

The “Inner City” Is My Blues

Danné E. Davis

It made Marvin wanna holler and throw
up his hands and
Stevie declare people were living just
enough.

Anyon (1980) revealed its hidden
curriculum while

Weiner (2003) urges challenges to its
placement in the deficit paradigm.

It makes me cringe—the term inner
city—hearing it spoken or seeing it in print
because . . .

its use routinely, and often intentionally,
conveys images of degeneracy, hopelessness,
and incapacity;

its use disguises the identity and marginalizes
the worth of particular human beings based on
erroneous interpretation.

What I know about the inner city does not
stem from the location of my childhood.

Although I did spend my formative
years in a northeast ‘hood carefully arranging
my mud pies on the sidewalk to resemble
clumps of canine dung;

Mastering my kickball dexterity to
increase my chances of joining a team
through selection instead of by default;

Attending a “walk to” elementary school
where all of my teachers were middle-class
White females and the principal a
White male;

Assuring that I had ten cents on my
person at all times to call my daddy, not
9-1-1, in the case of an emergency;

Creating a personal library in my attic
playroom with *LadyCake Farm*,
and *Mama Hattie’s Girl*—books about

the Black experience given to me by
my mother to supplement my interest
in Richard Stevenson mysteries and
Barbie dolls;

Witnessing women donning big hats
with matching gloves on their way to
Protestant church services that lasted
all day if you were Pentecostal;

Watching my teenage brother prepare for
Saturday night rent parties somewhere
off of MLK Boulevard, -Avenue, -Drive—
a thoroughfare typically found in the
Black community; a route occasionally
where gays and lesbians opt to gentrify;
but rarely if ever, as a main road where
Jewish, Irish, or Italian folk live.

As a parenthetical, schoolchildren
should learn to say Rev. Dr. Martin
Luther King, Jr., to grasp the fullness
of the intellectual achievements and
sociopolitical triumphs of a man of
African descent whose ancestors were
legally emancipated in 1865 and since
then have been striving to overcome
the phenomena of Black folks *living*
in underserved communities, *learning*
in underfunded schools, *being*
underrepresented in politics, and
facing underhanded economic
opportunities. Such circumstances
tend to predominate countless
educators’ orientations of deficiency
and pathology towards city
schoolchildren that all too often
lead to low expectations whereby
they are permitted to fail (Ladson-
Billings, 2002), or worse, not
receive instruction at all (Fueyo,
& Bechtol, 1999; Hilliard, 1988).

What I know about the inner city does
not stem from the location of my
adulthood.

Although people refer to the local
school district as urban—often used
interchangeably with inner city
(Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005;
Weiner, 2003)—perhaps due in part
to the ethnic and

racial diversity of its students despite
its geographic location in an upscale
suburban township where...

Train tracks literally divide multi-unit
tenements and exorbitant mortgage
estates;

Regional grocery store customers receive
flimsy plastic bags to lug their food
to the bus stop, while patrons of a
national market are offered handled
paper bags to carry organic produce
to their SUVs in the parking lot and
are asked, during adopt a shelter
animal month, to consider providing
a cat, dog, or reptile with a good
home;

My numerous encounters with the
local police include complaining
about a White male colleague who
referred to me as a S.O.B. because
of his assumption that a 5’3” African
American woman wearing sweat
pants and tennis shoes was a
student instead of a tenure-track
faculty member.

Rather, I know about the inner city
through the vernacular of my peers
who use it to...

entitle courses;

name proposals, scholarly
presentations, and research foci;

refer to practicum settings where
numerous prospective teachers—
most all of whom are White—
sometimes beg, along with their
parents, to avoid.

For many of my learned peers,
the inner city connotes human
beings who have been

“minoritized” (McCarty, 2002) in
ways similar to the alchemy of
blackness in the United States
during the 19th Century immigration
waves (Davis, 2002) because of
presumptions about living
conditions, suppositions about
social behaviors, and assumptions
about academic needs. In fact,
many of these

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mindsets are premised in perceptions of deprivation instead of the realization that people representative of the African and Asian and Caribbean and Latino Diaspora, who through the promises of self-determination and personal affirmation, forge ahead in ways incomprehensible to outsiders.

Be attentive when listening to “old school” artists’ renditions about city life because the composition was—and still is for me—a unique juxtaposition of a call to action and recognition, despite new school lyricists who seem to urge and act against the well-meaning and empowering efforts of city people.

The misconstructions of the inner city cause me to cry out because the complexities of people of color and the economically impoverished, who routinely challenge, reframe, and overcome deficit notions are unknown to many of my peers.

Despite the mastery of the vernacular by my peers, they all too often miss (inter-

pret) the vision of how the events of my childhood—akin to those of many children living and learnings in cities today—were never excuses for what I could not achieve but rather were foundational in who I have become.

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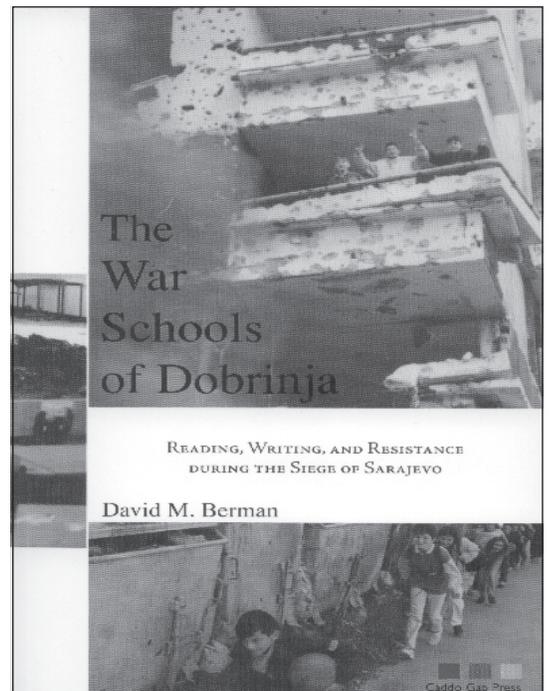
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Reading, Writing, and Resistance
during the Siege of Sarajevo

BY DAVID M. BERMAN

A carefully researched and eloquently written case study
of the war schools of Dobrinja.

From the Preface by David M. Berman:

This book . . . is difficult to write . . . , perhaps a schizophrenic attempt at best to write an academic analysis of an intensely human experience, of a struggle for survival under the most desperate of conditions, of a struggle to save the children of Dobrinja. In academic terms, this book is a case study of the war schools of Dobrinja set within the background of schooling throughout the besieged city of Sarajevo. In more human terms, this is the story of the teachers and students of Dobrinja, the students who asserted their right to their education and the teachers who answered their call . . .



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