EPILOGUE

Black Education Post-Katrina: And *All Us We* Are Not Saved[1]

Joyce E. King

Remember the Kongo saying, "It hurts to lose certain traditions." The more

a society moves away from its traditions, the more its people and system

become physically and spiritually weak and disoriented. To lose one's

cultural traditional values is not only to terrorize oneself but to ridicule

oneself in the eyes of the world.

—K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *Kindezi: The Kongo Art of Babysitting*

How can we be successful if we have no idea or, worse, the wrong

idea of who we were and, therefore are? . . . Our minds can be

trained for individual career success, but our group morale, the

very soul of us has been devastated by the assumption that what

has not been told about ourselves does not exist to be told.

—Randall Robinson, *The Debt*

The *Maafa* gave rise to a single world-wide strategy among our

oppressors: prevent African families and communities from

educating their children.

Katrina accomplished in a day . . . what Louisiana school

reformers couldn't do after years of trying.

—American Enterprise Institute[3]

All that is public, including schools, is under attack.

—Erica Meiners (2007)

The lower classes are worth more to private corporations when

they are in prison than when they are free.

—Dedon Kemanthi[4]

This Epilogue asks, What is the state of Black education "post-Katrina"? What is at

stake? What is to be done? The dire condition of public education in New Orleans in the

aftermath of the 2005 Gulf coast storm serves not as metaphor but as context for framing the

complexities of Black education as a *civilizational* crisis.[5] This crisis includes mass Black

criminalization and incarceration and the school-to-prison track (e.g., prison industrial complex)

as well as the dismantling of public education. What has appeared simply to be the government's

abandonment of the most impoverished Black people in New Orleans is a pattern of systematic

neglect in jobless urban ghettos across the nation that is better understood as the racialized

privatization of public spheres—notably schools and prisons. Moreover, as Meiners (2007)

observes, "All that is public is under attack."

Wynter (2006) argues that fundamentally this is a crisis of knowledge: Western

civilization's best minds and academic disciplines are deeply implicated in the belief structure and ways of (not) knowing that systematically jeopardize Black lives. However, this destruction of Black life ("as life unworthy of life") also diminishes White America's humanity (Rimstead, 2001). And while democracy, human rights, justice, and our planetary environment are at stake, civilization also hangs in the balance (King, 2005). Following are indications of this civilizational knowledge crisis.

Beyond Rescue

First, Black people in America have been "beyond rescue" in the nation's schools, cities, and prisons long before Hurricane Katrina—a marginalization that has been justified in part by the neglect and distortion of African descent people's history. The current state of Black education, for example, differs drastically from the historical record of Black accomplishments and educational excellence—from the specialized knowledge of the African ancestors who built the pyramids in ancient Kemet and the Songhay Empire's universities at Sankoré, Gao and D'jenné in West Africa, to clandestine "slave schools" and African Free Schools in early America, Citizenship schools and Freedom schools during the Civil Rights Movement as well as independent Black institutions (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 1980; Dannett, 1964; Hilliard, 1997).

Second, "rescue" via prevailing education policy, practice, theory, and research is doubtful if the *systemic* causes of this racially rooted civilizational crisis are not addressed. Instead, as the crisis is normalized and those who suffer are blamed, the true nature of the crisis is denied, distorted, and hidden in mystification and euphemism. For example, Black people's poverty is the focus of analysis instead of systemic White supremacy/oppression; success and inclusion actually require some form of complicity and self/group abnegation; dismantling public

education is called "restructuring" locally and "structural adjustment" globally and "a new national model of a market-based system of education" obfuscates the transfer of public resources into the hands of private entities.

Third, the condition of education in New Orleans and the mass incarceration of African Americans provide interrelated vantage points from which to grasp the relationship between Black education "post-Katrina" and the public good, that is, what is at stake for "all us we." Tate's (2007) analysis of the need for societal investments in education and employment opportunities—opportunity expansion—for urban youth identifies concrete material benefits that would accrue to the entire society, but which remain unrecognized and "hypothetical" (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Day & Newberger, 2002). Thus, the larger policy context and arena for action must include the knowledge crisis and the need for transformative possibilities that address the systemic connection between education, racialized domination, and real democracy and freedom.

Inclusion/Complicity and Negation/Nihilation at What Cost?

Part of what often remains just beyond recognition, understanding, analysis, and action is Black nihilation (or nonbeing) as a requirement of White America's supposed well-being.[6] In his description of "White America's sense of self," for example, Wacquant (2002) captures part of this dialectical interconnection in terms of how social class interacts with race. That is, White America senses itself as "profoundly unlike and distinct from the Black and unworthy poor." This complex racialized "alter-ego" relationship between "White" being and "Black" negation appears now to be associated with the unworthiness/unfitness of "the Black poor" (in mostly Black "failing schools," failing "ghetto" cities such as New Orleans, and their "extensions in the prisons"). But it also extends to the entire continent of Africa and is a condition of (the idea/ideal

of) "Whiteness" as a privileged mode of being (more human).[7]

One cost of this privileged ("White") sense of self is the attenuation of White America's humanity. The benefits of privileged (and "honorary") "Whiteness" and the associated worthiness of (White) middle-class acceptability lull the rest of us into a false sense of security, success, and well-being:

> In every era, Blacks have been viewed as apart, inferior and unworthy, as fringe players in the American narrative. But in the last 35 years the Black communities have been stripped of jobs, seen their poor isolated, resegregated, and redefined as unworthy and inherently dangerous. Government, the state itself has been refashioned into a punitive and carceral machine whose main function is to contain and control this unworthy, dishonored and dangerous poor and black population. (Dixon, 2007, online text)[8]

"All us we are not saved," however, if people of African ancestry anywhere remain culturally and spiritually dislocated, economically dispossessed and politically marginalized by the mythology of race and its economic, cultural, and political inequities/iniquities.

The standpoint, that Black Americans "exist as an African people, an ethnic family," is not usually considered in prevailing education policy, research, theory, and practice (King, 2005, p. 20).[9] Ironically, Black academics and opinion leaders who publicly castigate the (Black) "lower socioeconomic people" (Bill Cosby's phrase) and exhort them to do better and be better tacitly acknowledge Black people's shared identity and community-family connections (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007).[10]

Yet in the arenas of public policy and education, transformative possibilities that address

the racialized roots of our predicament and that build on our collective legacy of democratizing and humanizing public spheres long dominated by White supremacy racism are curtailed. The need for group-based solutions for African Americans is typically unacknowledged, even by the most progressive observers. Certainly, this is the case with respect to the "shocking" and "awful" state of Black education in "post-Katrina" New Orleans, where nihilating academic knowledge has also played a pernicious role.

Shocking and Awful: Erasing Public Education in New Orleans

In *The Shock Doctrine*, award-winning investigative journalist Naomi Klein (2007) documents how governments, following economic strategies devised by the renowned economics professor Milton Friedman and his Chicago School of "fundamentalist capitalism," have used disasters as a pretext to experiment with drastic "free market" reforms at the expense of the public good. Klein begins her analysis of this "disaster capitalism" with the example of the near-total "erasure" of public education in New Orleans and its almost complete replacement by a system of privately run but publicly funded for-profit charter schools in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

In the turmoil and panic of natural and government instigated disasters such as the lack of adequate response to the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina, various populations have been "shocked" and "awed" into acquiescing to large-scale (and profitable) emergency economic, political, and social "reforms" that are rapidly implemented and then quickly made permanent.

Professor Friedman, also an advisor to presidents (and dictators like Pinochet) and "grand guru of unfettered capitalism" in the "hypermobile" global economy, was an ardent and influential supporter of school vouchers. He advanced the notion that Katrina's devastation in New Orleans represented a fortuitous opportunity. In an op-ed in the *New York Times* 3 months

after the hurricane, Friedman wrote,

> Most New Orleans schools are in ruins . . . as are the homes of the children who
> have attended them. The children are now scattered all over the country. This is
> a tragedy. It is also an opportunity to radically reform the educational system.
> (Klein, 2007, pp. 4–5)

A Nobel laureate, Friedman's ideas have exerted enormous influence on public policy in the United States and the foreign policy elites who studied with him at the University of Chicago. Primarily, he emphasized the "preservation and extension of individual freedom."[11] Klein notes that for Freidman a "state-run school system reeked of socialism." He passed away on November 16, 2006, less than a year after advancing his proposal for privatizing schooling in New Orleans but not before his scheme was seized by the George W. Bush administration and "a network of right-wing think tanks . . . that descended upon the city after the storm" (Klein, 2007, p. 5).

> Freidman's radical idea was that instead of spending a portion of the billions of
> dollars in reconstruction on rebuilding and improving New Orleans' existing
> public school system, the government should provide families with vouchers,
> which they could spend at private institutions, many run at a profit, that would
> be subsidized by the state. (p. 5)

Before the storm, the New Orleans public school system, like other resource-starved urban districts, was chronically ineffective in serving the mostly poor African American students

who attended the city's 123 schools. (It is worth noting, however, that White students were relatively well served.)

Unfit/Unworthy: Narratives of Blackness

In 2003, in accord with the accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the Louisiana Department of Education created the "Recovery School District" (RSD) to take over its "failing schools," which at the time of the storm in 2005 numbered 23.[12] As the online *Parents' Guide to Public Schools* (2007) in New Orleans states, "The Recovery School District is a state-wide, intermediate school district created by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to take over and operate failed schools." These are "low-performing schools that do not meet state-set goals for academic improvement for four or more consecutive years."[13] Within a neoliberal business model, such school "takeovers" are portrayed as rescue and reform to "save" mostly Black and Latino/Latina children from "failing" urban schools. To the extent that this federally prescribed top-down school "restructuring" effectively ends democratic governance in urban schools and communities, these accountability maneuvers mean a loss of liberty for the society. For another example, the teachers' union contract was dissolved after the storm and all 4,700 professional educators in New Orleans were summarily fired.

After the storm, the number of charter schools, which are mostly managed by the Recovery School District, jumped from 7 to 31. The locally elected New Orleans Public School (NOPS) board currently serves more than 20,000 students. It coexists with this parallel "governance" structure and operates only five public schools but oversees 12 charters operating in buildings that were previously public schools. The "sale" of public lands and property, forced relocation of working class and poor/inner city families, and gentrification are all part of a

pattern of economic and political dynamics that are at stake in urban school "reform."[14] Elites have allowed urban schools to atrophy in deteriorating ecological environments, while the lifeblood is drained from their surrounding jobless communities.

However, mismanagement by "unfit," "incompetent," and "corrupt" leadership is suggested as justification for the transfer of public wealth to private interests. For example, Ralph Adamo (2006), a New Orleans journalist (who is also a parent), concluded at the end of the second school year since the hurricane (2006–2007) that the "mismanaged and undersupplied" RSD that was responsible for 22 schools and about 9,500 mostly African American students was "nothing as much as a failed experiment." His news report decries privatization running "amok" in New Orleans:

> The story of the RSD is, in part, a story of how the idea that public entities (either systems or individuals) that were not fit or competent to run public schools came to dominate the reconfiguration of public education in New Orleans. That narrative was combined, of course, with the narrative that only private, market-driven forces can effectively improve school performance and carry on the tasks of public education. (Adamo, 2006)

However, locals can read a racialized subtext in this narrative. Prior to Hurricane Katrina New Orleans schools served 63,000 students: 93% were African American and 75% were "low-income" (see Note 11). Therefore, "low-performing" (mostly Black) schools are in "New Orleans," which is also mostly Black, in contrast to "*metropolitan* New Orleans," which consists of six other "Whiter" parishes. Thus, a decoded narrative reads,

> The idea that public entities *where Black people were predominate* were not fit

or competent to run public schools came to dominate in the reconfiguration of public education in New Orleans.

Similarly unspoken, spatially coded language operates in the racial discourse in other locales. In Atlanta, Georgia, for another example, when some Whites say "the city of Atlanta" or "Fulton County," they really mean "Black people" as opposed to references to surrounding ("Whiter) "Gwinnett" or "Henry" counties. (On an airport bus, I overheard one non-Atlanta resident say to another: "Whenever I need documents from the court in Atlanta, I know it's going to be hassle. They are so disorganized, I just go to Gwinnett where I don't have any problem.") Likewise, "urban" and "inner city" (as compared with "rural") are erstwhile spatial markers that connote racially coded meanings making them "near-synonymous with black in policy making as well as everyday parlance" (Wacquant, 2002).

In these racialized reconfigurations, the interests of Black middle-class educators and homeowners, as well as White people are expendable "collateral damage" given the larger goal of controlling/relocating/exploiting the dangerous/unworthy/unfit "Black poor," who frequently occupy prime urban real estate or school property (Tate, 2007). The economics and politics of urban school reform involve discourses and disparities of power that are evident not only in the "achievement gap" but also the wealth gap, the health gap, and the incarceration gap. In fact, Meiners (2007) cites the complicity of educators as a cost of the link between schools, prisons, and the normalization of mass incarceration, that is, the "making of public enemies."

Mass Black Criminalization and Incarceration

Before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was like no other American city; even with its "exotic"

blend of French, Spanish, African, and Anglo-American cultures, it was acknowledged to be America's "most African city" city as well. In fact, the major contours of the Black Experience in the Americas can be observed in the history of New Orleans, from the depredations of market-driven African enslavement, the deceptions of freedom and Reconstruction, the shortfall of integration and current Black dispossession from their homes and schools by 21st century "market-driven forces." New Orleans has been a crucible of Black educational excellence and resistance. However, mass Black criminalization and incarceration—which the Children's Defense Fund has dubbed a "cradle-to-prison pipeline"[SM]—has eclipsed mass mobilizations for justice. The online Black newspaper *BlackCommentator.com* (2004) observes, "Mass incarceration is by far the greatest crisis facing Black America, ultimately eclipsing all others."

Who Benefits?

Today, almost 2.25 million Americans are incarcerated in local, state, and federal prisons—more than any other nation and more than seven times the international average. African Americans and Latino/Latinas are disastrously overrepresented in this number. As a result of the national policy of mass criminalization and incarceration of Black American, liberty and democracy for all are also called into question. Virginia Senator Jim Webb chaired a recent Joint Economic Committee (JEC) of the U.S. Senate hearing on October 4, 2007, that examined this question: "Mass Incarceration in the United States: At What Cost?" Shockingly absent is any societal debate in the nation today concerning what Senator Webb described as "one of the largest public policy experiments" in the nation's history and the "alarming" numbers of incarcerated African Americans. The JEC hearing testimony addressed reasons why

♦ the incarceration rate has continued to rise despite falling crime rates;

- ♦ institutionalization rates have skyrocketed for Black men;

- ♦ Black male high school drop-outs have much greater risk of ending up in prison than other demographics;

- ♦ the U.S. incarceration rate is the highest in the world; and

- ♦ the incarceration rate for Black males remains much higher than other demographic groups.[15]

Economist Glenn C. Loury's testimony made the racialized interconnection between criminal (in)justice policy and the skyrocketing incarceration of African Americans explicit:

> What all this comes to is that, to save "our" middle class kids from the threat of their being engulfed by a drug epidemic that might not have even existed by the time drug incarceration began rapidly rising in the 1980s, we criminalized "our" underclass kids.[16]

Privatization, Profits, and Disparities of Power

A study by Roberts (2004) describes the social impact of this policy on young Black men and their communities:

> The extraordinary prison expansion involved young black men in grossly disproportionate numbers. Achieving another historic record, most of the people sentenced to time in prison today are black. On any given day, nearly one-third of black men in their twenties are under the supervision of the criminal justice system—either behind bars, on probation, or on parole . . . African Americans

experience a uniquely astronomical rate of imprisonment, and the social effects

of imprisonment are concentrated in their communities. Thus, the transformation

of prison policy at the turn of the twenty-first century is most accurately

characterized as the mass incarceration of African Americans. (pp. 1271)

While the public and educators are led to focus on the "behavior" of Black youth and to

speculate about the deficiencies of Black culture, Wacquant (2002) argues that "Physical

isolation of the Black poor enables racially selective policing, prosecution and imprisonment

without the need of special laws explicitly targeting blacks." As Wilder (2000) has also

concluded, racism continues in other institutionalized structures:

Social relations can undergo revolutionary change without impacting the power

dynamics of the society . . . Racism continues to reflect a disparity of power and

it is as egregious today as it was in the eighteenth century because the advent of

less dramatic forms of dominance is *not* progress. More insidious in modern

social relations is the fact that white people do not have to expressly target black

people in order to exploit them. They only have to locate their interests in

private and public policies that have disparate impact. Freed from involvement

in color-specific political decisions and specific acts of racial oppression, white

Americans can more easily imagine the injustices of their society to be natural

or irrational. (pp. 240–241)

Therefore, we should not be deceived because segregation is no longer the law of the

land. The policy of unprecedented prison proliferation and mass incarceration coalesced in the

1980s with a shift to private for-profit prisons that have replaced state-run institutions—just as private for-profit schools have begun to replace public schools in New Orleans and other urban districts. Similar non-racial but racially coded narratives normalize both.

Private prison corporations are a multibillion dollar business; they are involved with other providers of "health care, phone, food, and other services in correctional facilities" as well as economic development in rural, mostly White communities. These "free market" forces aggressively recruit new prison construction and work "actively to increase the number of citizens being locked up."[17] In a well-documented essay titled "Prison Profit and Slave Labor," blogger "NdicaBud" examines ways in which privatization is again "encroaching ever further on what had been state responsibilities, and prison systems are the target of private interests." This analysis, which illustrates how corporations and service-related businesses benefit from the prison industry, is worth quoting at length:

> The shift to privatization coalesced in the mid-1980s when three trends converged: The ideological imperatives of the free market; the huge increase in the number of prisoners; and the concomitant increase in imprisonment costs. In the giddy atmosphere of the Reagan years, the argument for the superiority of free enterprise resonated profoundly. Only the fire departments seemed safe, as everything from municipal garbage services to Third World state enterprises went on sale. Proponents of privatized prisons put forward a simple case: The private sector can do it cheaper and more efficiently. This assortment of entrepreneurs, free market ideologues, cash-strapped public officials, and academics promised design and management innovations without reducing costs or sacrificing "quality of service." In any case, they noted correctly, public

sector corrections systems are in a state of chronic failure by any measure, and

no other politically or economically feasible solution is on the table.[18]

Data compiled by the Children's Defense Fund (2007) offers additional insight regarding

the interconnection between education "failure" and incarceration:

◆ Black Americans constitute 13% of the population but half the nation's

   prisoners.

◆ Black youth are almost five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youth

   for drug offenses.

◆ Government data show Black students face much harsher discipline and are put

   out of school more often than any other ethnic group for similar offenses.

◆ Some 70% of Black children are born to single mothers, a major cause of

   youth delinquency.[19]

It is also important to note that women are now the fastest growing prison population and

many are young mothers with children (Talvi, 2007).

Education and Socialization for Cultural Well-Being

The above statistics suggest that the condition of our youth as well as the state of Black

education are far removed from the traditional culture of achievement of people of African

ancestry. After the defeat of the Songhay Empire in 1591, the European Transatlantic

enslavement enterprise interrupted this legacy of educational and cultural excellence. For

instance, when it was illegal to teach our ancestors to read, they hid their counterknowledge and societal critique in the words of "sorrow songs" such as "everybody talking 'bout heaven ain't going there," songs that document their refusal to acquiesce to the inhumanity and ideology of enslavement.

During Reconstruction, "free people of color" in Louisiana and other Black leaders who had obtained some schooling participated in rewriting state constitutions in the South to provide free public schools for all children (Anderson, 1988). Such educational provisions constituted a watershed in the Black freedom movement that benefited the society as a whole. However, the reestablishment of plantation power with northern complicity meant disenfranchisement, Jim Crow terror, lynching and segregated, unequal education—for nearly a century—but not without continuing resistance that is part of our cultural excellence tradition.

The African American legacy of cultural excellence and resistance to oppression includes the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, the modern Civil Rights Movement, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control movement, the Black Studies movement and the establishment of African-centered schools and curricula, as well as independent Muslim and Christian schools (Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1991; Muhammad, 2005), to cite a few examples. It remains to be seen whether the education system's current gambit—school takeovers, high stakes testing and dismantling public schools with the promotion of vouchers and charters as the only viable alternative to chronically failing schools—will permit Black people to continue to carve out enough "liberated space" for authentic Black education and socialization for our cultural well-being (King, 2008).

What Really Happened in New Orleans?

In 1960, four Black girls braved hysterical crowds of "angry white women in pin curlers and toreador pants" during what has been called "the Second Battle of New Orleans"—the 100-year struggle to integrate the public schools (Baker, 1996). A Norman Rockwell painting shows one of them, six-year-old Ruby Bridges walking alone past armed Federal marshals on her way to "integrate" Frantz Elementary School. At another school, McDonough 19, Tessie Prevost, Gaile Etienne, and Leona Tate were also "protected" by Federal marshals. This movement to integrate the schools in New Orleans was a sustained collective action on behalf of the entire Black community-family.

There is no hint of this heritage of collective action and "community capacity" (Roberts, 2004) in the images and news reports that were broadcast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Rather, the media vilified and dehumanized those who were left stranded in New Orleans in grotesque tales of wanton savagery, supposedly inflicted by young Black males (e.g., raping babies and elderly women). While the authorities later denied the veracity of these widely circulated tales, no one reported *why* the elderly and mothers with babies were gathered together outside at the front of the Morial Convention Center. Anecdotal "Word" from the community and evacuees, on the other hand, indicates that traditional Black cultural values prevailed during this crisis: The young men gave the elders and women the utmost respect. They *organized the people* at the Convention Center; they directed the elders and mothers with children to the front *so they could be rescued first* when the buses they had been told to wait for finally arrived.

What Is to Be Done?

Research documents that mass incarceration destroys "social citizenship" (Roberts, 2004). At this time of crisis in Black education and the society, what do students, teachers, and community educators have to know if Black youth are to learn in ways that enable them to care about their communities and to contribute to community-building rather than the pursuit of education only as a one-way ticket out? Post-Katrina Black education challenges include what educators are learning (or not learning) about Black students, about our culture and about our African heritage, which contributes to educational inequity and policies and practices implicated in the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Dance, 2002; Duncan, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; Meiners, 2007).

One possibility discussed in this *Handbook*, Black economic literacy, can also incorporate Black-community-family consciousness (Gordon Nembhard, 2008). Questions that should inform such literacy include Why are Black communities so poor and why is Africa poor/underdeveloped? What have African people given to the world? How can we restore community capacity and make a living in this era of deindustrialization, other global changes in the economy, and prevailing "market forces"? These are the kinds of questions Black youth (and their teachers) should be able to answer and they should be able to develop solutions for such systemic problems. In teacher education, curriculum development, and community outreach, there is a critical role for Black Studies in addressing the crisis of knowledge that undermines Black educational excellence (Gordon Nembhard & Forstater, in press; Ward & Marable, 2003).

Systemic and historical thinking is rare regarding social issues such as the legacy of slavery, poverty *and* oppression, African American group identity, consciousness and identification with our African heritage as well as the mechanisms of White supremacy racism. Cosby's widely publicized criticisms (and concern about) poor Black people fail to link the

systemic impoverishment of Black communities to the institutionalized privilege and advantages of White-middle-classness. In response, for example, Dyson asks, *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* (Dyson, 2006).[20]

The failure of public education to serve Black youth is a form of human rights abuse—the 21st century *Maafa.* While the "terrible consequences" of racialized disparities are life threatening for the Black community-family, they actually call into question the values of the society, including democracy, freedom, and justice for all. Education professionals and policymakers focus on high stakes testing and "teacher quality and accountability" to the exclusion of other possibilities that engage youth in active learning and doing for democratic citizenship (Lipman, 2003; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 2001) and cultural well-being (King, 2008). Lipman's (2002) research links accountability to "racialized social control" and needed community-based strategies for social change. As Lipman argues, "Policy responses are conditioned by the relative strength and mobilization of social forces (e.g., organizations of civil society, working-class organizations, popular social movements)" (p. 12). Our ability to address the challenges of this era depends on opportunities that we create to educate, to socialize, and to mobilize the next generation.

In conclusion, the state of Black education "post-Katrina" challenges us to educate all children, including "other people's children," to build a world in which "all god's chillun got shoes." That is to say, our humanity places certain obligations on us—to be responsible for ourselves—for our own spiritual, intellectual, and economic integrity and cultural well-being and to understand how our society *really* works. The education "reform" that has been engineered in New Orleans faster than the broken levees could be repaired has been lauded in the press as "the nation's preeminent laboratory for the widespread use of charter schools" (Klein, 2007, p. 6).

However, public school teachers there have described this massive experiment with the futures of our children as a "land grab" (Klein, 2007, pp. 6–7). After visiting New Orleans recently, the President of the United Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, concluded that "A major part of the reshaping of the city's ethnic face has been played out on the stage of New Orleans public schools."[21]

Our obligation is to be proactive especially on behalf of those who suffer. Safeguarding public education would seem to be an important part of that obligation. Saving our children requires both quality education and appropriate community-family socialization. We require creative community-based solutions for this responsibility (King, 2005). For example, the study of African language to access core values and African social practice and organization—before European values intruded—is one possible venue for the recovery of valuable traditions and the reunification of the African family. In Songhoy-senni (language) and classical Songhoy society there was no word for "prison" because other social institutions worked to harmonize society (Maiga, 2007).

In response to mass Black incarceration and criminalization we need a mass movement for educational, social, and economic justice that includes investment in our communities and in people. The future of public education and livable communities is what is at stake for African Americans, the nation, and the world when Black children in a public education system in a major American city become pawns in a massive experiment in "crisis exploitation" to persuade an unsuspecting nation to accept privatized, for-profit rather than public education at our expense.

Notes

1. In Trinidad and Jamaica, "all ah we" means "all of us," so "all ah we" is one. "We are all one people." Personal communications, Janice B. Fournillier, Annette Henry, and Ashley Hamilton-Taylor, November 10, 2007. In Jamaica, one might also hear: "All ah we no save." Personal communication, Sylvia Wynter, November 11, 2007. "All us we" incorporates a Black American inflection and includes humanity in general.

2. Marimba Ani introduced this Kiswahili term, *Maafa*, which means "disaster" or "terrible consequence," to describe the disconnection, displacement, and dislocation that African people have suffered through 500 years of enslavement, imperialism, colonialism, invasions, and exploitation. See Richards (1989) and Ani (1994).

3. Cited in Klein (2007).

4. "Prison profit and slave labor." See www.yahooka.com/forum /politics-current-affairs/22956-prison-profit-slave-labor.html.

5. The concept "civilizational" is adapted from Munford's (2001) definition of "civilizational historicism": a system of thought, a philosophy, an explanatory model with a specific purpose—a world view of use to Black folk" (p. 1).

6. Annihilation and nihilation are related but distinct social processes. Wynter (1989) describes the concept of nihilation (from the French word *néatisé*) as the total negation of being. See also King (2005).

7. Sylvia Wynter (2006) explores the interconnections between our "unbearable wrongness of being," "the epistemology of knowledge" and the "liberation of people" (p. 113).

8. Dixon summarizes Wacquant's (2002) analysis.

9. This is the first of "Ten Vital Principles of Black Education and Socialization" advanced by the Commission on Research in Black Education established by the American Educational Research Association (www.coribe.org).

10. A rash of hate crimes, including events that recently occurred in Jena, Louisiana, have invigorated mass mobilizing—spurred by Black radio commentators who address listeners as "family."

11. Hoover Institution, Stanford University press release, November 16, 2006, "Milton Friedman noted economist, Nobel laureate, and Hoover senior research fellow, dies at 94." Retrieved November 9, 2006, from www.hooveSr.org/pubaffairs/releases/4667846.html

12. See Steiner (2005).

13. The *Parents' Guide* states, "In New Orleans, the RSD operates 24 schools and oversees 20 charter schools. RSD is run by a superintendent who is appointed by the state Superintendent of Education. An advisory board was established to advise the superintendent on matters pertaining to the RSD." See www.nolaparentsguide.org/Parents'%20Guide%20Aug07.pdf.

14. It can also be argued that the provisions of NCLB permit local and national "effective school" models and charters, including African-centered schools, to provide community-designed, if not controlled, alternatives. The issue of disenfranchisement and dismantling of public education remains, however. The sale of public lands and buildings when school enrollments in deteriorating areas are allowed to drop and threaten public schools' economic viability is another example. See "Chronology of California School District Takeovers, Youth Strategy Project." www.datacenter.org/research/oaklandtakeover.pdf. "Dismantling a Community" provides a New Orleans privatization timeline. www.soros.org/resources/articles_publications/publications/dismantling_20061026/dismantling_20061026.pdf.

15. Testimony before the JEC of the U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., October 4, 2007. See http://jec.senate.gov/Hearings/10.04.07EconomicCostofIncarceration.htm. Data presented included these statistics: Although African Americans constitute 14% of regular drug users, they are 37% of those arrested for drug offenses and 56% of persons in state prisons for drug crimes. African Americans serve nearly as much time in federal prisons for drug offenses as Whites do for violent crimes. A Black male who does not finish high school now has a 60%

chance of going to jail. One who has finished high school has a 30% chance.

16. *Mass Incarceration and American Values*, JEC Testimony, October 4, 2007.

17. See www.motherjones.com/news/special_reports/prisons/print_overview.html. See also, Blankenship and Yanarell (2004).

18. See http://www.yahooka.com/forum/politics-current-affairs/22956-prison-profit-slave-labor.html

19. Children's Defense Fund, reported in Powell (2007).

20. It is worth noting that Dr. Cosby's attention has shifted away from a compelling research, policy, and government agenda that he cogently advanced in his book with Dwight Allen, titled *American Schools: The 100 Billion Dollar Challenge*, in which he called for a massive federal investment in research. Retrieved June 30, 2001, from ipublish.com www.bn.com

21. See Weingarten (2007).

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