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CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR BLACK YOUTH RESISTANCE

By **Tyson E. J. Marsh**

The rich history and tradition of Black intellectual radicalism, protest, and critical praxis draws upon and informs multiple epistemological spaces while also occupying a variety of physical places and contexts, both historically and in the present. The politics of place and space are woven throughout the Black radical tradition and struggle for social justice, as white supremacist state-sanctioned violence (i.e., the maintenance and reproduction of white racial and economic supremacy through violent and racist state-sanctioned laws, policies, and practices enforced through Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses), both overt and covert, has required that Black folk take a creative and critical approach in locating and creating spaces and places to organize, strategize, and mobilize. As Lefebvre has written, "Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies."² While Black radicals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright carved out intellectual spaces for the political work of challenging white supremacy, Septima Clark, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer engaged in critical public pedagogical work in the struggle for civil rights in more formal, physical spaces and institutions. Combining the former and latter, scholar-activists Angela Y. Davis, Kathleen Clever, and others have situated their political work within the tradition of critical public intellectualism.

Marc Lamont Hill³ has identified cultural criticism, policy shaping, and applied work as three critical spaces in which educational researchers engage in public intellectual work. However, in acknowledging the marriage between racism and capitalism, we must also begin to position Black youth as public intellectuals in the struggle against white supremacist state-sanctioned violence. Undertaking this work requires that we acknowledge the way in which dominant culture serves to silence Black youth while simultaneously co-creating spaces with them to critique and respond to the culture of systemic violence as it manifests itself in schooling and formal/informal sites of education. Within a top-down education reform and policy context in which Black youth are the last ones consulted, if at all, we must work with them in carving out spaces to inform education policy, within the policy-making process when possible, and through activism when that is the only viable venue. In relation to applied work, we cannot discount that throughout the history of the Black radical tradition, progress would not have been made without youthful

creativity and innovation in reversioning and fine-tuning opportunities and sites of resistance to white supremacist state-sanctioned violence.

However, we must also consider that, historically, the merging of the struggle for racial and economic justice has been met with profoundly violent responses, which is indicative of the power and potential that, together, they hold. While the election of Barack Obama can be seen as a symbolic form of progress, we must remember that sustained progress has rarely been made within the formal political process. Further, it is essential that we work to instill in youth the ability to look beyond mere symbolic representations of progress, and learn to problem pose, ask questions, and read between the lines of dominant political discourse to discern the agenda and individual interests of Black and non-Black political leaders alike, as well as their teachers. This requires that we as educators acknowledge the unequal balance of power between ourselves and our students, both within and outside of the formal classroom, and open ourselves up for critique and the possibility of acquiring new knowledge from the youth and communities we serve.

Critical Pedagogy

Centering politics, culture, and economics, critical pedagogy “provides historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction for those in education who still dare to hope.”⁴ Recognizing that education is not neutral, critical pedagogy scholars, educators, and activists situate education, teaching, and learning as sites of contestation and radical possibility. Throughout history the struggle for educational access, equity, and social justice has been central to the trajectory and development of Black radical thought and resistance, and it is well documented that this struggle has been met with the expression of every imaginable form of white supremacist violence. From the physical violence imposed on those who dared to teach themselves to read during slavery to the systemic violence of the school-to-prison pipeline, white supremacist ideology works tirelessly, overtly, structurally, and covertly to prevent Black youth from realizing their educational hopes, aspirations, humanity, and freedom. A brief look at some of the foundational concepts of critical pedagogy assists us in developing a language to name how white supremacy and state-sanctioned violence function, while offering us insight and strategies for resistance in the struggle.

In line with the Black radical tradition, critical pedagogy requires that we recognize the intimate connection and interplay between racism and the hegemony of US capitalism and imperialism. It is imperative that we see the struggles against capitalism and racism as one and the same, as opposed to separate, conflicting struggles. Failing to acknowledge the interconnectivity of racism and

capitalism results in a failure to understand and address the historical and present-day material relationship between the exploitation of Black labor and white economic supremacy, throughout the diaspora. While the material benefits of Black slave labor to white economic interests are historically clear, we must also interrogate how white supremacist capitalist ideology asserts itself in education policy and practice to generate profit at the expense of Black youth. As Bell has argued, the structure of white supremacy will only allow racial justice to the extent that it serves to support white economic interests.⁵ Though *Brown v. Board of Education* was touted as a major step forward in the struggle for Black civil rights and access to education, at the height of the Cold War, it served the interests of white supremacy and capitalism in that it falsely portrayed capitalism as equitable and egalitarian. Though one of communism’s primary critiques of capitalism was the inequitable outcomes it produced, civil rights rulings and legislation served as evidence in countering this argument. However, this required that white supremacist state-sanctioned violence shift from overt and explicit acts to covert and implicit practices embedded in social and economic policy. While progress has been made, nearly sixty years later, Alexander and others have documented how legal, social, and education policy have worked to establish a school-to-prison pipeline that has placed more Black men under the supervision of the justice system today than were enslaved in 1850.⁶ This is increasingly troublesome when we consider the growth of private prisons that turn a profit from the labor of inmates, as well as the political and economic disenfranchisement of former prisoners. From a critical pedagogical perspective, this is not happenstance, but rather deeply connected to the historical relationship between racism and capitalism in which a capitalist system of schooling must be implicated.

Watkins⁷ has noted that, after the abolition of slavery, the political and ideological shaping of Black education was undertaken by powerful white philanthropists invested in maintaining segregation, unequal power relations, corporate interests, and cheap labor. In the present day, corporate interests masked as philanthropy (e.g., Gates Foundation, Edith and Eli Broad Foundation, Walton Family Foundation) continue to play a role in the shaping of education policies and reforms that negatively and disproportionately impact working-class Black youth.⁸ This is evidenced by the closure of neighborhood public schools serving predominantly Black and Brown youth in Chicago Public Schools under then-CEO Arne Duncan, the opening of charter schools conducive to gentrification, and the removal of Black and Brown working-class families from key areas of the city slated for “development.”⁹ Situating the curriculum as a form of cultural politics, critical pedagogy requires that we see education and the process of schooling as primarily concerned with the legitimation and reproduction of dominant cultural norms, values, interests, and beliefs. Concisely put by James Baldwin, “Education is a synonym

for indoctrination, if you are white, and subjugation, if you are Black.”¹⁰ Contextualizing the cultural politics of the curriculum in relation to the experiences of Black youth, we must take into account the way in which schools have been situated as sites for constructing, producing, and policing knowledge and Black bodies within a racist neoliberal reform environment defined by corporate and militaristic imperatives. This is evidenced by the disparate impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on Black and Brown youth,¹¹ the over-representation of ROTC programs in schools serving working-class youth of color,¹² and the presence and arming of school police officers with military-grade weaponry and tactical gear.

While politicians to the left, right, and center have cited the Obama presidency as a signal that we have attained a post-racial society, white supremacist state-sanctioned violence is as fierce as ever. From Staten Island to Ferguson to Waller County, Texas, we must still insist that #BlackLivesMatter is directly and indirectly a product of whose knowledge is valued and validated in American society and culture. Schooling has played a central role in this process. Within a critical pedagogical framework, McLaren¹³ has identified three forms of knowledge concerned with the function of schooling and the curriculum: *technical knowledge*, *practical knowledge*, and *emancipatory knowledge*. Technical knowledge serves the purpose of ranking and predicting the economic productivity of students within the existing capitalist social order, while practical knowledge is focused on the way in which students make sense of their interactions with society without problematizing inequitable relations of power. Concerned primarily with maintaining the flow of capital to the top of the economic hierarchy, and valuing property rights over human rights, the current neoliberal education reform movement seeks to reproduce the racial and economic hierarchy in forwarding technical and on occasion practical knowledge to ensure the production of docile and compliant workers.

As Ross and Gibson have argued, “The primary role of capitalist schooling is social control, winning the children of the poor and working classes to be loyal, obedient, dutiful, and useful, to the ruling classes under a variety of lies.”¹⁴ Centering technical and practical forms of knowledge, the neoliberal reform movement has narrowed the curriculum, implementing controls including high-stakes testing and the militarization and policing of schools, disproportionately resulting in the punishment and control of working-class Black youth. Metal detectors, video surveillance, zero-tolerance policies, and the establishment of school district police forces armed with AR-15 rifles are not meant to ensure the safety of our youth, but rather teach them that they are a threat, cannot be trusted, and should learn from any early age, their place in the neoliberal social and economic order. Critical pedagogy’s response

to the systemic and state-sanctioned violence of neoliberal education reform lies within the prospect of emancipatory knowledge, interrogating and challenging dominant capitalist economic and social ordering, along with unequal relations of power at the intersection of race, class, and gender, as well as other forms of oppression, in schools and in the streets. For educators seeking to do emancipatory work in establishing a critical pedagogy for Black youth resistance, the concept of public pedagogy is particularly valuable, both conceptual and practically. In the following section, I present public pedagogy as an oppositional practice deeply connected to the Black radical tradition, and an essential tool in forwarding a critical pedagogy of Black youth resistance to white supremacist state-sanctioned violence.

Public Pedagogy

We need a new understanding of how culture works as a form of public pedagogy, how pedagogy works as a moral and political practice, how agency is organized through pedagogical relations, how individuals can be educated to make authority responsive, how politics can make the workings of power visible and accountable, and how hope can be reclaimed in dark times through new forms of pedagogical praxis, global protests, and collective resistance.¹⁵

Situating our interactions with the world as citizens, producers, and consumers of knowledge and culture, and often in response to dominant cultural discourses¹⁶ of white supremacy in both formal and informal institutions and public spaces, embracing public pedagogies of resistance requires that we begin to think of ourselves and Black youth as public intellectuals. We cannot wait for the next Black leader to emerge and lead us to the promised land. White supremacist state-sanctioned violence has always seen to it that our most promising, critical, and radical leaders die young, or become co-opted by the rhetoric of liberal multicultural capitalism in which selected success stories are told and retold to reproduce notions of meritocracy, hard work, and “grit” while failing to locate and name the convergence of white supremacy and capitalism, and the violence that, together, they produce. It is imperative that each and every one of us sees ourselves and Black youth as radical leaders, which requires that we co-create spaces with youth where their voices can emerge to inform the critical possibilities of our struggle, both realized and unrealized. The concept of public pedagogy is not new to the Black radical tradition in theory or in practice, but rather must be sustained¹⁷ and revitalized¹⁸ in the critical educational work that we all do, regardless of our vocation. Some examples of this public pedagogic work from the Black radical tradition are visible in the arts and spiritual practices.

The Art of Resistance

The arts have always served as a critical public pedagogical space where Black expressions of resistance have emerged to inform the struggle against white supremacist state-sanctioned violence. Though frequently presented in a linear fashion, the arts represent a circular, layered, and looped tradition rooted in communication, agency, and resistance within and throughout Black culture. From the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement and hip hop culture, the arts are a primary location for naming and responding to racist structures. As the late Amiri Baraka asserted, “There is no depth to education without art.”¹⁹ Further supporting this perspective, Joyce King has reiterated the importance of the arts and humanities as one of the ten vital principles to Black education and socialization, arguing that

The “ways of knowing” provided by the arts and humanities are often more useful in informing our understanding of our lives and experiences and those of other oppressed people than the knowledge and methodologies of the sciences that have been privileged by the research establishment despite the often distorted or circumscribed knowledge and understanding this way of knowing produces.²⁰

Within the context of corporate and militarized neoliberal education reform and the narrowing of the curriculum, Black youth have disproportionately lost instructional time in the arts, limiting opportunities for them to express themselves and their cultural wealth in critical and creative ways.²¹ As Quinn has asserted, art education oriented toward social justice “require[s] engagement with the political, social, and economic structures that are our surround, through investigation of what matters in the lives of teachers and students, and emphasis on collective action for social change.”²²

Recognizing the criticality and primacy of voice,²³ critical pedagogical work requires the co-creation and maintenance of spaces in which Black youth voices and culture can be placed in conversation with, and in critique of, the hegemony of white supremacy and white supremacist state-sanctioned violence. Operationalizing critical pedagogical praxis, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell²⁴ and others have documented the critical pedagogical value of drawing on youth culture and the arts, through mediums including but not limited to hip hop culture, as its foundations are rooted in resistance to racism, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression and can simultaneously be utilized to build critical academic skills across the curriculum.

Though the arts have served as a location for Black radical resistance to white supremacist state-sanctioned violence, the cultural appropriation and commodification of Black culture has served to commercialize the arts in ways that serve to reinforce white supremacist imaginations and representations of Black youth. For example, while hip hop culture is deeply grounded in the struggles of urban youth to articulate their resistance to poverty, racism, violence, and exclusion, its rise in popularity among suburban white youth led to its commodification and commercialization in the 1980s. As hip hop culture transitioned from subculture to popular culture, in true supply and demand fashion, the imaginings and perceptions of white suburban youth were imposed on hip hop as an artistic form of expression. This ultimately served to fashion the hip hop industry to cater to the desires of white suburban youth, and their particular imaginings of Black and Brown urban youth. While it is not my intention to diminish the critical role that the arts and hip hop culture have played and continue to play in the resistance of white supremacist state-sanctioned violence, the white suburban fetishization and commodification of rap music and hip hop culture serve to remind us of the importance of working with Black youth to consider the role that capitalism has played in shaping how they are represented and ultimately viewed within a racial neoliberal state. To be concise, we must push youth to be critical consumers and critical producers of knowledge throughout and within the arts.

Religious and Spiritual Strivings

Religion and religious institutions have played an indisputable role in the Black struggle against white supremacy, though we must always remain conscious of the violent atrocities committed historically, and in contemporary times, in the name of religion and religious ideology. Pedagogically speaking, religion serves as a primary example of the way in which ideology, politics, and culture are embedded in social institutions, as well as providing insight into the way in which such institutions and corresponding belief systems are contested spaces. Carette and King,²⁵ as well as others, have situated the commodification and privatization of religion and spirituality within a globalized neoliberal framework, outlining how spirituality has been used to reify orthodox politics and limit agency and critical expression, sacrificing racial and economic justice in the name of profit. As such, in forwarding a critical pedagogy for Black youth resistance, we must continue to co-construct, strengthen, and reversion a Black theology of liberation²⁶ in the struggle against white supremacist state-sanctioned violence.

Forwarding a radical pedagogy of hope, bell hooks²⁷ reminds us of the importance of love, spiritual connectedness,

awareness, and wholeness in working with Black youth. Within the current context of neoliberal schooling that forwards individualism and disconnectedness, it is “no wonder then that Black students, students of color, and working-class kids of all races often enter schools . . . with a learned experience of interconnectedness that places them at odds with the world they have entered.”²⁸ Building on the rich history of Black liberation theology, we must work to position formal and informal educational spaces as radical sanctuaries²⁹ where Black youth can connect and use their voices and lived realities to name and address the persistence of white supremacist state-sanctioned violence. Given the resurgence of violence aimed at Black religious communities, coupled with the decline of public sites of critical democratic engagement, which goes hand-in-hand with neoliberal ideology, more so than ever, it is critical that we develop radical approaches in situating our “spiritual strivings” and struggle against white supremacist state-sanctioned violence within the “Souls of Black Folk,”³⁰ particularly our youth.

Final Thoughts on Black Youth Resistance

In October 2015, a video emerged showing Richland County Sheriff’s Deputy Ben Fields violently arresting a young Black female high school student who failed to comply with her teacher’s orders to leave the classroom. The video shows the muscular, two-hundred-pound-plus, white, and armed Deputy Fields hovering over the petite young woman as he states, “Are you coming with me, or am I going to make you,” before slamming her, still in her desk, to the ground, violently dragging her across the floor, pinning her hands behind her back, and placing her in handcuffs. Though Deputy Fields was later relieved of his duties, it is likely only because one of her classmates filmed and posted the video of the incident, which went “viral.” Weekly we are bombarded with stories and videos clearly documenting white supremacist state-sanctioned violence in action, today, in 2016. We gasp in contempt, we rage at work, during our commute, at home, as we wonder, “When will something be done to stop this violence?” In response, some of us march or advocate for change through the political process; others perform spoken word to let out their rage, while others pray for deliverance from evil. This is not enough. It was not enough to secure justice for Fred, Trayvon, Aiyana, Sandra, Mike, John, Tamir . . . the list goes on and will continue to go on, unless we disrupt the cycle of white supremacist state-sanctioned violence. On college campuses, at town hall meetings, at church, at faculty/staff meetings, and through social media, we strategize and discuss potential means of resistance, yet we are often complicit in ignoring or silencing the voices of Black youth, which we often justify based on our own “success” within “the movement” or by simply making it to adulthood.

Documenting the Black Radical Tradition, Robinson³¹ offers an in-depth analysis of the development of the Black intelligentsia, focusing significantly on the radical work of W. E. B. Du Bois, among others. Du Bois carved out a space for himself and became the first Black person to earn a doctoral degree from Harvard University. A prolific scholar and activist, over one hundred years ago Du Bois argued, “The training of the schools we need to-day more than ever,—the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts.”³² Today, I see these “gifted minds” and “pure hearts” and hear their often resistant voices emerge in barber shops, community centers, and hip hop lyrics, on Facebook and Twitter, but not often enough in K-12 and college classrooms, though they are there. While Black scholars have provided critiques and insight into the ways in which policy, educational policy notwithstanding, contributes to the reproduction of white supremacist state-sanctioned violence, we must apply this work to the lived realities and experiences of Black youth. Like Du Bois, we must carve out formal and informal educational spaces for Black youth to imagine new possibilities and co-create public pedagogies to counter the convergence of racism and capitalism and the lives that, together, they claim. As Fred Hampton, whose life was claimed by white supremacist state-sanctioned violence nearly fifty years ago, expressed with an urgency that rings true to this day, “We need to do more acting than we do writing.”³³ For the sake of Black youth, this should also be accompanied by more listening and less talking, so that they may teach us, and engage us in, a critical pedagogy for Black youth resistance.



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Notes:

- ¹ Zeus Leonardo, "Through the Multicultural Glass: Althusser, Ideology and Race Relations in the Post-Civil Rights America," *Policy Futures* 3, no. 4 (2005): 400–412.
- ² Henri Lefebvre, "Reflections on the Politics of Space," *Antipode* 8, no. 2 (1976): 31.
- ³ Marc Lamont Hill, "Beyond 'Talking out of School': Educational Researchers as Public Intellectuals," *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 35, no. 2 (2012): 153–69.
- ⁴ Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2015).
- ⁵ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ⁶ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).
- ⁷ William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).
- ⁸ Kenneth J. Saltman, *The Gift of Education: Public Education and Venture Philanthropy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).
- ⁹ Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- ¹⁰ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 60.
- ¹¹ Russel J. Skiba, "The Failure of Zero Tolerance," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems: Reclaiming Children and Youth* 22, no. 4 (2014): 27–33.
- ¹² Kenneth J. Saltman and David A. Gabbard, eds., *Education as Enforcement: The Militarization and Corporatization of Schools*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- ¹³ McLaren, *Life in Schools*, 134.
- ¹⁴ Ross and Gibson, "The Education Agenda is a War Agenda," in *The Phenomena of Obama and the Agenda for Education*, ed. Paul R. Carr and Bradley J. Porfilio (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2011), 235.
- ¹⁵ Henry A. Giroux, "Cultural Studies in Dark Times: Public Pedagogy and the Challenge of Neoliberalism," *Fastcapitalism* 1, no. 2 (2005): 1–16.
- ¹⁶ Jennifer A. Sandlin, Michael P. O'Malley, and Jake Burdick, "Mapping the Complexity of Public Pedagogy Scholarship: 1894–2010," *Review of Educational Research* 81, no. 3 (2011): 338–75.
- ¹⁷ Django Paris and Samy Alim, "What are We Seeking to Sustain through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward," *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (2014): 85–100.
- ¹⁸ Teresa L. McCarty and Tiffany S. Lee, "Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty," *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (2014): 101–24.
- ¹⁹ Amiri Baraka, *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 108.
- ²⁰ Joyce E. King, *Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 20.
- ²¹ Tyson E. J. Marsh and Shiv Desai, "'God Gave Us Two Ears and One Mouth for a Reason': Building on Cultural Wealth Through a Call-and-Response Pedagogy," *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 14, no. 3 (2012): 1–17.
- ²² Therese Quinn, "Out of Cite, Out of Mind: Social Justice in Art Education," *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* 26 (2006): 16.
- ²³ McLaren, *Life in Schools*.
- ²⁴ Jeffrey M. Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell, *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).
- ²⁵ Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- ²⁶ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 2010).
- ²⁷ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ²⁹ Rene Antrop-González, *Schools as Radical Sanctuaries: Decolonizing Urban Education through the Eyes of Youth of Color* (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2011).
- ³⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Norton, 1999).
- ³¹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
- ³² *Ibid.*, 15.
- ³³ Fred Hampton, "American Experience: Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985," Public Broadcasting System, 1997, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/about/pt_206.html.

LESSON PLAN:**FIGHT THE POWER: A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR BLACK YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**By: **Tyson E. J. Marsh****Connection to Middle School and/or High School:**

By middle school and high school, Black and Brown youth are disproportionately likely to encounter police or experience punitive zero-tolerance policies. As schools that serve predominantly Black and Brown youth are increasingly militarized through the presence of surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and armed police officers, in turn, it is critical that we become aware of how they internalize their militarized school and community surroundings. As educators, we must also develop an understanding of how these surroundings communicate deficit expectations to Black and Brown youth. In order to understand how they make sense of and experience their surroundings, it is imperative that we co-create spaces with them, in and outside of schools, for them to develop their voices and communicate their experiences, particularly in a standardized reform environment in which such opportunities have been severely limited. If we fail to co-create spaces and opportunities for youth to express their voices in relation to how they experience an increasingly violent school and community environment, they may seek other spaces and opportunities to express their voices, which may not be productive.

Goals: Through analysis and engagement with primary sources and popular culture that speak to the historical and present-day struggle for racial and economic justice, youth will consider how politics, the arts, and religion/spirituality have served as critical locations in the struggle against racial and economic injustice. In addition, students will develop their voices and sense of agency by identifying how these locations, and others, might be reversioned and combined to address issues of injustice within their own schools and communities. Specifically, this lesson plan series will address the following objectives:

- Students will develop critical insight and thinking skills regarding the relationship between race, racism, and economic exploitation.
- Students will recognize the role that formal and informal institutions have played and continue to play in reproducing racial and economic inequality.
- Students will consider the historical and present-day utility of political, artistic, and religious/spiritual counter-public spheres as physical and ideological spaces of resistance to various manifestations of white supremacist state-sanctioned violence.
- Students will work to become more aware of how their voices can inform creative approaches to activism in the struggle for racial and economic justice.

National Council for Social Studies Standards**History**

- Help learners to identify issues and problems in the past, recognize factors contributing to such problems, identify and analyze alternative courses of action, formulate a position or course of action, and evaluate the implementation of that decision.

National Council for Social Studies Standards**Individuals, Groups, and Institutions**

- Help learners understand the concepts of role, status, and social class and use them in describing the connections and interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions in society.
- Help learners analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture in both historical and contemporary settings.
- Assist learners as they explain and apply ideas and modes of inquiry drawn from behavioral science and social theory in the examination of persistent social issues and problems.

National Council for Social Studies Standards**Culture and Cultural Diversity**

- Have learners interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding.
- Guide learners as they construct reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues.

- Have learners explain and apply ideas, theories, and modes of inquiry drawn from anthropology and sociology in the examination of persistent issues and social problems.

National Council for Social Studies Standards

Civics and Government

- Assist learners in developing an understanding of citizenship, its rights and responsibilities, and in developing their abilities and dispositions to participate effectively in civic life.

Lesson #1: Examining Racism and Economic Injustices

Part A

Initiating the lesson, the teacher should provide a broad description/synthesis of different types of racism and economic injustice (, see Teacher Resources at the end of the lesson plan). Students should be asked to break up into groups of three to discuss how they have experienced and/or understand racism and economic injustice/inequality within their own community and schooling experience. Each group of three should be asked to provide at least one concise example of racist injustice and one example of economic injustice that they have experienced or observed, which should be recorded or written on the board.

Part B

The teacher should proceed by engaging the class in a structured dialogue about the way in which racial and economic injustices/inequalities might interact and intersect based on small group discussions and the description of racism/economic inequality provided by the teacher. At the conclusion of the discussion, the teacher should ask students to think about how, historically and in the present day, racism and economic inequality have been/are being addressed through politics, the arts, or religious/spiritual means. For homework, the students should be provided with examples from one political figure, one artist, and one religious/spiritual leader (e.g., excerpt from a speech transcript, selected writing, artistic representation; Fred Hampton, Angela Davis, June Jordan, Amiri Baraka, bell hooks, David Walker, etc.), which will be discussed in the following class session. In addition, students should be asked to identify and bring to class the names of one politician, one artist (defined broadly), and one religious/spiritual figure who have been/are influential in addressing both racism and economic inequality, whom they should also be prepared to discuss briefly with their group. NOTE: Students should be encouraged to think of figures beyond those who are typically discussed in the curriculum.

Lesson #2: A Historical Contextualization of Injustice

Starting off lesson two, the teacher should ask students to engage their groups regarding how the assigned examples (political figure, artist, religious/spiritual leader) used their respective platforms to discuss and act against racism and economic injustice.

After students have completed their brief discussion, the teacher should engage the class in a mini-lecture to contextualize, historically and in the present, the specific injustices that each of the key figures and their respective movements were seeking to address, using primary sources. For example, a comparison between David Walker's Appeal, the Black Panther 10-Point Program, and the Guiding Principles of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement could provide critical insight into how the struggle against white supremacist state-sanctioned violence has shifted and transformed over time. Concluding the mini-lecture, the teacher should pose the following questions:

- How have we made progress in relation to racism and economic inequality?
- How do racism and economic inequality persist at the societal level, particularly in relation to institutions (e.g., legal, politics, religion, education, etc.)? Is it different, or is it the same?
- How can we use politics, the arts, and religion/spirituality to address racism and economic inequality?
- How can we draw upon and strengthen the strategies proposed or employed by the political figure, artist, and religious/spiritual leader to address both present-day racism and economic inequality?

Concluding the discussion, and building on the final questions, students, in their groups of three, should be asked to work together to identify one specific example of how racism and economic inequality converge in their specific school and/or community. As an example, some of my former students have made connections between the resources available to them in support of their academic success in contrast to those that are not available to them, but are available in neighboring, affluent, white communities (AP courses, college counseling, a stable and experienced teaching staff with high expectations, etc.). Upon identifying a specific example of the convergence of racism and economic inequality, each group member should be assigned, individually, to speak to how the example can be addressed through political engagement, the arts, and religion/spirituality, respectively. In addition, students should be encouraged

to think critically about how to build on and reversion the historical work of political figures, artists, and religious/spiritual leaders to address the context and community-specific issue. In addition, the following approach should be considered, though students should rely on their own voices and sense of agency to complete this assignment.

- Use the arts (music, photography, dance, drawing, counter-storytelling, etc.) to articulate the issue, as well as educate peers and community members.
- Identify how the issue is framed through politics, personalize the issue, and envision new and unique opportunities for political engagement and activism to reframe and address the issue, as well as educate peers and community members.
- Use religion (multi-faith) and/or spirituality to articulate the moral and ethical imperative and obligation of addressing the issue, to appeal to a broad audience.
- Articulate a tangible plan of action with the intention of enacting change.

Lesson #3: Students as Teachers and Leaders

Overview

Lesson three situates the students as teachers, and teachers and community as students, working toward the end of educating their peers and community members. As such, and after a “rehearsal” and run-through where each group can be provided with critical peer and teacher feedback, students should be provided with the opportunity to present their work in a venue where they can engage a larger audience (state legislature, city council, school board, school event, community event, political/artistic/religious or spiritual event). To maximize engagement with the audience, students might also work together to identify the venue where they might have the strongest impact. The format and timing of the presentation of group work will be dependent on the chosen venue, though students should gear their presentation to the respective venue and audience. In addition, one or two groups may be positioned to present collectively, if they have identified the same community and/or school issue.

Presentation format

It is of the utmost importance that, in undertaking this work, the teacher acknowledge the strength and vulnerability required for youth to speak up and speak out on issues of racial and economic injustice, largely a result of the differential and unequal power relationship between adults and youth. As such, the teacher must serve as a strong advocate for the students presenting their work. In addition, the teacher should briefly introduce the origins of the initial two lessons that contributed to student identification of contextually specific examples of the convergence of racism and economic injustice, which have ultimately informed the development of the presentations. This requires reminding adults and other participants that the issues that will be discussed were generated from the specific experiences of student presenters, as well as the setting of ground rules for a constructive dialogue following student presentations. Specifically, adult participants should be reminded that they should show presenting students the same respect that they would expect from them, or that they might have shown their teachers. In addition, students should be encouraged to believe in the strength behind their voices, experiential knowledge, and agency. Specifically, the teacher may want to engage the audience to establish the following guidelines:

- The audience should limit responses and feedback to youth presentations to an allotted, set time frame at the conclusion of presentations.
- Audience participants should be encouraged to provide constructive feedback to youth presenters, engaging them in dialogue that will assist the presenters in revisiting and strengthening their approach to addressing the issues they are presenting.
- Adult participants should encourage student presenters to advance their goals and plans, and offer resources that might assist in this process, if available.
- At the conclusion of presentations and the question and answer session, students and adults should have the opportunity to informally debrief, and have the opportunity to have meaningful discussions surrounding the issues discussed.

Assessment

In assessing student presentations, students should be evaluated on the following:

- Creativity and effectiveness in concisely identifying and communicating the convergence of racism and economic injustice in their community.
- Clear and concise explanation of the convergence of racism and economic injustice through the lens of politics, the arts, and religion/spirituality.
- Articulation of how the issue can be understood and addressed through building on, reversioning, and extending historical and present-day political, artistic, and religious/spiritual approaches to addressing the issue.

- Identification of a clear, concise, creative, and tangible plan of action to address the issue at the local community level.

Instructional Resources for Teaching and Learning

1. Margaret Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, 9th edition (Kentucky: Cengage Learning, 2015). This anthology offers concise insight into race/racism, class/economic inequality, and gender/sexism, and is an ideal source for teachers seeking to discuss these issues.
2. Donn C. Worgs, “‘Beward of the Frustrated...’: The Fantasy and Reality of African American Revolt,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 1 (2006): 20–45. This article considers political, artistic, and religious/spiritual figures and their role in influencing revolt and resistance to oppression.
3. Gören Olson, director, *Concerning Violence* (Final Cut for Real, 2014), DVD, 78 minutes. This award-winning documentary focuses on African resistance to colonial rule in the struggle for African Liberation.
4. Gören Olson, director, *The Black Power Mixtape: 1967–1975* (Independent, 2011), DVD, 100 minutes. This award-winning documentary focuses on key figures in the Black Power Movement.
5. Deb Ellis and Denis Mueller, directors, *The FBI’s War on Black America* (CreateSpace, 2007), DVD, 47 minutes. This documentary examines the FBI’s Counterintelligence Program and its role in compromising the Black Power Movement.
6. Mike Gray, director, *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (Facets, 2007), DVD, 88 minutes. This documentary attempts to document the work of Black Panther Fred Hampton, who, in the middle of the film shoot, is killed by Chicago police.
7. Liz Garbus, director, *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (Netflix, 2015), online video, 101 minutes. This documentary traces the life and activism of Nina Simone.
8. Reggie Turner, director, *Before They Die!* (Mportant Films, 2008), DVD, 92 minutes. This documentary chronicles the stories and narrative of the survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riots, articulating their quest for justice.

A LIBERATING MESSAGE OF HOPE: A YOUTH MINISTER’S TESTIMONY FROM THE UPRISING

By **Russell St. Bernard**

Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God’s activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹

This edict sets the tone for all youth ministry leaders, but especially those who shepherd African American youth. In the African American community, the church has functioned as a movement-building vehicle by meeting cultural, social, economic, political, and spiritual needs amid grave societal inequality and created spaces of refuge, nourishment, and hope in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Dr. James H. Cone is clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for those who have been oppressed and seek more out of life, and his theological understandings were rooted in early experiences in the Macedonia African Methodist Church.

I am an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, whose core mission is to “minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of people by spreading Christ’s liberating gospel through word and deed.”² Throughout the Bible the word *gospel* is used, and the Greek word is *euangelizo*, which has a translation of “the Good News.” I remember very early on in my Christian walk reading through the Bible and getting to the section of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), but seeing the title “Good News” instead of “Gospel.” The true meaning of the Gospels and what has been recorded of the work that Jesus did in those books is truly the Good News. For the Good News proclaims to those who have no sight that one day they will see; to those who are lame that they will be able to walk; to those who are sick with a disease that they will be healed; to those who are deaf that they will hear again; and to the poor that they will not always be poor, but God has more in store for them!³