

Old School, New School, No School

Hop Hop's Dismantling of School and the Prison Industrial Complex

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Orfield (2009) concludes in his report “Reviving the Goal of an Integrated Society: A 21st Century Challenge” that schools in the U.S. are more segregated now than they were forty years ago. Additionally, this segregation arises during a time in which the economic climate is more troubling and the gap between rich and poor is growing ever wider. This article addresses the public school crisis as a critical socio-political fiscal concern targeting economically oppressed youth of color by multiple institutions of domination such as the criminal justice, school, and economic systems, all of which are interwoven into the prison industrial complex. We promote the abolition of these systems from a radical hip hop pedagogical perspective. To defend this argument, we use rap lyrics, critical race theory, and other hip hop mediums as a counter-narrative to the dominant lens—white and wealthy—through which mainstream culture looks at social problems.

WHAT IS HIP HOP?

Hip hop is one of the fastest growing youth cultures in the world, as shown by its recent corporatization within the entertainment industry (Fernandes, 2011). Ogbur (2007), author of *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap*, writes,

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The international manifestations of hip-hop are considerable. In the last decade, hip-hop expanded its appeal considerably, there have emerged local communities of 'head' in the far reaches of the world. Ghanaian hip-life, Panamanian- and Puerto Rican-inspired reggaeton, South African Kwaito, and other hip-hop/local hybrids have made indelible marks on glocal (global/local) youth culture and political expressions. (p. 180)

For mainstream audiences, hip hop is synonymous with rap, a musical genre that the police, corporate media, and suburban white-middle class often connect with violence, gang activity, and other deviant, nihilistic behaviors. Such assumptions are similar to the stigmatization of other aspects of Black culture throughout U.S. history (Rose, 2008; Watkins, 2005). Hip hop is unfairly generalized because of the media's tendency to promote rappers whose lyrics are insensitive to women and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/sexual, queer, intersexual, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community while exalting the "gangsta" lifestyle (Parmar, Nocella, Shykeem, 2011, p. 288).

In contrast, hip hop culture is founded in African tribal musical customs and emerges out of the U.S. Civil Rights movement (Chang, 2005; Boyd, 2003). Once Africans were brought to the U.S. as slaves, Marshall (2000) explains that "African-American expressive cultures, especially musical ones, have provided opportunities for resistance, critique, and education since their first syncretic soundings sometime in the sixteenth century" (para. 1). Non-corporate modern hip hop continues to exemplify "resistance, critique, and education" (Marshall, 2000, para. 1). Forman (2007) notes that rap and hip hop emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s within the Black community in the boroughs of New York City not as a call for violence from gang-infested streets, but as a musical genre that hoped to "challenge or disrupt the cultural dominant" through a "combination of defensiveness and willful optimism" (p. 9). Despite this inspiring definition, hip hop still gets regularly stigmatized as violent and misogynistic, sometimes with good cause, as many rap lyrics refer to woman as "hos" and "bitches," thus perpetuating misogyny and patriarchy. But these negative messages of some rap lyrics are far fewer than those wider-reaching messages of the dominant white, capitalist, colonized, U.S. imperialist culture that promotes patriarchy, sexism and homophobia via all forms of media, only *one* of which is corporate hip hop (Rose, 1994; Perry, 2005; Williams, 2010). The civilization arising from white European origins argues for competition, control, and normalcy, not for collaboration, interdependence, respect for difference, and equity. However, the latter, positive attributes are celebrated by many communities of color, such as non-corporate hip hop.

Indeed, non-corporatized hip hop is the only culture that speaks to educating youth of color on a deeper level than merely imparting their pre-slavery and colonialist histories to them (Ball, 2011). Williams (2010) emphasizes the potential power of this "counterhegemonic spirit of hip-hop such as narration of

institutionalized racism, internal colonialism, underclass entrapment, and urban poverty, to help explain the external sources of prevalent psychosocial problems among African American youth” (p. 230). Hip hop speaks to the current conditions of poor urban communities, writing and rapping on topics from police brutality to the war on drugs. Hip hop—through graffiti, dance, rap, fashion, education, deejaying, beat boxing, and locally owned private businesses—tells the story of a people who must now rebuild their communities after periods of slavery, colonization, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights era and continued institutionalized racism. Part of this rebuilding is to offer what Marshall (2000) calls “an alternative education—a challenge to dominant notions of knowledge and truth” that youth find in traditional Western-Colonial schooling (para. 4), noting that early hip hop artists and producers, such as KRS-One, actually referred to their art as “Edutainment” (para. 4.). Hip hop is comprised of artists using their medium to identify and criticize social ills while offering alternatives for the oppressed. In his song “Hip Hop Lives,” KRS-One (2007) defines the genre as “more than music”; rather, it is “knowledge,” and an “intelligent,” “relevant movement.” Hip hop, as KRS-One defines it, is about positive and intellectual momentum and is, from its earliest inceptions, a social justice movement with which its listeners became engaged advocates rather than passive listeners (Parmar, 2009).

THE PROBLEM WITH SCHOOLS

The movie *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), directed and written by John Singleton, is an historically and culturally foundational film that speaks to the oppressive conditions in urban poor communities of color in the U.S. while also demonstrating that white suburban teachers are often not culturally, historically, and experientially prepared to teach urban youth of color. This film explores the conditions of the Black community, beginning with a jarring statistic punctuated by gunshot sounds in the background: “One out of every twenty-one Black American males will be murdered in their lifetime.” The movie, set in South Central Los Angeles, begins in 1984 with four youths of color walking to school, talking about a shooting that took place in their neighborhood the night before; the nonchalance with which they discuss this violent act is telling:

First Boy: Tre, you do your homework?

Tre: Yeah, I did it.

First Boy: Can I copy it?

Tre: Hell, no. Too bad, you should’ve done it.

First Girl: Did you hear the shooting last night?

Tre: Yeah, I got under my bed.

First Boy: Man, you a scaredy cat.

First Girl: My mama say, “A bullet don’t have no name on it.”

First Boy: I ain’t afraid. My brothers been shot and they still alive.

Tre: They lucky. (1991)

This short dialogue shows the ways in which the youths’ environment determines their views on school (not doing homework), forces them to act tough and unaffected by the threat and reality of violence (“I ain’t afraid”) and also normalizes violence (“A bullet don’t have no name on it”) because violence is as much a part of the neighborhood as are the fences and houses by which the children walk to school.

Next, a white female teacher speaks in front of the same children’s middle school social studies class. All the students are of color, some have their heads down, others clean their nails or draw. In other words, they are disengaged from the American history lecture. After a stock history of Thanksgiving, the teacher tells her students,

Teacher: And that’s why we celebrate Thanksgiving, to commemorate the unity between the Indians, excuse me, the Native Americans, and the early English settlers who were called ... Class?

Class (in unison): Pilgrims.

Teacher: That’s right, the Pilgrims. Very good.

Tre: The penguins!

Teacher: Who said that? (1991)

The teacher and Tre then begin a confrontational conversation because Tre called the pilgrims “penguins,” causing his classmates to laugh. The following scene confronts the colonization of the Americas as a challenge to white supremacist pedagogy proffered by the white teacher and the school system as a whole. Tre’s father has educated him, allowing Tre to explain the importance of Africa to his class in that all history began in Africa with the first peoples. Therefore, Tre challenges white supremacy and the white teacher’s account of Thanksgiving’s historical origins. She invites him up to the front of the class to teach a lesson:

Tre (pointing to Africa on a map): What’s the name of this place?

Female Student: That’s Africa. I know that.

Tre: Right, that’s Africa.

Tre: Did you know that Africa is where the body of the first man was found? My daddy says that’s where all people originated from. That means everybody’s really from Africa. Everybody. All y’all. Everybody. (1991)

Tre teaches that history did not begin in the Western world, as is subversively taught in U.S. classrooms. This is Tre's lesson for his class, and it is an important one. These scenes from *Boyz N the Hood* provide brutally honest commentary on the public school system, and Singleton wisely chose to begin with these scenes as the foundation for the gang-related bloodshed that follows when the children grow up. In this case, cinematic "fiction" mirrors current realities.

White teachers dominate America's school system (Epstein, 2005). Landsman and Lewis (2011) make a direct correlation between the deficit of Black teachers and the achievement gap amongst Black students. Nationwide, Black students comprise about "20% of the total school enrollment"; concurrently, 70% of public school teachers are White, 8% Black (with only 1% of those being male), and 9.8 percent of principals are Black (p. 137). As the authors conclude from this data: "Consequently, many Black students could go through their entire school experience without having a principal or teacher who understands their diverse needs" (p. 137).

We are not contending that white teachers have nothing of value to teach students of color. However, many white teachers who are trained in urban education are not prepared for, in Landsman and Lewis's terms, the "diverse needs" of their students, causing some educators to flee the environments in which they are supposedly qualified to teach. Jorissen (2003) reports that many teachers trained in urban education face difficulties in the inner-city setting that cause them to leave and either teach in the suburbs or change careers altogether (p. 41). The result is a lack of people who are willing to teach in urban schools; consequently, inner-city schools have opened their doors to deliver the most oppressed groups of students in the U.S. to nonprofits such as Teach for America (TFA), which recruits predominately white young adults, about 70% white (Toppo, 2009, para. 35), the majority of whom are from middle- to upper-class communities and universities, to teach for two years.

In sum, white teachers are less likely to intellectually reach Black students as effectively as would those who understand their culture more intimately and directly. Another study reports that "[p]reservice students of color bring a richer multicultural knowledge base to teacher education than do White students" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 95). The problem Sleeter identifies shows that the problem with schools is a consequence of both the systemic violence in knowledge politics and of culture clash. Recruiting students of color for educational degree programs, perhaps with focus on male students, should be a nationwide priority, while at the same time calling for a moratorium on hiring white teachers for urban schools that predominantly teach students of color. Moreover, most of the educators that teach in urban schools do not live in those communities, and urban schools are provided with the least amount of educational resources. Consequently, frustrated teachers may kick students out of their classes and/or discouraged youth may

decide not to attend school at all. Giroux (2009) emphasizes this dilemma by noting that

[p]unishment and fear have replaced compassion and social responsibility as the most important modalities mediating the relationship of youth to the larger social order. Youth within the last two decades have come to be seen as source of trouble rather than as a resource for investing in the future, and in the case of poor black and Hispanic youth are increasingly treated as either a disposable population, cannon fodder for barbaric wars abroad, or the source of most of society's problems. (p. 18)

With some teachers buying into this perspective, the school-to-prison pipeline becomes an inevitability. The pipeline entails “the policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems” (ACLU, para. 1). While frustrated teachers will likely retain their jobs when they dismiss students from their classes, the discouraged youth removed from his/her school is left to the streets to join the military or to be drawn into illegal activities that will integrate him/her into the criminal justice system for life.

As long as students and teachers cannot relate to each other in terms of daily experiences, culture, and history, there will be a breakdown in the educational process. An example of this cultural divide recently made international news, as reported in *The Week*:

On April 1, Sewells Point Elementary’s Jessica Boyle [a white teacher] divided up her classroom and had white 9-year olds ‘sell’ their black and mixed-race counterparts. After parents expressed outrage, Principal Mary B. Wrushen sent them a letter on April 6, conceding that the auction was ‘inappropriate for the students.’ (2011)

This is not an isolated incident of misjudgment or cultural insensitivity, as a similar mock slave auction took place at a school in Ohio. The problem is not that Ms. Boyle taught slave history, the problem is *how* she taught it, as it appears that she either could not or would not consider the issue from the varied perspectives of her multiracial class.

HIP HOP CALLS OUT SCHOOLS: A CRITIQUE OF THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Hip hop has and can continue to provide different versions of history and reality from those ideas taught in mainstream schools (Comissiong, 2007). Most importantly, the alternatives provide messages that can educate youth of color and stop the school-to-prison pipeline. The rap group Dead Prez has been especially

efficient in critiquing the U.S. school system, noting the need for hip hop to give alternate versions of the “truth” regularly taught in America’s classrooms:

dead prez feel they learned more from their records—the counter-knowledge provided by African-American music, especially hip hop for this generation—than from any school teacher [...] An important component to dead prez’s criticism of the educational system and its inability to reach many African-Americans is their framing of the dominant knowledge as false, specifically as “lies.” [...] Thus dead prez’s discrediting of the current education system as one that teaches lies is an important technique for producing a counter-knowledge, and for ultimately re-educating what they see as a miseducated group of people. (Marshall, 2011, paras. 5, 6, 7, 8)

Hip hop continues to be a movement against the oppression that stems from authoritarian power structures of a white-dominated system, just as Dead Prez infers. Indeed, much of hip hop is *against* violence, specifically the brutality inherent in racism, classism, and incarceration. Thus, what are often seen as aggressive lyrics are better viewed as responses to the violence that African Americans regularly face in heavily-policed neighborhoods.

To see this rebellion at work, one need only look at a classic anthem of hip hop music: “Fight the Power” (1989) by Public Enemy. Public Enemy was a model for the “overtly conscious and political” style of hip hop music in the 1980s and ‘90s (Boyd, 2003, p. 52). “Fight the Power” critically examines and challenges the larger systems of domination that create oppression on the local level. Chuck D of Public Enemy acknowledges the educational authority of hip hop, famously calling their music “CNN for black people.” In a 2004 interview with *Mother Jones*, Chuck D gives an example of the type of political message to which he refers: “You should be a person inside the world with knowledge of your terrain. And if you lock yourself into the 2,000-by-3,000-square-mile, lower-48 box of the United States, you’re going to be frustrated by its limitations. You gotta think outside the box” (Chang, 2004, para. 11). This is a potent message for youth of color: know your world from a global perspective, know the world that exists outside of your immediate environment, and question the world depicted on T.V.

Hip hop undermines persons and systems of dominance. Two such systems that have and do affect youth more than any other are schools and prisons. In turn, hip hop has been an avenue for exposing the school-to-prison pipeline, as defined above. Biggie Smalls emphasizes this predicament in “Juicy” (1994), explaining that his “album is dedicated to all the teachers that told me / I’d never amount to nothin’.” In “Juicy,” Smalls admits to street hustling, but also to “hustlin’” to feed his children, something that his teachers, and neighbors who called the police on him, did not consider. Smalls’s lyrics demonstrate the connection between an ineffective school system (the teachers who demeaned him) and ju-

venile crime by showing that those responsible for educating him had no insight into or sensitivity toward his life outside the classroom.

The school system, as many hip hop artists note, promotes white male history while oppressing and marginalizing those of color, women, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA community. Of course, this does not mean that no white males, or the educational system in general, care about America's disenfranchised youth. Rather, as Parmar, Nocella and Shykeem (2011) argue, school administrators are hesitant to acknowledge

that racism, and (mental and institutional) slavery are still alive and perpetuated in the school system by the practice of ideological beliefs that 'at-risk' students are deficient and in need of 'saving' and rescue, when in fact, they are at risk of being targeted and profiled by the police. (p. 294)

Without this acknowledgement, the school-to-prison pipeline will continue as an unspoken substructure of urban schooling, one that does not allow for resistance, or critical feedback from students and the urban community. Thus, the voices of resistance against schools by urban Black youth have come predominantly through hip hop music and culture.

Far from being the province of academics and activists alone, the school-to-prison pipeline is a continued topic for hip hop artists as well. Hip hop is a form of narrative through which individuals express their experiences, and education is a commonly commented upon aspect of those experiences. As Dyson explains (2007), rap music emphasizes the "social isolation, economic hardship, political demoralization, and cultural exploitation" (p. 63) that occur in poor urban communities, and although hip hop is not solely concerned with "the ghetto poor, [...] its major themes and styles continue to be drawn from the conflicts and contradictions of black urban life" (p. 63). One of those contradictions is that education was to be an avenue of emancipation for African-Americans, but it has turned into yet another path through which urban youth become enslaved (Ogbar, 2007).

In "Poetry Behind the Walls" (2011), Parmar, Nocella and Shykeem cite the U.S. Constitution of the United States' Thirteenth Amendment (1865) to demonstrate that slavery is not a mere historical footnote; rather, it continues in the prison system: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (U.S. Const. am. 13). Modern slavery manifests as prisoners are "paid from pennies to minimum wage—minus fines and victim compensation—for everything from grunt work to firefighting to specialized labor," making and packaging products for corporations such as Starbucks, Microsoft, and Victoria's Secret (Winter, 2008, para. 1). Recently, Alexander (2010) has reported that "more African Americans are under

correctional control today—in prison, in jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began” (p. 175). The reality of modern day slavery is irrefutable, and it begins with the school-to-prison pipeline. Social critics, educators and advocates who care about youth of color must address the continuing issue of slavery as well as the historical events that caused and maintain oppression, such as youth incarceration. Hip hop artists carry on as a major force in exposing these truths.

Even before the term school-to-prison pipeline came into prominent use in the early 2000s by radical education and prison abolition activists-scholars, Tupac Shakur exposed its reality as something that both he and other urban youth of color experience (Dyson, 2011; McQuillar & Johnson, 2010). In “Dear Mama” (1994) he raps of being an incarcerated elementary school student “huggin’ on [his] mama from a jail cell.” Tupac asks powerful question in these lyrics: Who would think that a mother would have to visit her child in jail when he should be spending his days getting an education, as do most American youth? Even if children from urban communities want to go to school, there are so many obstacles for them to get there, from parents who may be drug addicted to dangerous neighborhoods through which they traverse to reach school. Educational administrators and teachers must begin to recognize the daily experiences of youth and not simply tell these children to come in smiling and positive, leaving their “baggage” in front of the schoolhouse only to be picked up again once classes are dismissed.

Teachers may dismiss the reality of their students’ experiences outside the classroom, or they blame parents, who were once students of this broken system themselves, for the criminal activity of minors because the typical white middle-class teacher cannot relate to their students lives and/or they are not *critically* educated about white dominance and how whiteness proceeds as the norm in American culture. In “Propaganda” (2000a) Dead Prez explains this regrettable dynamic by arguing that today’s children are being fed a “miseducation,” that results in a type of social control further exacerbated by the police and media. Dead Prez forcefully depicts the truth about a wrecked educational and media system that sends youth into the handcuffs of the police, and they show that this “miseducation” continues with each new generation of Black youth who are exposed to America’s school system. As they conclude in “Propaganda,” “this ain’t living,” and inherent in those words is their urging their listeners to take control of their lives.

As a complement to this message, in “The Show Goes On” (2010), Lupe Fiasco shows his support of youth and those teachers who continue to believe in them. Fiasco raps in praise of fathers who stay to raise their children and for children who work to get out of the “ghetto.” At the same time, he decries those within urban neighborhoods to recruit youth into lives of crime. However, most significantly, he saves his “five in the air” for teachers who let kids know that while

there are internal and external forces holding them back, ultimately, “the World is theirs!” Far from being a negative hip hop anthem, this is a potent message telling youth of color that there are alternatives to incarceration. He implores fathers to be there for their children, asks urban children to both be proud of who they are but to also seek passages out of the ghetto, and he decries those in the ghetto who recruit children into lives that will likely lead to incarceration. Most significantly, Fiasco applauds those teachers who are unwilling to give up on their students and who, unlike Biggie’s teachers, send them the message that they can and will amount to something because the world belongs to them too.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of urban teachers who are able to earn that “five in the air” of which Fiasco raps. Rather than seek the roots of the school-to-prison pipeline, teachers often label “disruptive” students as trouble-makers, violent, deviant or disabled. Rapper Nas explains this in his song “Bridging the Gap” (2005), for his artistic spirit, manifested through graffiti, caused him to be labeled as a “juvenile delinquent,” and although he loved to read the books his father gave him, such as those by Malcolm X, his teachers labeled him dyslexic. Once again, hip hop exposes what Marshall terms counter-knowledge for the “subaltern,” a term indicating marginalized individuals and groups existing outside dominant systems of power. For example, Nas, like Fiasco, demonstrates the need for fathers to be there for their children to remind them that they are not delinquent or disabled (Dyson & Daulatzai, 2010). Rather, they are being miseducated. So, instead of reading a textbook about the bogus history of Thanksgiving, urban youth can read about Malcolm X. Ultimately, however, our hope is that someday there will be enough urban educators to tell the truth about American history through critically rendered textbooks even as students continue to get those messages through hip hop music, as the two can certainly coexist.

In “They Schools” (2000b) Dead Prez explains very clearly, and with a great amount of frustration, that the current education system in the U.S. promotes white supremacy and is shaping youth of color to enter the prison system, not feed their families, pay rent or empower their communities. They pose school, *not education*, as a “joke” and a “12 step brainwash” camp developed and supported by those who control “the whole social system.” Rather than receiving transformative educations, teachers imply that only by pulling up their pants (in other words, not sagging their jeans) will they have a chance in the world created by their very oppressors. Of the many striking words that Dead Prez uses to critique the school system, their final line about loving education is most essential, for it shows that students want to learn but are obstructed by an institution that will not teach them how to navigate through their often challenging lives. Teachers are too busy telling students to “pull up your pants”; in other words, leave behind hip hop culture, which most certainly includes fashion, and try to be more like the American mainstream. In a similar vein, Mos Def uses his song “Mathematics”

(1999) to show how rap can relate to math, and more importantly, how math is socio-political with messages beyond $1 + 1 = 2$. Hence, it is not that Math, Science, or English cannot be fun for youth, but that teachers cannot relate to the urban youth's experiences, and therefore have a difficult time teaching them in a meaningful way that will resonate with their life experiences (Prier, 2012). Alternatives do exist. For example, urban educators who teach history can use *Hip-Hop U.S. History: The New and Innovative Approach to Learning American History* by Blake Harrison and Alexander Rappaport (2007).

Unfortunately, not enough urban educators are familiar with texts such as Harrison and Rappaport's. Therefore, when urban youth leave school and enter the prison pipeline, it is too easy for mainstream white America to assume that those children either cannot be educated or do not want to be educated. *This is a lie*. They do want education, but they must balance that desire with crack-infested neighborhoods, police brutality, and the mere ability to survive against a white supremacist society. These realities are regularly overlooked in America's school system, and as Dead Prez advises in "They Schools" (2000b), until Black Americans "have some shit where [they] control the fuckin' school system/Where [they] reflect how [they] gon solve [their] own problems," the educational disparities amongst Black youth and the school-to-prison pipeline will continue unabated.

Additionally, it does not help that the schools themselves are criminalizing normal childhood behaviors. In *Lockdown High: When the Schoolhouse Becomes a Jailhouse* (2011), Annette Fuentes argues that school buildings have become prisons for poor urban youth of color. In "Stop the School-to-Prison-Pipeline" (2012), a staff writer from *Truthout* writes,

As police have set up shop in schools across the country, the definition of what is a crime as opposed to a teachable moment has changed in extraordinary ways. In one middle school we're familiar with, a teacher routinely allowed her students to take single pieces of candy from a big container she kept on her desk. One day, several girls grabbed handfuls. The teacher promptly sent them to the police officer assigned to the school. What formerly would have been an opportunity to have a conversation about a minor transgression instead became a law enforcement issue. (Staff, para. 6)

When did schoolhouses become jailhouses? One possible answer is the war on drugs. As crack-cocaine was pumped into poor urban communities by the U.S. government in the 1970s (Webb, 1999), it led to the emergence of the war on drugs during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the 1980s. It was then that the prison industrial complex was born. At that time, approximately five hundred thousand people were imprisoned in the U.S.; only a decade later, there were approximately two million people in prison, mostly with drug related charges ("The punishing decade," 2000, para. 1). Next, the prison industrial complex became eager

for bodies to fill cell beds and provide cheap prison labor, so they created the school-to-prison pipeline and constructed schools as prisons, with guards and metal detectors, security cameras, and K-9 police officers performing random locker searches (Fuentes, 2011).

With the rise of academic repression from kindergarten to higher education (Nocella, Best, and McLaren, 2010), there is a renewed need for resistance and an innovative transformative educational paradigm of which hip hop must be a part. Another excellent example of this trend is the organization Save the Kids (STK), named by incarcerated youth. STK is a national movement with chapters all over the U.S. that promotes alternatives to youth incarceration and keeping youth away from violence, and this includes use of hip hop activism, pedagogy and workshops.

CONCLUSION

Schools are fundamental in shaping society; they can either promote social justice or oppression. Kindergarten to twelfth grade schools cannot take all the blame, as *all* teachers are products of higher education. Sadly, there are some professors who write and teach about social justice, yet never leave their ivory towers to fight for social justice. Educators should not simply teach about social justice movements and lecture about the prison industrial complex (Davis, 2003). Rather, they must engage and participate in activism that may cause them to risk as much or more than their students, community members and others who lack the privileges that professors have if their real objective is to end modern slavery in the U.S.. Schools and universities, along with teachers, staff, and administrators in those institutions, commonly perpetuate white supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist education, which fosters the school-to-prison pipeline that hip hop artists seek to upend.

Continuing to challenge the dominant educational agenda is the field of critical pedagogy as it pertains to urban education; this is the field of study dedicated to deconstruction of the modern educational school system, or the school industrial complex, based on domination, and to reconstruct education by students and community members on the values of peace, inclusion, and social justice. Critical Urban Education argues that “urban schooling” is a socially constructed geography that proliferates gross inequities and discrimination ... (Nocella, Parmar, Stovall, under review)

Critical pedagogy will not solve all problems in America’s schools, but with the aid of hip hop, it will hopefully bring an end to the conventional Euro-centric educational standards with which we are all too familiar. Until educators and others in governing roles and positions start risking their social dispensations and

look critically at the school-to-prison pipeline, nothing will change. Fortunately, with the aid of Nocella, STK, the organization introduced above, developed the Institute for Hip Hop Knowledge (IHKK). IHKK was created to respect hip hop culture, educate teachers on youth experiences as told through rap music, and to teach politics and organizing skills to kids. IHKK has further created the Jam Master Jay Hip Hop Library, Tupac Hip Hop Activist Academy, the Hip Hop Research Initiative, and the Biggie Small Hip Hop Education Certificate.

As critics, we must be willing to let go of the power, space, and place that we dominate and control as educators, administrators, staff, politicians, parents, and adults. Through America's school system, we continue to govern and control youth and other oppressed groups. Youth, students, and the community, rather than politicians and corporations, *must* have more say in how schools and universities are run, and this includes curriculum. In the words of Dead Prez (2000b), we must be willing to change the "fuckin' school system." We must provide services that will assist in ending systemic social problems such as poverty, community and domestic violence, drug addiction, police brutality, and homelessness. The late Paulo Freire—father of critical pedagogy and one of the most influential educators in the twenty-first century—simplifies the problem between oppressed and oppressor by stating, "The oppressors do not favor promoting the community as a whole, but rather selected leaders" (p. 124) such as CEOs, presidents, principals, military generals, executive directors, and even teachers. But how can any of these oppressors, especially teachers, focus solely on the ABCs and 123s while communities are dying from drugs and violence, while others are being locked up for selling drugs, and with still others unsure if they will make it home safely from school? Hip hop offers the most relevant critiques of America's education system, and it is up to a new generation of critical urban educators to continue to make changes that will keep youth of color and those mired in poverty out of the prison system, resulting in an end to modern slavery.

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