered Native Americans and Mexicans to benefit white Americans.

Project 2025, if enacted, seeks to do the following in education (Klam, 2024):

- Remove tax dollars from public schools and create more parent-school choice, which will empower the charter school movement and school privatization.
- Do away with curriculums that emphasize DEI, such as Afrocentric, Latino, and Queer studies.
- Adopt a nationwide book ban on texts identified as DEI.
- Reassert testing as an essential determinant evaluating school performance and student progress.
- Reduce scholarships, grants, and other federal funding toward minority students;
- Defund colleges and university programs that infuse DEI as part of its core curriculum objectives and goals.
- Stop federally funding Black colleges and university systems;
- Discontinue the Secretary of Education position and replace it with a federal oversight committee that enforces revised federal educational policies.

There is unquestionably more about *Project 2025's* intentions to eliminate policy changes that successfully progressed minority groups over the last 60 years. The 2024 presidential election will determine the fate of these progressive policies, which ushered in many improvements for minorities. It seems that this period is similar to what occurred in 1876, when Samuel Tilden, the Democrat candidate, a bleeding-heart Confederate, won the election in a cheating scandal. The election was recalled, which led to the *Compromise of 1876* and ended Reconstruction so that a Republican candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, could become President.

They Not Like Us

In a sensational Hip-Hop rap battle, a contested imaginary battlefield where lyrical rhyme flows take center stage to determine who has the best verbal castigations, poet-Laurette and Pulitzer prize-winning artist Kendrick Lamar released his Hip-Hop song "*They Not Like Us.*" In it, the rapper spews venomous tales of adversarial conquest over his counterpart, Drake, who he professes is a fabricated concoction of the African American experience. Drake, a famous Hip-Hop artist and griot from Canada, has a mixed heritage. His birth origins are from a Black American dad and a Jewish-Canadian mom. His talents and musical productions far exceed those of many Black American artists. He has created hit after hit, selling millions of albums and records and appearing on top billboard charts since 2008.

Nevertheless, Lamar accuses Drake of not doing enough through his music to celebrate where his talent originates from and asserts that he is a corporate fabrication and an existential threat to hip-hop. In other words, he is more "Hip-Pop" than Hip-Hop. Hip-hop was an outgrowth of community grass-roots movements from the Civil Rights and Black Power Eras of the 1960s.

"Hip-Pop," on the other hand, is an outgrowth of corporatocracy, which means that the music has become more mainstream and lost its community and cultural ethos. As such, it has become a part of the American cultural fabric and remains celebrated by white audiences who appear captivated by the genre's creative sounds and lyrical flows. Some white youth even assert that it gives them "swag" or "cool points" for knowing particular rap songs and artists, such as Drake, who is one of the artists they love to listen to (Kitwana, 2002).

Lamar insinuates that Drake's whole style is Black American, with him being caricatured as a "preppy mixed race Candidian" lover boy, misogynist, and, at times, a tough guy. Such imagery appeals to mainstream audiences that love Black culture when it is time to party and be entertained but cannot stand the people or show no real love toward them when it comes time to defend, protect, and insulate them from racism and economic disparities.

As Lamar says, *you run to Atlanta when you need a few dollars. No, you are not a colleague.*

The accusation is that Drake only works with Black American artists when he needs to brush up on what is happening or relevant in the culture. This enables him to generate incredible sounds that resonate with his fans and remain cutting-edge. Drake interacts with artists from whom he can learn. Undoubtedly, many of these same artists also rely on him to further their careers. A quid-pro-quo equation exists throughout the music industry, where it is prevalent for artists to learn from each other and borrow from their materials to maintain their marketability.

Also, Drake has a Black American parent, and he acknowledges that in his music about where his roots are and always have been. A DuBosian "divided soul" philosophy seems to be at work for Drake. However, it is not uncommon for many children with parents from diverse backgrounds to struggle with identity confusion. There are many Black children with Black parents who struggle with identity. Having instruction in the classroom that allows students to discover their cultural identities and learn the significance of who they are remains essential everywhere, even in Canada. Restricting children to Eurocentric ideas that dumb them down to believe their histories are limited works against the best interests of everyone. People are different and come from unique backgrounds and beautiful ethnicities.

"They Not Like Us," and Nor Should They Be

Instead, celebrating diversity, embracing differences, and recognizing everyone's strengths and achievements promote a healthier society. Attempting to reenact colonial educational models from the past will only worsen things in the school system because children and many of their parents have already rejected this. Bull Connor is dead: a Southern racist police sergeant who did everything in his power to stop integration; Strom Thurmond is dead: A racist Southern politician who enforced Jim Crow laws yet impregnated a Black woman while married to a white woman; Nathan Bedford Forrest is dead: Co-Founder of the Klan. Although

many of their zombified ideas remain with us, a progressive world will once again return them to the graveyard because “*They Not Like Us.*”

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