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Feb 29th, 3:10 PM - 4:00 PM

GET OUT: Schooling as Spirit Possession

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Mahnzili, Amiri, "GET OUT: Schooling as Spirit Possession" (2020). *The Annual Black Intersections Conference*. 1.

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“Get Out!”

Beyond the Notion of “Acting White”: Schooling as Spirit Possession:

Dismantling Interpretations of African American Student Success

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Abstract

In this chapter, the authors propose that education, which historically has been mainly under the jurisdiction of religious institutions and has been administered by spiritual leaders and attendants, is a sacred and spiritual transaction. Thus, churches and schools are equivalent and have the same spiritual obligation, which is to create in an individual a new spirit. Given the spiritual nature of education, we see the colonial schooling system as a conduit for spirit infusion that provides the opportunity for not only “acting White” but also for the possibility of becoming White by spirit possession. This line of thought leads to the main objective, which is to dismantle current notions of African American student success that is often positioned as going to or graduating from college rather than *getting out* of the schooling process altogether.

Key Words: Acting White, Freedom, Spirit Possession, Post-traumatic Slavery Syndrome, African American Student Achievement, African American Male Theory, Religious Education

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Jordan Peele's (2017) horror film "Get Out" presents a gripping commentary on race relations through the eyes of Chris Washington, a Black photographer who spends a weekend meeting the family of his White girlfriend, Rose Armitage. The weekend builds up to an annual party thrown by the Armitage family. Unknown to Chris, the party is in actuality an auction for his body. The Armitages developed the coagula procedure that implants the consciousness, mind, and spirit of a being into the body of another. The family's coagula, or possession process, involved (a) hypnosis, or putting the subject to sleep (Rose's mother, Missy, is a psychiatrist and proficient in hypnosis); (b) psychological prep, or pre-op, which allows for the vessel to meet the individual who will be occupying the body; and (c) the actual operation in which consciousness is placed into the vessel to complete the possession process.

While at the party, Chris meets Logan, the only other Black man who is attending the party. Under normal circumstances, seeing another Black face in an all-White environment provides a sense of relief; however, in this case, Logan adds to Chris's growing sense of paranoia. During their first interaction, Chris expresses the comfort he feels by Logan's presence. As Logan's White wife introduces herself to Chris, Logan informs her that Chris expressed the comfort he felt by not being the only Black man at the party. Then, Chris is asked whether being Black in the 21st century is an advantage or a disadvantage. In an attempt to avoid answering the question, Chris tries to pass the question off to Logan, who contrives a response that is so bizarre that Chris thought that no Black man in his right mind could formulate such an answer. In fact, Logan's response is so unusual that Chris attempts to record him, but the

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flash from the camera sends Logan into a crazed state and he shouts to Chris to GET OUT! At that moment, Chris thinks that Logan is attacking him, when, in reality, Logan is one of the Armitage's body-possession victims and was trying to save Chris's life by offering the only advise that could save his life: GET OUT!

In this paper, we demystify both the esoteric role of education, in general, and the specific function of schooling under the control of colonial powers to move beyond the common critiques of schooling seen in the literature. We propose that education, which historically has been mainly under the jurisdiction of religious institutions and has been administered by spiritual leaders and attendants, is a sacred and spiritual transaction. Thus, in our view, churches and schools are equivalent and have the same spiritual obligation and function, which is to create in an individual a new spirit. Given the spiritual nature of education, we see the colonial schooling system as a mechanism or conduit for spirit infusion that provides the opportunity for not only "acting White" but also for the possibility of becoming White by spirit possession. This line of thought leads to the main objective of the current work, which is to recalibrate, if not dismantle, current notions of African American student success that are often defined or positioned as going to graduating from college.

Our work is informed by various aspects of African American Male Theory (AAMT) (Author & Author, 2013a, 2013b) that push our thinking beyond conventional ways of framing African American student success. Specifically, one of the tenets of the theory is that all forms of resistance and opposition demonstrated by African American boys and men in society and schools, such as "sagging" and the use of nonmainstream language, are strengths. Moreover, AAMT calls into question the very notion of resistance and opposition by arguing that a

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significant amount of what we label as such is a natural and collective way of being and a continuation of African culture and persona that colonial systems and institutions are in opposition to and resist. This nondeficit perspective, coupled with the theory's ecological systems approach, which includes accounting for the supernatural and collective unconscious, provides us with the tools needed to explore the spiritual dynamics of education and teaching, which provide the foundation to reconstruct notions of African American student success.

Situating “Acting White” in History and Purpose of Schooling

A robust body of critiques of the hegemonic origin, purpose, structure, and practice of the *educational* system in the United States can be found in the literature. The system has been characterized as oppressive (Darder, 2012; Freire, 1996), a mechanism for reproducing capitalistic culture (Casey, 2013; Foley, 1990; Watkins, 2001), deculturalization and cultural genocide (Alfred, 1999; Griffin, 2000; Pewewardy, 2002; Spring, 2016), and mis-education (Shujaa, 1994; Woodson, 1990/1933) as well as myriad related pejorative assessments (Giroux, 1983a, 1983b, 2004; Hill, 1987; McLaren, 2005; Oakes, 1985; Sleeter, 2008). Navarro-Rivera (2009), in presenting a statement by the second commissioner of education, Samuel Lindsay, underscores nature of the US educational system:

In the wake of its military victory in 1898, the U.S. government initiated what the dominant discourse called a “civilizing,” “Americanizing,” or “assimilationist” mission. A crucial step in this mission was to grind down or “pulverize” the constituent elements of the conquered peoples’ cultural identities. In 1902, Samuel McCune Lindsay, the commissioner of education of Puerto Rico, noted, “Colonization carried forward by the armies of war is vastly more costly than that carried forward by the armies of peace,

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whose outpost and garrisons are the public schools of the advancing nation.” The process of reacculturation went hand in hand with the steps taken to destroy the cultural identity of the conquered peoples. (p. 164)

This strong body of work that positions the educational system as an institution that, by design, commits cultural genocide does not appear to be in dialogue with or to inform the body of work on the “acting White” phenomenon. “Acting White,” with some variation in the literature, is used to characterize African Americans who adopt the cultural and behavior norms generally ascribed to Whites, including beliefs, attitudes, speech patterns, and clothing. Moreover, the term “acting White” is used in the literature to describe how African Americans characterize other African Americans who are seen as academically successful.

Over 30 years ago, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) ignited a firestorm among sociologists, cultural anthropologists, educational scholars, and mainstream media outlets when they argued that the “acting White” phenomenon was part of a larger oppositional culture of African American students that was a result of institutionalized racism and enslavement. From their viewpoint, African Americans do not value educational achievement, as it is seen as conforming to White norms and behavior. Thus, African Americans have developed a particular cultural orientation, described as oppositional identity, toward academic achievement and education, in general, that positions academic success as being tantamount to Whiteness.

Since then, there has been a significant amount of research with the intent of exploring the validity and generalizability of Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) position (Akom, 2008; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Harpalani, 2002; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Stinson, 2010).

The results of such discussions and scholarship have been mixed, and the dialectical notion that

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African American students are isolated and mocked systematically by their peers for being academically successful is not clearly established in the literature (Author & Author, 2018; Toldson & Owens, 2010).

One critique of Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) work worth noting here is based on the distinction between the terms *education* and *schooling* (Shujaa, 1994). Author (1997) challenged Fordham and Ogbu by arguing that they have confounded the terms *education* and *schooling*. Author views schooling as the process used to maintain and continue asymmetrical power relations but defined education as "the process that should make people more capable of manifesting who they are as defined by their cultural and community norms" (p. 99). Thus, he contended that what Fordham and Ogbu found was a rejection of schooling by African Americans rather than of education, as Africans in the Americas and elsewhere, from antiquity to the present, have thirsted and fought for education, both as sovereign peoples and in the face of tremendous adversity and minimal resources (Anderson, 1988; Author, 1997; Author, Author, & Author, 2006; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Williams, 1996).

The body of literature on the debate about oppositional identity fails to incorporate the distinction between schooling and education. Although having good intentions, many scholars, in their eagerness to defend the intellectual and educationable capacity of African Americans, failed to even consider whether schooling, the process that leaves one oppressed, deculturized, and mis-educated, actually leaves African Americans "acting White" or, perhaps, for the purpose of this paper, becoming White altogether. This line of thinking by scholars inherently embraces a Eurocentric position and paradigm of what is success for oppressed people under a colonial system of schooling. We discuss this in more detail in a later section.

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DuBois and Woodson: Are We Acting?

Building on the notion that the objective of schooling is to deculturize or to foster cultural genocide (Alfred, 1999; Griffin, 2000; Pewewardy, 2002; Spring, 2016), we must consider the logical consequence by asking whether schooling makes one act, or even become, White. This is a line of inquiry that few scholars take on. Nevertheless, this notion has percolated in African American communities since their encounter with colonial systems of schooling, as it is embedded in axiomatic terms, such as *educated fool* and *acting White* to denote that there is something about the schooling process that results in an individual's not being him or herself. DuBois (2001), however, did discuss such a possibility.

DuBois (2001), in *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906–1960*, directly addresses this notion of Black people's becoming White as a consequence of such systems as schooling. DuBois, in a speech to African American teachers in the early 1960s, stated:

Are we to assume that we will simply adopt the ideals of Americans and become what they are or want to be and that we will have in this process no ideals of our own? That would mean that we would cease to be Negroes as such and become white in action if not completely in color. We would take on the culture of white Americans, doing as they do and thinking as they think. Manifestly this would not be satisfactory. Physically it would mean that we would be integrated with Americans losing first of all, the physical evidence of color and hair and racial type. We would lose our memory of Negro history and of those racial peculiarities which have long been associated with the Negro. (pp. 193–194)

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All of what DuBois (2001) articulates is significant, but we would like to illuminate a particular statement, as it speaks more directly to the main point of our paper. DuBois spoke of African Americans' taking on the cognition, culture, and behavior of Whites: "We would take on the culture of white Americans, doing as they do and thinking as they think." We will consider the implications of this statement, alongside Woodson's concern, in *The Mis-education of the Negro* (1990/1933), about the control of an individual's controlling a person's thinking and its consequences:

If you can control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think, you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (p. xiii)

To summarize, DuBois (2001) and Woodson (1990/1933) believe that the schooling process changes the thinking, behavior, and culture of African Americans, which, in turn, changes the African persona, personality, and person. Thus, schooling alters the African identity and nature; a synonym for the word *nature* is *spirit*. To transform or implant one with a new or alien spirit, from the viewpoint of a significant number of scholars, is spirit possession.

Spirit Possession

Spirit possession is a phenomena that can be found in every part of the world (Bourguignon, 1973). In general, the term *spirit possession* indicates a broad collection of phenomena that entails the spirit of a person (Greenbaum, 1973) or a non-corporeal agent, such

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as an ancestor, divine being, demon, or foreign visitor, being involved with a human host (Rashed, 2018). The spirit who inhabits the person or body has his or her own agency, desires, behaviors, and agenda that cause the possessed individual to manifest the persona, nature, characteristics, voice, gestures, and, in some cases, the physiological body and face of the possessing entity. The literature contains various appellations and categories of spirit possession as well as a more recent move away from the term *possession*, based on the argument that it is both inaccurate and pejorative (Ephirim-Donkor, 2016). We do not wish to contribute to the dominant hegemony that positions African spiritual practices as being pagan, at best. Thus, we draw a distinction between the beauty and utility of a human or priest who is “alighted,” not possessed, by or carries a divine spirit to bring about healing (Ephirim-Donkor, 2016) and what the literature refers to as harmful spirit possessions caused by the splitting of one’s personality due to trauma and being unwillingly located in foreign institutions, systems, and milieus. We focus on the latter.

The recent trajectory in anthropological studies includes a focus on harmful spirit possessions that are a result of collective group trauma of communities that emerge from violent conflict, such as war, or from dealing with historical oppression and injustice. Igreja (2018) noted, “The current emphases on the topic have considered and analyzed the symbolic and creative aspects of spirit possession, as well as spirit possession as an instigator of major social unrest and ill-health (p. 4). Ethnographic studies reveal that symptoms of harmful spirit possessions manifest as depression, self-mutilation, hearing voices, nightmares, and disassociation, that is, a detachment from reality and a lack of connection with one’s memory

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and identity (Mental Health of America, 2018), in societies with communal trauma (Gustafsson, 2009; Igreja et al., 2010; Kwon, 2008).

Collective, cultural, or historical group trauma, as it is referred to in the literature (Walters et al., 2011), is a growing area of study in regard to Africans in the Americas as a consequence of the Maafa, the African Holocaust of the Middle Passage that took the lives of millions of Africans (Hilliard, 1998). This area of study also includes the ongoing impact of enslavement and oppression of diasporic Africans (Eyerman, 2001; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006; Tully, 1999; Williams-Washington, & Mills, 2018). Key books, such as *Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Leary, 2005) and *Post-traumatic Slavery Disorder: Definition, Diagnosis and Treatment* (Reid, Mims, & Higginbottom, 2005), present a plethora of health issues associated with post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS), including depression, anger, and a self-destructive outlook. Moreover, internalized racism, a component of PTSS, causes a distorted self-concept that produces an aversion to one's own identity, culture, and body (Leary, 2005).

Related fields of study have emerged and further our understanding of collective and cultural group trauma in terms of transgenerational transmission of trauma (TTT) and epigenetics. In short, TTT refers to how trauma is passed from one generation to the next. According to Kellermann (2013), despite the publication of approximately 500 studies, there is little empirical evidence of exactly how the unconscious trauma of a parent can be genetically transmitted to a child. "Such a notion evades any simple and logical explanations" (p. 1). Nevertheless, some view epigenetics as a cutting-edge and scientifically important discovery (Rothstein, Cai, & Marchant, 2009) to account for hereditary and environmental factors that

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influence the psychological and somatic health of an individual and his or her descendants (Kellermann, 2013; Kuzawa & Sweet, 2009; Ryan, Chaudieu, Ancelin, & Saffery, 2016).

Overall, although promising, the tenets of epigenetics and TTT still do not completely explain collective group trauma and its transmission from one generation to another.¹

Our discussion of collective group trauma, PTSS, TTT, and epigenetics is significant for several reasons. For one, we lay the groundwork for future scholars in each of these areas to be in dialogue with one another and, in particular, in conversation with scholars who study harmful spirit possession as they search for plausible explanations for the transmission of generational trauma. Could the answer to the notion that “evades any simple and logical explanations” be found in the spirit? Hopes for this dialogue can be seen in a recent study on epigenetics that was serendipitously (or perhaps purposely) titled, “The Ghost in our Genes: Legal and Ethical Implications of Epigenetics” (Rothstein et al., 2009). In many circles, including academic, the words *ghost* and *spirit* are interchangeable.

For another, these bodies of literature collectively speak to the ability of trauma to alter one’s identity and nature. Trauma opens the gateway for identity transfiguration and harmful spirit possession. More specifically, the individual and collective trauma of Africans in the Americas due to the Maafa and continued violence and injustice creates the conditions for identity replacement and harmful spirit possession.

Schooling and Harmful Spirit Possession

¹ For other possible explanations on how trauma may be passed from one generation to the next, we encourage scholars to refer to work on the collective unconscious. See, for example, Taub-Bynum (1984) and Author et al. (2006).

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Related to harmful spirit possession caused by traumatic events is the harmful spirit possession that arises from the psychological and somatic violence that results from participating in a foreign system, such as schooling, but also from being forced to eat foreign foods, speak a foreign language, and worship foreign gods as well as being called by a foreign name. Wilson (1999) addresses this issue:

When we talk about this *spirit* that possesses us; when we talk about this *spirit* that the European implanted in us—in terms of the language, in terms of the food, the religion, the values, the social relations, the name we are talking about a spirit that's just not a spookish entity in ourselves. It actually incarnates in us. (p. 102)

Although scholars may debate the notion that the European schooling process infuses a White spirit into Black people, much of the world recognizes that the educational process is a spiritual and sacred endeavor. The secular schooling system, for the most part, is a very recent and limited phenomenon. Education has been mostly under the jurisdiction of religious intuitions, such as temples, mosques, and churches, and has been administered by spiritual leaders and attendants, such as shamans, priests, imams, monks, nuns, Sunday school teachers, and the like (Anderson, 1988; Cajete, 1994; Ming-Dao, 1986; Williams, 1996). Thus, we view schooling and education as having the same obligations, functions, and consequences as church, religion, ritual, and other spiritual practices. Education and schooling involve a spiritual transformation or possession mechanism. The life and work of African traditional healer Malidoma Somé best illustrates this phenomenon.

Somé (1994), in his autobiographic work, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*, tells the story of his being kidnapped from a

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traditional African community in Burkina Faso at the age of 5 by a French Jesuit missionary. He was forced to attend seminary school until he escaped at the age of 20 and returned to live with his family. He had a challenging time with adjusting to life back among the Dagara people because it was apparent to everyone in his traditional community that the schooling process had inculcated in him something foreign. This is seen in the following quotes, the last of which is a conversation between Malidoma and his father:

As an educated man I had returned, not as a villager who had worked for a white man, but as a white man. (p. 167)

Knowing what you know is not common. It means that you have received the white man's Boar. His spirit lives in you. In a way you are not home yet. It's as if the real you is somewhere else, still trying to find the route home. The you sitting here in front of me is like the priest who came here fifteen years ago and took you away from us. Your soul is in his hands. (p. 176)

So why am I of such great concern? I have already explained that. You carry something in you, something very subtle, something that comes from your contact with the whites—and now you want to be here where you once belong. You cannot live here as you are without turning this place into what you are. (p. 176)

Beyond the notions of miseducation, assimilation, deculturalization, and *acting*, according to the elders of the Dagara people, the colonial schooling system infused Malidoma with a new and foreign spirit. His spirit becomes possessed by the spirit of Whites, and he becomes essentially a White man. Wilson (1999) also posits that African Americans, through harmful spirit possession, become White in spirit and in body:

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What do we mean when we talk about incarnation? We are dealing with the Latin root *carne*s which has to do with meat, flesh. In other words, the spirit comes to dwell in our very flesh and comes to sculpt our very bodies. Therefore, the spirit is a physical thing as much as it is a psychological thing. The bodies that we have tonight, ladies and gentlemen, are bodies that have been created by the European experience and are not our natural bodies as Afrikan people. Just as the surface of our bodies reflects the influence of another people, the very internal nature and the physiology of our bodies reflect those people as well. (p. 102)

Positioning African American Student Success:

Lessons from the Lion and Hunter

African American student success is typically described as the closing of the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites or graduating from college. Nevertheless, there is no clear or concise definition of such success (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018; Saunders, de Velasco, & Oakes, 2017; Toldson, 2018; Varenne, 2018). Even if one is not ready to accept the well-documented phenomenon of spirit possession, especially as it relates to schooling, definitions of African American academic success need to be rooted in the body of critiques and the evidence that it involves cultural genocide (Alfred, 1999; Griffin, 2000; Pewewardy, 2002; Spring, 2016). In thinking about how African Americans should frame and relate their own perspectives of success in light of our current work, we draw upon the African proverb, “Until the lion tells his side of the story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter,” and modify it: “Just because the lion is talking, doesn’t mean that he isn’t still telling the hunter’s story” (Author & Author, 2018, p. 8). This proverb cautions against looking at success from the viewpoint of Eurocentric

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norms that utilize Eurocentric theories, definitions, and ontological and epistemological frameworks that ultimately support European and colonial interests.

When considering the following scenario and questions, think about the lion as king of the jungle. A lion has been captured by a hunter and is forced to participate in his system and institutions. Think of the lion in the hunter's classroom and in his society in general. What would you think constitutes success for the lion? What outcomes would you hope to see, particularly if you wanted the lion to remain a lion and to be free? What kind of behaviors would you see, or hope to see, in regard to concepts such as "self-defeating resistance" (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001) or what we call maladaptive behaviors? (Author & Author, 2013a, 2013b). How would we view indicators such as dropout vs. college-going rates for lions and low test scores? Finally, what theoretical frameworks would best articulate what is going on with the lion, for him to continue to be a lion, for him to be successful?

If the lion could freely tell his story, then he would probably write praise poems² to the lions that were most disruptive to the inculcation process in classrooms and in society. Volumes would be written about those lions who maintained their identity, who dropped out of school, and perhaps even those who were jailed. Lions would enshrine those who decided to eat their teachers as a means to be free, and no definition of success other than freedom would be acceptable.

The consequence and totality of what we are proposing here takes us way beyond what scholars characterize as cultural mismatch (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Villegas, 1988) or

² Africans have a long and rich history of praise poetry (see Finnegan, 2017).

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cultural opposition (Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991) to a theory about the so-called underachievement of African American students. If schooling is a harmful spirit-possession mechanism, then what we are witnessing in classrooms and institutions is a battle of spirits. African American children, particularly in inner cities or *ghettos*, which offer a type of protection against harmful spirit possession, attempt to fight to continue to be African in their spirits. This phenomenon manifests in behaviors such as sagging pants or hats turned backwards, braided or locked hair, over-the-teeth grills (gold/silver), and tattoos. In addition, the attempt to maintain an African identity and spirit can be seen in common names and nicknames, such as La'Quaysha, Nay Nay, Sha'Quonda, Davonte, Cavasia, Tay, DeOntario, JaQuante, and Mookie, and the structure of the language used, which follows West African linguistic rules and patterns (Smith & Crozier, 1998). Note that it is not our belief that these behaviors occur in reaction to or in opposition of being in colonial institutions, as the lion does not roar because of the hunter; it roars because it is a lion. Wilson (1999) has argued that some inner-city youth participate in Black-on-Black violence or use the N-word, for example, because they are possessed with an alien (White) spirit. Yet, he also has argued that these behaviors occur due to a lack of an African historical narrative that causes cultural amnesia (Wilson, 1993, 2011). We are not opposed to the former argument, as the two concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but we favor the latter. *Hood* or hip-hop culture is not an attempt at or a manifestation of Whiteness or harmful spirit possession any more than the lion's roar is a manifestation of or an attempt to be a hunter or of being possessed with the hunter's spirit. Rather, these behaviors represent the cultural continuity of Africa in the Americas (Fortes, 1967; Herskovits, 1959; Kenyatta, 1983; McAdoo, 1988; Nobles, 1980; Sudarkasa, 1980), albeit, through a clouded lens

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and the lack of an intact cultural memory or historical narrative. This phenomenon is equivalent to what happens to a white light that passes through an object or filter, becoming distorted, bent, or even taking on colors.

Harmful spirit possession is possible anywhere under the system of White supremacy (Welsing, 1974), but it becomes less probable in isolated settings, such as the inner city or in the segregated south, where Black people in large numbers still live communally, in multigenerational settings and practice “old-time religion,” whereby individuals are more likely to get possessed by the Holy Ghost, speak Ebonics, and grow and cook their own food. Thus, harmful spirit possession becomes more probable in integrated situations where African Americans are less likely to do any of the aforementioned. Further, some of the literature on “acting White” found that African American students were far more likely to be seen in that manner in settings in which they were significantly the numerical minority (Austen-Smith & Fryer, 2005).

We now return to the issue of how to view African American student success in a system created to destroy African identities and possess African bodies. We can ask which Black man is more successful: Davonte, who dropped out of school because, among other things, he could never sit still in class, “sags,” code switches between slang and Ebonics, and is in and out of jail, or William, who speaks perfect English, is clean-cut, and has several degrees and a well-paying job at a Fortune 500 company? What is important in trying to address this question is that, as scholars, we really do not have theories and frameworks by which to position Davonte as being successful. Society, in general, including scholars, is conditioned to see him as deficient, to perhaps laugh at his name, and to be ashamed of his language. In fact, Davonte is advised that,

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to be successful, he needs to *get out* of his own community and neighborhood, as to *get out* of the hood or ghetto is seen as the only pathway to success. Likewise, as scholars, we do not have the theoretical foundations to render William as unsuccessful. Rather, scholars write plenty about how William is successful (Bonner, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Grantham, 2004; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Whiting, 2009) and about why Davonte is not (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2004; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003).

Conclusion: Toward a Pedagogy and Practice of Exodus and Exorcism

As, then, for those of us who are diseased in body a physician is required, so also those who are diseased in soul require a pædagogus to cure our maladies.

Clement of Alexandria (150 AD - 215 AD), *The Paedagogus (Book I)*

Here, then, is an adequate revolution for me to espouse—to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of the denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. . . . The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done.

Chinua Achebe “The Novelist as Teacher” (1965)

The notion of schooling as spirit possession should be taken into account in our approach as pedagogues, scholars, and administrators. According to second-century philosopher Clement of Alexandria, Egypt, and renown novelist Chinua Achebe, educators hold a spiritual position that can be used to heal the deep pain that resides in the soul but that also can be used to inflict harm. Thus, the issue becomes whether we are plantation scholars, that is, those that use colonial

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tools, frames, and theories to analyze African American students and to ultimately support the current asymmetrical power relations, or liberation scholars. The answer can be found in how one frames and defines success for African American students.

We assert that it is no longer acceptable to write about *successful* African American students without some problematized context and without making an attempt to define success. As best as we can extrapolate from the body of literature, which is relatively silent on the matter, success is defined as African American students' graduating from college. What scholars consider successful and unsuccessful, however, must be rooted in African and African American history, culture, community, and political and spiritual realities, such as their being a captured people in the *hunter's* institution and system with the significant probability of being possessed by a White spirit.

We define success as freedom. For those interested in freedom the film *Get Out*, from which we drew for this paper, offers a solution to harmful spirit possession. Africans in the United States need to consider *getting out* of and away from institutions and spaces, such as schools and churches, if not the United States altogether, where harmful spiritual possession is more probable. As well, the film offers an antidote the intentions of an alien host—exposure to a flash of light. This literal light represents enlightenment or illumination that comes from knowledge and from the Divinity of God or a god, angel, spirit, or human (Ephirim-Donkor, 2016; James, 1954). It is the work of educators and scholars to have a pedagogy of exodus and exorcism that pushes African American students to *get out* of situations and places where harmful spirit possession is more possible and to participate in an exodus from frameworks and

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theories that maintain the status quo. Finally, this pedagogy uses the light of knowledge and the Divine light within us to force an exorcism of harmful foreign spirits.

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