

# Apologia for K. W.

## A Brief Tale of Wounded Love, Schools, and Being Black in America

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*George Bush does not care about Black people.*

—Kanye West

Nervously blinking with hands stuffed into his pants and his courage mustered into action, he rambled his brief complaint. Deep pain etched each shaky syllable, however. Then, after a moment, just enough of a moment to compose a quick, lucid theme, he seemed to say, “And you don’t love me.” It was an old story, dripping with sentiment, of unrequited love. On the other hand, this scene was an emblem of a Sartre-esque Hell, where the herald of love is pain, a pain from which there is no exit. The speaker and lover, in this case, was Kanye West, a talented and charismatic African American rapper and musician. What he actually said before millions of people is in the epigraph. If one were to replace “George Bush” with the majority American caste or the hidden ideology of majority cultures, we must agree with KW. If KW were to represent the African American co-culture, a disturbing subtext emerges from his words: African Americans expect Whites to care about them, an idealistic embrace that just does not live up to the history of the relationship between the two peoples or current events and facts.

The most salient of the current events was the winds of Hurricane Katrina that blew through New Orleans, exposing the old-fashioned Southern rot in both its

schools and society. These winds exposed the distorted grandiosity of American ethnocentrism and laid bare this truth: African Americans have hitched their star to that of the majority, and this generally is a disaster. The hitch takes on names like multiculturalism, affirmative action, tolerance, and surprisingly, names like Horatio Alger and Michael Jordan.

The disaster has been a culture of poverty, where communities have collapsed and warped institutions such as street hustling and prisons have replaced Black businesses and Black churches. Wacquant (2001) argued that in the last 20 years of the 20th century, the ghetto and prison have merged into one entity, an unrelenting whirlpool of inequality and exclusion. In New Orleans before Katrina, the rot had become so infectious that murder was common, too many police were indistinguishable from thugs, and schools seemed indistinguishable from prisons. When New Orleanians stood on their rooftops waving signs for help from fetid waters around them, they also wanted relief from the fetid madness of their lives. The relief was tragic on an epic scale.

We argue here that the real tragedy is the acceptance of this situation by Black folk. This acceptance is a quiet, hopeful one that is still reliant on “the goodness of strangers” (Tennessee Williams, 1957, p. 45). The African American voice is so quiet, a faint cry for love and caring. While we agree with KW, we do not agree with the expectation of caring from the majority caste. We argue that such expectation is self-defeating and is in itself, tragic. It is most tragic in urban schools, like the pre-Katrina Orleans Parish schools, formerly a daily trauma for students and teachers. Frankly, this expectation is like Echo’s hapless chase of Narcissus, and Narcissus’ equally hapless chase of himself.

While this article concerns the tragedy

of the misuse of power and the power of imagined inferiority, allow us to mention now that the solutions are tough. African Americans must lose misconceptions about the majority, heighten understanding about being Black in America and how that makes their children vulnerable to this nation’s worst, stop fighting losing battles like affirmative action, and find and maintain a position of power and strength. Here, the reader should note that the full onus of responsibility is on African Americans, and we believe that the place to begin is in the schools that serve the African American community. To large degree, African Americans have misjudged and over intellectualized racism, to the point of excusing it. Just as there is no excuse for racism, there is no excuse for African Americans becoming emotionally dependent on it. This is not blaming the victim; this is directing the victim on how to fight back. The words of the old Nigerian proverb apply here: you cannot just blame the rat.

### On Echo and the Fading African American Voice

In the Greek myth of Narcissus as told by Edith Hamilton (1969), Narcissus was a beautiful young man whose beauty was so great that any woman who saw him longed to be his. He ignored them. The hearts he broke meant nothing to him, even the heart of the fairest of the nymphs, Echo. Through the unjust whim of the goddess Hera, Echo was condemned never to speak first, but to always have the last word. This meant that Echo could follow her love, Narcissus, but could not speak to him. So, shamed by her obsessive love but forced into a passive role, she hid herself in a cave. Her incessant longing caused her to waste away completely, until the only thing left was her voice, with it

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having the power only to repeat the words of a speaker.

The goddess Nemesis rewarded Narcissus' self-obsession and cruel ways by having him love only himself. He became so obsessed with looking at his reflection in a pool that he fell in love with it, finally realizing what he had done to others. Like Echo, he pined away for this perfect reflection of himself—a love completely unobtainable—with one unending gaze. Unable to move himself from his reflection, he died. One could say that he loved himself to death. When the nymphs came to bury his body, all that was left was a lovely flower.

Our argument is that the American majority caste behaves like Narcissus or the typical Narcissist—with unmitigated self-interest (Hotchkiss, 2003). By caste we refer to a caste system, the deliberate ordering of groups in a society, making some groups more powerful and others less so (Cox, 1948). This distribution of power exists on a hierarchical continuum. Group definition is based on typically superficial and arbitrary characteristics. Group interaction, however, is rule-bound; and the rules are based on group definitions. Therefore:

The caste system does not represent a social order in unstable equilibrium; it represents rather a powerful norm toward which social variations tend to gravitate; it is capable of perpetuating itself indefinitely. Its practice and theory are in complete synchronism; it does not rationalize its position; its scriptures are outspoken on the point of man's inequality to man; it has no shortcomings; it does not excuse itself; it is totally excellent. (Cox, 1948, p. 22)

These norms can be overt, but typically are subtle, and are always a boon for more powerful groups and devastating for those less powerful—as Cox noted, a “totally excellent” system. Here are the justifications for slavery, Jim Crow, and innumerable forms of discrimination. Those rules take on names like segregation, apartheid, and miscegenation, the latter two terms invented for the very purpose of defining the boundaries that divide the groups. Manifested in the most basic places of human endeavor, the workplace, houses of worship, and schools, typically these norms supersede *de jure* attempts to equalize members in the hierarchy. For instance, in India, it has been decades since the legal abolition of its caste system; however, in reality India's caste system functions in much the way it always has with economic and educational opportunity determined by one's caste. The country still uses an unpopular quota system that favors those

in lower castes in an effort to reverse the millennia old practices (Arora, 2007).

Like the Narcissistic personality type, groups at the top of the social hierarchy have few breaks on the group's collective conscience. Like a Narcissist (Payson, 2002), the powerful groups have a rigid sense of right and wrong, are apt to apply heavy punishment to other groups, and rarely apply the same rules to its own group. Even more, the Narcissistic caste will bend these rules for itself while criticizing others for making similar transgressions. Deception and manipulation of less powerful groups are essentials of the status quo. Typically, remorselessness will dominate, followed by periods of collective rage, almost always directed at groups lower on the social hierarchy. The dominant group's hegemony exists on all levels of human interaction: cultural (all spheres), economic, and even spiritual.

A notable example of the white majority caste's Narcissistic tendencies can be found in the Puritan myth of coming to America to find religious freedom. The emblem of this migration has become the first Thanksgiving, where Pilgrims and Native Americans broke bread together in an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual understanding. However, the truth is that Puritans, certainly escaping harsh discrimination by the Church of England, came to America to establish their own religious paramountcy. They did. Those who objected suffered greatly or were deemed criminal; and like the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, were exiled. While their descendants did not practice slavery, both New England's textile industry and vast shipping fleets supported it and grew wealthy from it.

This myth is instructive on several levels. First, it is a rewriting of history, a kind of deception designed to justify current dominance. The recounting of the myth almost always fails to mention the bloody massacres and broken treaties that followed the first Thanksgiving and generally resulted in successively more and more land acquired by European whites. It is important to note that the wars against Native Americans began in New England. To these early settlers from Europe, Native Americans were savages, so remorse was not a prominent feature of the determinism of the day. For example, when Native Americans who surrounded Fort Pitt in 1763 asked the whites inside to surrender, William Trent said this of them in one of the first recorded incidents of germ warfare: “Out of our regard for them, we gave them two Blankets and an Handkerchief

out of the Small Pox Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect” (Gill, 2006).

The outbreaks of smallpox that followed devastated the region's Native Americans. Finally, when it comes to dealings with those who were not white, the rules seem easy to break. The great American irony or perhaps hypocrisy is that this country, founded to increase the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of its inhabitants, immediately drew on genocide and slavery to achieve its economic goals. No tactic was too base to maintain group dominance, all the while announcing in speeches, proclaiming in textbooks, and even in etchings on buildings the lofty humility of its guiding principles.

One of the pinnacles of this irony is that the idea of the federal system defined by three branches of American government at the upper level and state governments on a lower level was loosely based upon the governmental system created by the Iroquois Union, a fact rarely seen in public school textbooks. However, the ideological ties to Europe are so strong, particularly Greek democracy and Roman republicanism, that the very architecture of governmental building after building across the country tells the story of European dominance. Who could miss the point?

Coen and Coen (2000) captured the results of majority caste myth-making in a comical speech made by the Wizard (or perhaps Grand Cyclops) in their critically acclaimed movie, *O Brother Where Art Thou?* In a speech at a Klu Klux Klan rally the Wizard profoundly captures a critical purpose of the dominant caste, to protect its culture, heritage, and privilege. The ultimate result of this need is to kill a Black person.

WIZARD: Brothers! We are foregathered here to preserve our hallowed culture'n heritage! From intrusions, inclusions and dilutions! Of culluh! Of creed! Of our ol'-time religion! . . .

We aim to pull evil up by the root! Before it chokes out the flower of our culture'n heritage! And our women! Let's not forget those ladies, y'all, lookin' to us for p'tection! From darkies! From Jews! From Papists! And from all those smart-ass folk say we come descended from the monkeys!

That's not my culture'n heritage! . . .

Izzat your culture'n heritage? . . .

And so, we gonna hang us a neegra!

(Coen & Coen, 2000)

This speech identifies key institutions and belief systems that need to be “preserved,” including religion and schools, both sharing an ideology of ignorance and hate. Insidiously, some cultural projection

occurs in the speech with those groups and ideas in opposition to majority ideas considered evil. By projection we mean that a group will take its own reprehensible behavior and apply it to a group not in power, often using such a projection to justify poor treatment of that group. Since African Americans are evil, it becomes acceptable and even a culturally affirming act to kill them.

In a real sense and equally insidious, the hanging manifests as the African American co-culture, trapped by the collapse of the ghetto on one side and the open-door policy of the criminal justice system on the other. Schools act as hapless co-conspirators, Janus-like, reflecting both the ghetto and the prison, greasing matters in a way that makes movement from the ghetto to the prison system easy. It seems as if the solution to majority caste problems and fears is to kill someone Black. This murder can come in actuality, as suggested by declining life-expectancy rates and increasing incarceration rates of African American males; or it can come metaphorically, with declining services, institutions, neighborhoods, and schools.

With the notable exception of the sports and entertainment industry, this view of African America is invisible to the dominant caste, appearing only as moralistic tales that affirm majority dominance. For example, two movies about schooling, *Dangerous Minds* and *The Substitute*, help to make the case. In these movies, European Americans solve the issues of near apocalyptic school landscapes. *Dangerous Minds* ably presents the White teacher as cultural anthropologist on the verge of going native in order to help children of the ghetto, while in *The Substitute* the angry White male solves urban school problems with a gun. In both cases, it is majority group values and mores that live in the end, while minority views are stereotypically presented—and are therefore invisible—and in the case of *The Substitute*, minority school children die.

Then there was Katrina that made the invisible visible. National Public Radio (Burnett, 2006) reported on what seemed to be an extreme and overt manifestation of an aggressive cultural hegemony that occurred on the Danziger Bridge during the Katrina chaos. Even though there are plenty of varying accounts, all agree on one issue: five unarmed and innocent African American citizens were gunned down by police. Several others were wounded and one permanently maimed. All of the victims had African ancestry in common.

Some argue that the police were victims too, overwhelmed by a city and conditions that had disintegrated. We argue that in part under severe pressure, these officers responded instinctively from deeply held values and mores outlined in the Wizard's speech. Therefore, they shot every Black person in sight.

The crawling FEMA response to the Katrina disaster was the Danziger Bridge writ large, an amazingly incompetent response that allowed over 3,000 to die and forever changed the lives of hundreds of thousands. Therefore, we agree with KW and find that in at least the schools, a similar response has occurred for decades—in slow motion, a kind of passive aggression that included official silence and inaction at the dissolution of African American communities. That is, the New Orleans schooling experience for African Americans has been one long Danziger Bridge. This was common knowledge too.

With a metaphor laced with irony, people in the area often referred to the Orleans Parish schools as pipelines to Angola, the vast prison farm that houses some of Louisiana's worst criminals. During slavery, this same place was the site for a notorious plantation with the same name, one of those places a slave found himself after being sold down the river. Of course, this phrase meant going to a place where it was cheaper to work slaves to death and buy new ones than try to preserve the ones you have. Angola has served as a continuous site for African American enslavement or incarceration for nearly 200 years. Its link to the history of slavery, the current failure of schools, and the failure of every institution that could affect change for the people of Orleans Parish are nothing short of remarkable.

Furthermore, we argue that the African American minority caste responds like Echo; or, at least, has done so in the last 30 years, that is, with nearly complete impotence, a voice in complete fade. The refrain is a consistent, quiet moan: "We want to be loved by White people; We want to be liked White people; We want what White people have." Of course, this refrain is the complement to KW's complaint that "George Bush does not care about Black people." Current rap music lyrics reflect the madness of Echo's position, dependent on a Narcissus that finds her invisible and irrelevant.

For centuries, European American culture (values, belief systems, social systems) has associated blackness with criminality Wacquant (2001). Yet, the goals of these same systems have been the object of African American desire, as expressed in

many ways, but most poignantly by the lyrics of images of too many rap music songs. Couple this desire with an acceptance of the majority projection and stereotype of African Americans as criminals, something amazing results. It seems that a portion of African American popular culture has twisted criminality as a way to achieve European American standards of material success. As if unable to say anything but to repeat these notions in the dominant popular music of our day, rap lyric after rap lyric worships the European American ideal. Consider the Academy Award winning lyrics of "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp" (Houston, Coleman, Beaugard, 2005):

Done seen people killed,  
done seen people deal  
Done seen people live in poverty  
with no meals  
It's ----- up where I live,  
but that's just how it is  
It might be new to you,  
but it's been like this for years  
It's blood sweat and tears  
when it come down to this shit  
I'm tryin to get rich 'fore I leave up  
out this bitch  
I'm tryin to have thangs  
but it's hard fo' a pimp

Song after song seems to echo this sentiment that "that's just how it is," that as a young Black person, one must resort to criminal behavior in order to achieve the American dream, with the bulk of this behavior involving preying upon other African Americans. Of course, criminal behavior is one perfect justification for majority inaction, while the rap lyrics "echo" majority stereotypes. With one million African Americans in prison, half of the American incarcerated total, the African American voice seems to be lost, wandering, and directionless.

Worse yet, these notions of misogyny and crime reflect those found in the majority caste. It is as if these rap musicians have internalized the narcissism of the majority, becoming *kapos*, those who collaborated with those in power at Nazi concentration camps to keep the rest of the incarcerated population in check. Using the ethic of "It's hard out here for a pimp," *kapos* did whatever it took to survive, including providing buffoonery-type entertainment to murder for those in power—all the while justifying their own behavior. Perhaps the most bizarre manifestation of this logic is the debate concerning the prevalent use of the N-word in rap lyrics.

Rap musicians argue that they have co-opted a term of hate to become one of

endearment, brotherhood, and resistance. However, it can be used only in certain contexts by certain people, and it must be spelled in a certain way. What these musicians call co-opting seems like a convenient excuse for accepting a negative stereotype generated by the majority. Worse yet, they act with disregard for the impact of the use of the word on both majority and minority children.

In schools, the result is a notion that African Americans in general, and African American males, in particular, are beyond love (Duncan, 2002). In other words, some suggest that negative stereotypes of Black males have become so crystallized and pervasive that many teachers position and understand them as being unworthy of effort, high expectations, care, empathy, compassion, and love. Without these basic human elements being ascribed to Black males, they become expendable to school systems and society—the academy included. Arguably, this logic is generalized to all students in a school and to the people in communities that feed the school.

According to Hotchkiss (2003), narcissists project unwanted parts of themselves to other people, behaving as if other groups possess what they dislike about themselves. They may even get others to believe that they actually possess those traits. We argue that narcissist castes do the same, so the Pilgrim myth of tolerance and diversity replaces the history of the genocidal wars that followed. The majority caste projects its own criminality onto other groups; and unfortunately for them, the other groups buy into this, making these borrowed notions part of their own self-image.

The aggression of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the general majority sense of disliking and avoiding African Americans reappears in the African American as a range of hyper-aggressive, self-defeating behaviors and complaints—like the deeply ironic complaint about the difficulty of the life of a pimp and even the ill-informed criticism of poor African Americans supplied by Bill Cosby. The evidence that African Americans have bought in to the worst of majority projections is intense anger projected back to the majority. In the case of the majority caste and African Americans, we have Narcissus and Echo, each co-equal with contempt or self-contempt and vulnerabilities, both angry, ashamed, but locked together by history and traditions.

Therefore, when an African American rap music giant states that “George Bush does not care about Black people,” the implication is that there is a flawed rela-

tionship between two groups and that the majority caste should care about minorities. Certainly, this flaw is structural and deeply imbued with class struggle, a relationship as complex as it is problematic.

A case in point is the antediluvian New Orleans public school system, the day before Hurricane Katrina. The school system had 65,000 students with 97% of them African American. According to Toppo (2006a), the school system was a disaster. Two-thirds of the district’s schools were not meeting state standards, and 74% of the district’s eighth graders failed to demonstrate English/language arts competence on the state exam—all this amidst annual allegations of cheating on the exams.

In 2003, one high school’s valedictorian needed seven tries to pass the state’s 10th grade mathematics test. The Orleans Parish Schools had gone through 10 superintendents in 10 years. Corruption had so become part of the system’s culture that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) set up a task force inside the district headquarters. The FBI investigations led to 26 indictments and 20 plea bargain deals. In one case, a payroll employee wrote herself \$240,000 in checks. It follows that the school district was \$450 million in debt when the storm hit (Waldman, 2007). In the middle of one of the most impoverished urban landscapes in the nation, the school system had a 46% dropout rate (Toppo, 2006b). It was these dropouts who drove the soaring New Orleans crime rates.

According to Waldman (2007), at a post-Katrina press conference held by students still in the system, they requested textbooks, toilet paper, and teachers who like them. The official pre-Katrina response to the district’s problem was little; post-Katrina there has been a rush to dismantle the entire system in favor of a free-enterprise inspired experiment. Despite all of its problems, dismantling the New Orleans Public schools destroyed a key institution that could have served to help rebuild the culture and community. Healing the schools would have been an important treatment leading to healing the entire community.

### How Echo Can Regain Her Voice

The New Orleans example was not always the case in the African American community concerning schooling. There was a time when the African American minority saw majority hegemony for what it was and responded in a thoughtful, reasonable, and healthy manner. Just a few years

following slavery, African Americans had a clear consensus on two counter-hegemonic issues: land ownership and education. The clarion voices on this issue translated into land ownership and a rush to schools. When *Plessy* led to the shuttering of publicly funded African American schools and the muzzling of African American teachers, African Americans embraced the support of Julius Rosenwald (founder of Sears and Roebuck) and opened 5,300 schools from Texas to Virginia.

For several decades in the early 20th century, Rosenwald challenged African Americans to match his contribution to these schools, and remarkably, they did, with nearly 50 million dollars raised by share-croppers, laborers, maids, and Pullman porters. Despite some criticism of the curriculum of these schools and the motives of those who created the curriculum, the teachers and local African American communities shaped these schools to meet their local needs for education. Arguably, the education provided by these schools in the 1920s and 1930s and driven by deeply held mores to defy prejudice and discrimination laid one of the foundations for the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s in the American South. In the midst of Jim Crow segregation and oppression, a semi-autonomous Black community emerged with themes of independence and self-reliance (White, 2002).

Also emerging at the same time was a system of private secondary schools that were usually completely African American financed. Some were even boarding schools. Often started by African American landowners just after the turn of the 20th century, the schools flourished until White school boards began providing for secondary schools for African Americans. Certainly, the education reflected the times, with an emphasis on basic skills and agriculture. However, these schools provided a different type of pipeline than the New Orleans example did, a pipeline from these largely rural schools to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Also, as described by the father of one of the authors (HB), whose father attended one of these schools (Cedar Point in East Texas), there was an impressive hidden curriculum designed to prepare students to engage the White majority in an effective manner. For example, one deeply imbued value was that an African American would “have to be twice as good, to be just as good.” Such a precept gave teachers the license to push students beyond the curriculum and inspired students to struggle with

above-grade-level material. This notion also prepared many of these students to take on leadership roles in the community and to prepare their children to become many of the “firsts”: first Black teller at the local bank, first Black postman, first Black teacher, first Black foreman, and the like. Only one of these schools remains, the Piney Woods School of Mississippi.

These schools had several common principles that have been abandoned or ignored by current schools serving African Americans (and for that matter, other minority or low socioeconomic groups). These principles reflect Hotchkiss’s (2003) advice on dealing with narcissistic individuals. The first is to know oneself, or in the case of an affected group like African Americans, know group vulnerabilities. For instance, for African Americans fresh from slavery, it was immediately apparent that they were economically exposed.

They quickly learned that the promise of healing the degradation of slavery with 40 acres and a mule or other methods would not be realized. Where they could, they wasted little time in simultaneously acquiring education so as to acquire land and conduct business in the larger community. There were few illusions about ex-slaveholders and others in the majority caring for or loving them. These efforts resulted in an African American economy that sustained African Americans and created impressive communities amidst a powerful, openly racist society.

Further, they did not waste energy trying to enlighten or directly challenge the Narcissist majority group because it is simply the nature of the majority to be oblivious to any other group, except when exploiting that group. Therefore, they built systems and institutions to support African Americans in the face of great racism. Of course, this movement was not without ideas from African Americans that seemed to support the racist system of the day, like Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Compromise.

A second principle of these schools was a mature embrace of the reality that the goals of the African American community were not necessarily the goals of the majority. Typically, they stuck to their knitting in serving the African American community. For example, H. H. Thomas, principal of a Rosenwald school in Smithville, Texas has become a legend. He was so deeply involved in the community that he re-opened a local cannery so parents of children could can summer produce grown in subsistence gardens (Burley & Burley, 2002).

According to one former student, they

canned everything from collard greens to watermelon rinds. The result was that his students could be assured of food during the winter months, increasing the chances that they would stay in school. Professor Thomas was on the deacon board of two African American churches in the area and was the go-to problem solver for a number of agricultural and societal issues. He was a repository of history, both African and African American.

Professor Thomas’s example also points to a third key principle to dealing with a Narcissist culture, and that is setting clear boundaries. These boundaries are for the affected groups. Professor Thomas’ boundaries were clear and focused on the community. He recognized the narcissist pathology of a racist system and moved to counter it. It would have been suicide to attack the system directly; however, to counter the system’s denial of education for African Americans by providing that very thing is a sophisticated response to a self-absorbed majority. In a counter-example to Professor Thomas, if one were to examine rap videos as a gauge of current community values, one would find them to be grandiose dreams, fixed on self-gratification rather than support of the community.

Some may argue that rap music stars have earned millions for themselves through the images they promulgate, and that they are using the system to enrich themselves and escape the ghetto. However, they make billions for the corporations that own their record labels and other associated industries. These corporations reify the toxicity of majority group justifications of its inability to engage the minority community to solve any real problem. In a second counter-example at the school level, this means that teachers have little interest in engaging the community at any level. They clock in and clock out. During the school day, they obsess about control and rely on shame and manipulation to maintain control. They know no boundaries.

The fourth and final strategy is for the development of reciprocal relationships. Rather than complaining about the history of racism on part of the majority or even current structural racism, African Americans, particularly in terms of schooling, should create reciprocal relationships with the majority. This is important because in a sense, consistently despairing about past wrongs helps a group to stay in a one-down position with the narcissistic majority group.

For example, it is illusory for African Americans to think that an overwhelm-

ingly European American educator corps has its children’s best interests at heart. This idea is doubly true for those who design the curriculum and textbooks and make educational policy. One cannot even expect a token acknowledgement to local African American communities and their institutions. In one example of this precept, when new state testing standards aimed their sights penalizing schools and possibly teachers—White teachers bolted from predominately African American schools. They left the least prepared and the incompetent to teach students with the greatest needs. Simply, they cared only for themselves. As a rule, school districts did little to stop this.

In the modern era, we believe that Professor Thomas would create a parallel educational system to that of the public schools with the help of community institutions. It would provide both tutoring and assessment, with the assessments used as a double-check on the efforts of the school. He would draw the schools into the communities, so teachers and principals could find roles in the communities outside of the school. He would insist on a union of churches and other institutions to help get parents and teachers together to help keep children in school by improving conditions both inside and outside the school. Such a new institution would reciprocate every positive move of the school and expect its own positive moves to be reciprocated by the schools.

## Conclusion

Finally, we must return to the majority’s real inability to care about minority groups. Another old story dripping with sentiment of unrequited love was captured in an e-mail that circulated among African Americans about eight years ago. This letter delineated African Americans’ historical reliance on Whites to care about them, rather than to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. The authenticity of the source and author of this letter remain questionable and unverifiable, though the e-mail itself indicated that it was taken from the *Philadelphia New Observer* on November 18, 1998. The letter was written to thank Black Americans who have been faithful, loving, supporting, steadfast, forgiving in an abusive relationship, an unrequited love affair of over 400 years. The letter begins:

Dear Black Americans: After all of these years and all we have been through together, we think it’s appropriate for us to show our gratitude for all you have done for us. We have chastised you, criticized you, punished you, and in some cases even apologized to you, but we have never

formally nor publicly thanked you for your never ending allegiance and support to our cause. This is our open letter of thanks to a unique people, a forgiving people, a steadfast people, and a brave people: Black Americans.

In the letter, the authors thanked Black Americans for their labor, especially the diligence and tenacity of their labor when building this country and helping it acquire great wealth despite a lack of reciprocity and equity. African Americans were steadfast in the face of insurmountable adversity, even when women were raped, men lynched, maimed, and burned, and human and civil rights were denied. Black Americans even showed bravery on the battlefield, fighting and dying, despite being classified as three-fifths of a man. In spite of the way the majority treated Black Americans, Black people were still there protecting them. In fact, the authors noted that Black Americans kept right on raising their children, attending their sick, and preparing their meals.

Further, according to the letter, Black people were so dedicated that not only did they "rat out" Denmark Vessey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner, and sounded the alarm when old John Brown came calling on Harper's Ferry, they resisted the messages of trouble-making Blacks like Washington, Delaney, Garvey, Bethune, Tubman, and Truth. In fact, the authors noticed that there are some Black Americans still warning them today.

They struck a chord with the truth about the Black economy, on what, with whom, and how Black Americans spend their money. That is, when it is all said and done, Black Americans owned very few businesses and rarely supported their own people. Instead they spent their money on brand names manufactured by other groups and in other countries. Lastly, the most disturbing and at the same time the most profound words in the letter are those that have the broadest implication to the state of contemporary Black American experience and one that calls the question of a KW apology while it also questions the racial inequities existing in the wake and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The authors write:

You went beyond the pale and turned your children over to us for their education. With what we have taught them, it's likely they will continue in a mode similar to the one you have followed for the past 45 years. But with two generations of your children gone through our education systems, we can look forward to at least another 50 years of prosperity.

Despite the spirit of these words rich with double entendres, we must say that the alarm is ringing for African Americans, in much the same way it does in the first line of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, "Brrrrrrrrrrring." Perhaps instead of an alarm, what these words echo is the ringing of school bells that say the same thing, "Wake up!" At their sound, every African American should sit straight up in bed with two questions on her or his mind: What are our children really learning in school? Also, does the school promote the welfare of African Americans or simply promote the status quo?

In response to the loss of lives during Hurricane Katrina, Michael Eric Dyson (2006) wrote, "Yes, God's grace spared the survivors, but that doesn't mean that they are superior, just fortunate, and therefore charged with responsibility to live even more fully and purposefully in the awareness of their mysterious fortune." Do Black people care about Black people? Dyson's response is not just a challenge to the Black church, but a charge to Black America to recapture its prophetic anger, and instead of being immobilized by it, transform it into positive social action.

The letter from the *Philadelphia New Observer* ends with, *Sincerely, All Other Americans*. We believe that with the new world view as described above, African Americans can advance a new multiculturalism that does not rest its hopes on the majority. Implied in this vision is urgency, no waiting around for the majority to come around. We propose that this new model of realistic and reciprocal engagement with the majority will help both African American children, and in the long run, all other Americans. Inspired by the trauma of Katrina on African Americans and all Americans, we present this new way of thinking about how majority and minority cultures can interact beyond grand illusions and hapless rancor.

#### Note

The authors send their deepest condolences to Kayne West and his family on the recent loss of Dr. Donda West. Both she and her son are a triumph.

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