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 and 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 (Fuego, & 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

Danné E. Davis is an assistant professor in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Literacy Education of the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey.
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 (interpret) 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.

References

Caddo Gap Press Announces Publication of The War Schools of Dobrinja: 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 . . .