

# The Future of Education: Black Life and Our Classrooms

## A Moderated Panel Discussion

Moderation/Introductory Analysis:  
C. Darius Gordon

Panelists:  
Cherrish Cook  
Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta  
Onirê Onã Walê Borges dos Santos  
Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos

This piece is an abridged version of a panel discussion that was part of the symposium on Anti-Black State Violence Across the Americas: Power and Struggle in Brazil and the U.S., held at UC Berkeley on February 20–22, 2019, and organized by the LUTA Initiative, a coalition of scholars invested in facilitating international dialogue about racialized state violence across the Americas. The conversation featured Cherrish Cook and Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta (Berkeley High School Student Activists, United States) in conversation with Onirê Onã Walê Borges dos Santos and Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos (React or Die/Winnie Mandela Pan-Africanist School, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil). C. Darius Gordon moderated the panel (Editor, Berkeley Review of Education, Graduate School of Education, UC Berkeley). Alejandro Reyes performed transcription and translation for this article. For more information on the LUTA Initiative, the symposium, and a full video of this panel discussion with English and Portuguese subtitles, visit <https://lutainitiative.wordpress.com/>

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: C. Darius Gordon . Email:

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### **(Re)imagining Education in the Face of Anti-Black State Violence**

This panel started from the premise that our very notions of school and schooling have been built upon foundations of anti-Blackness used as tools for state surveillance, dispossession, and enclosure, which regularly situates schools as sites of Black suffering (Dumas, 2014; Sojoyner, 2016; Vargas, 2018). As such, schools repeatedly fail Black children and their communities despite their promises of a just, fair, and equitable system. Rather than engaging with the school as a neutral site of uncontested material and ideological politics, this panel contended with the (re)production of anti-Black violence enabled by the states' neglect of the educational needs of Black communities as well as the violence that occurs in and through schooling as a state project. The panelists explored the ways that harm is enacted upon Black children and their communities through practices such as school discipline, anti-Black curricula, school tracking, and enforcing normative concepts of learning. Beyond naming schooling as an often-overlooked form of state violence, this panel (re)imagines Black educational futurities and the possibilities of their manifestation by sharing proposals for educational spaces and practices that seek restoration and healing in the midst of anti-Black state violence.

The panel's discourse relied on an understanding of anti-Blackness as a fundamentally transnational structure. Encouraging us to think beyond the limits of borders, the panelists highlighted the similarities in their educational experiences and desires in order to reveal the global nature of anti-Blackness as it manifests in education. The panel suggested new avenues for how we might understand both the problems and the strategies of resistance to educational structures that are governed by state and non-state actors that undermine Black life. Namely, if we are to truly escape, refuse, or redress the violence of these structures, we will have to rely on transnational solidarity in both thought and action.

Through sharing their own personal experiences in schools and their desires for a better education for Black youth and their communities, the panelists highlighted the urgency of a reconceptualization of Black education. They called attention to the need for schools to be a safe place where Black students—especially Black girls and women—are heard, seen, and empowered. Considering the ways in which societies make illegible or misrecognize Black suffering, joy, and existence, it is essential that we establish educational spaces that affirm Blackness in all its forms. The panelists re-envisioned possibilities for the relationships between teachers and students that center on care (Valenzuela, 1999). They touched on the power of rebuilding community relations with all members of the community, including the incarcerated, the dispossessed, and the neglected. In addition to new visions of education, the panel explored the (im)possibilities of manifesting these visions in our current moment. By sharing the successes and challenges of the Winnie Mandela Pan-Africanist School in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, they discussed how these hopes for Black education are being put into action. *Reaja ou Será Morta, Reaja ou Será Morto* [React or Die]—a political, Pan-Africanist organization based in Salvador—founded the school in 2016. This school is a site of knowledge production, Black radical activism, and community building. In fact, in this context, these are all one in the same in that the school serves as a site of potential for the necessary educational changes that panelists proposed. These panelists deeply analyzed their lived experiences—both distinct and shared—and urged us all to take

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action, as they have, to “falsify the institution” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 20) of schooling by redefining what it means to engage in the practice of education. I encourage us all to take seriously their words and their call to action. The future of Black life depends on it.

### **The Future of Education: Black Life and Our Classrooms**

#### **Welcoming Remarks**

**C. Darius Gordon:** Good morning, everyone, *bom dia!* I’m very excited to be here! I would like to start this wonderful panel, and first I want to frame this day. Today we are talking about Americas’ Futures. I don’t know about those of you who were here yesterday, but I went home exhausted. It was a long day, we talked a lot about the commonalities and the differences that we share in our roots as Black folks across the diaspora, and it was really powerful. But not only was I exhausted; more than that, I was energized and recharged. I hadn’t felt that way in a very long time, and I felt ready to do the work that I feel needs to be done. And I think that yesterday really laid the groundwork for that. To give an example of that and to frame where I’m coming from, I’ll talk a little bit about what Cat Brooks [Co-Founder of the Anti Police-Terror Project] said.

She was insisting yesterday [that] people are always asking her, “How do we fix this problem? How do we fix these institutions?” And she was insisting: “We cannot fix what is not broken.” Which is to say that these institutions were not made with Black people in mind, they were actually made to undermine Black life. So, we cannot think about how to fix these institutions, we have to do something different. And she said that people often ask her, “So then what? We understand, we agree with you, but what do we do next? What is the next institution?” And she said, “I don’t have the answers. But I know that something else needs to be done.” She kept saying, “something else, something else,” over and over yesterday.

It really stuck with me, and I think that, for me, that’s what this Americas’ Futures [the theme for the third day of the symposium] is about. It is about finding ways to imagine concretely and to work together to re-envision what that something else is. So, I think today’s workshops are about saying enough is enough and beginning to actually work toward those alternative designs, which have Black life and Black liberation in mind.

Today we open up with a panel called “The Future of Education: Black Life and Our Classrooms.” When I first heard that jes [jessica compton] and Fatinha [Maria-Fátima Santos] [Lead Organizers of the Symposium, Department of Sociology, UC Berkeley] had the idea for this incredible event and were ready and charged to go . . . I’m a first year student, so I’d maybe been here for one or two months, so I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but I was immediately drawn, not feeling like I had much to contribute to these folks who have been doing this work and this thinking for a long time. The one thing I did have to raise my hand and say was that we need to talk about education. Education needs to be central. It needs to be a key moment in which we gather around in this symposium. And I think that yesterday I felt affirmed in that belief. In every single panel yesterday, again and again, education came up in many different ways, but it was central to the conversations on Black feminism, to conversations shared on

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different histories, it was central to the conversations on police terror and the carceral state. And so, for me, it was like wow, I'm definitely in the right place talking about the right things. And so, it's not to say that education came up in a way that people had blind hope in education, and definitely not in schooling. In fact, people were very critical of the ways that we think about those things. But I also think that what I got out of yesterday is that education is key to getting at that "something else" that Cat Brooks was talking about.

Andreia [Beatriz]—one of our panelists who I'll introduce to you in a moment—said yesterday, "We don't yet have the societal infrastructure for Black liberation, but we need people to survive if we are to liberate ourselves." So, I think that reimagining alternatives to education is part of the fight against Black genocide to ensure a reconnection between people and life. I personally believe that education is situated at the place to have the potential to be the bridge between what is and what can be. So, with that, we'll begin our workshop, which will be discussing both the ways in which we recognize the violence enacted by and within schools but also collectively reimagining new and radical educational possibilities.

So, I will start by introducing our panelists, and then we'll get going from there. Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos is a physician, professor, and coordinator of the grassroots community action group *Reaja ou Será Morta*, *Reaja ou Será Morto* [React or Die]. She studied medicine at the Federal University [of Health Sciences] in Porto Alegre and received her master's degree in Collective Health at the State University of Feira de Santana. She is a practicing physician within the jails and penitentiaries of the state of Bahia, a member of Brazil's National Commission for Criminal and Penitentiary Policies, and supervisor of the National Program for Basic Attention to Torture. She is a professor at the State University of Feira de Santana, and member of the scientific community Association of Black Researchers in Bahia. Currently in the doctoral program for Collective Health at the Federal University of Bahia, her research examines social trauma and national health policies in Brazil's penitentiary system. She is also a co-founder of the Pan-Africanist Winnie Mandela School in Salvador, Bahia, which we'll be talking about today.

To her right is Onirê Onã Walê Borges dos Santos. He is 12 years old and a student in the seventh grade. He is a militant-in-training of the political organization React or Die, *Reaja ou Será Morta*, *Reaja ou Será Morto*. He has participated in the International March Against the Genocide of Black People and also the Meeting of Maroon Children in the Pan-Africanist Winnie Mandela School. His main influences are his mother and father, and he is a Miles Morales fan. He trains [in] boxing for Black self-defense and also likes video games and comics.

To Onirê's right, we have Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta, who is an energetic jazz performing artist and a Berkeley High School student. Since coming to her new school, she participated in an all-Black play called *The Colored Museum* and has sung in multiple dance shows. In her spare time, she rollerblades and skates at the Berkeley Skate Park. She looks forward to engaging in more student activism.

And last, but not least, we have Cherrish Cook, who's a junior at Berkeley High School, where she is a member of the Arts and Humanities Academy, a small learning community and arts school. Cherrish is a performing artist and has starred in plays, such

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as *The Colored Museum* and an African dance show that takes place every winter and fall. Some of her interests include acting, learning, and advocating for the African American community. Cherrish has been a part of many organizations. The most significant organization that has impacted her life is the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. She has worked with this organization to put together many community-building events, such as the turkey drive that takes place on Thanksgiving and a clothes-and-food drive for the homeless that takes place at the Berkeley Fire Station. Cherrish looks forward to helping and sharing her knowledge across her community.

*To begin, Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos played a video about the Winnie Mandela Pan-Africanist School.*

### **Opening Video**

[The video opens with scenes of from the school. In the background, there is singing, and then various members of the school community begin to speak.]

*Hamilton Borges dos Santos (School Co-Founder): We're from the peripheries.*

*We're from the peripheries.*

*Potentially more human.*

*We're from the peripheries, potentially more human.*

*Black men and women at the sugar mill are going to lay down and roll.*

*Black men and women in Alagados revolutionize.*

*Iemanjá weeps in the stilt houses.*

*Oh, our people, our glory.*

*This song is like Exu's sword for Ogum to go to war.*

*It creates a new era.*

*Modernity awaits, bean stew on the table, a gun in hand.*

*A free child, this song.*

*Bean stew on the table, bro, a gun in hand.*

*A free child, this song.*

*It's for Lázaro, the kid on the street with nowhere to live.*

*Lázaro, the sad kid who's indignant.*

*Beans on the table, gun in hand.*

*A free child, this song.*

*Beans on the table, gun in hand.*

*A free child, this song.*

*Beans on the table, gun in hand.*

*A free child, this song.*

**Matheusa Xavier (School Coordinator):** The school was born in August 2016, on the day of the 4th International March Against the Genocide of Black People. After 12 years as a campaign, React or Die finally decided to institutionalize a 100% pan-Africanist school. A school that dealt with our issues, that spoke of our children, that offered a type of education and a method that were specific for our communities.

**Wagner (Student):** Every day in the *favela* I think I'm happy, but here come the cops and say, "Hands on your head, thief!" But I didn't do anything, just 'cause I'm Black it means I'm a thief, I don't understand that. I don't want any trouble. I want to fight to

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save my color. I'm Black, yes, but I know I'm happy. I go on living . . . without shame I say it . . .

**Cauan (Student):** I wanted to be two things: a poet, a bard—I even have a poem to recite—and a dancer.

**Videographer:** So recite your poem.

**Cauan:** My poem's title is, "Living, Knowing, and Setting Examples."

*My life has to be valued.*

*Hey boy, hey girl, react!*

*Practice sports, like jujitsu.*

*Don't let death take you, you're a pan-Africanist Black kid.*

*The cops are not pan-Africanist.*

**Videographer:** Uhuru! [Freedom!]

**Cauan:** Uhuru!

**Videographer:** Is there something else you would like to say?

**Cauan:** I'd like to send a message to our audience, or to my future, in case I ever see it. Never give up your dreams, follow them. Go after them and don't stop, you'll get there.

**Hamilton Borges dos Santos:** React! And fury and rage spread out.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** That's why we believe that consolidating the Winnie Mandela School means consolidating a set of actions and keeping them alive, keeping in motion a set of actions that lead us down a path, that allow us to tread that path, which is a path we are creating. But we understand that, in those 12 years of React or Die, we managed to make progress, and now we have to consolidate a series of institutions, Black institutions, institutions of our identity that allow us to elaborate and strengthen the process of Black people's liberation.

**Hamilton Borges dos Santos:** May we have clay to be reborn, a grave and a sweet corner to rest, something to love in eternity, and may death come softly with its warm tongue telling us when it's time . . . react!

### Panel Discussion

**C. Darius Gordon:** So now I've asked each of our panelists to share some brief opening remarks with the idea of the questions posed regarding their experiences being Black in schools and dealing with educational institutions and the ways in which they can imagine educational projects that work toward Black liberation. So, Andreia, would you like to begin?

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** Good morning everyone. Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to be here. Every time I see again the materials we have at React or Die, I travel in time, but I also revisit our practices. I would like to thank everyone who is working so much. Yesterday at some point I asked for a cup of coffee, because those of us who work in healthcare—I'm a doctor—sometimes to regain strength and improve attention, we develop a behavior, some psychologists claim it is a behavioral and not a dependency issue. But coffee . . . a cup of coffee all the time. So yesterday I kindly asked for a cup of coffee, and suddenly I had two large cups of coffee. So, I would like to thank all the caring people are showing. Yesterday I asked for a pen. I didn't return it to the young man there but I will, okay? I'll just have to find it somewhere. But all the attentions everyone is having with us, I really thank you, it's very important.

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I want to say that Hamilton [Borges] didn't want to come to the workshop, but now I understood, because we're all under 25 years old. I think that was why, since he's already 26, he thought it better not to come. I am feeling really well here, and I want to say that it is very important to speak. There's something I hadn't realized, that always stands out about Cauan's [a student featured in the video] words, and I'd like to talk about it because it really touches me. "To whoever is listening and to the future, if I ever see it." When a Black mother or a Black woman hears that, it has to do with several things. But the main one regards our process of elimination. That boy had his grandpa murdered, a nationally and internationally recognized *capoeirista* [a performer of capoeira, a Brazilian martial art], Moa do Katendê. He's a boy who has gone through a very beautiful process of growth and development. So, it is because of that that we have undertaken this struggle and walked down this path. It is because of that—that oftentimes we are so hard with our words, in our way of dealing with others, in our way of speaking. But is there another way of speaking of pain and death and of the great violence inflicted on Black bodies? It is a matter for all of us to reflect on.

I want to say that it is also a pleasure to share this space and this moment with these two young women with a beautiful story, and also with Onirê who, despite his shyness, agreed to come here to speak. I'm going to pass the microphone to him, so he can speak a bit about the school's history.

**Onirê Onã Walê:** Good morning everyone. My name is Onirê, and I am here to speak about the Winnie Mandela School. After 12 years of struggle, React or Die realized that it needed a place to organize better, and also that the community's children did not get a good education in schools and therefore also needed a place to organize. The school was founded on August 22, 2016, the day of the 4th International March Against the Genocide of Black People.

What does the school do? Well, the school has boxing classes at night, Portuguese, math, English, science, history, geography. There are also cultural activities like the Uhuru Cinema, literature, visits to museums, conferences, beaches. It also recognizes our history of struggle and resistance and our main references, which are Winnie Mandela, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Assata Shakur, the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King, Zeferina, etc.

Here [referencing photos from a slide] are two of our activities: the Uhuru Cinema, where we show a movie on a certain topic and at the end we talk about it, and boxing, which is used for self-defense. This [referencing a photo on the slide] is the day when a dentist visited the Winnie Mandela School. That day the dentist spoke about oral hygiene and how to take care of it. Here [referencing another photo] we have a regular day at the school, with some older and some younger children. And this is our main achievement, which is a chance for a better future for Black children. Thank you for participating.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** I just wanted to add that beyond education, what we seek is a process of integral development, with the understanding that such development also fosters education. And I would like to ask permission to show a photo of one of the activities that took place in 2011 [she displays a photo from an event regarding play in prisons]. And why do we call this integral development and not education? This photo is of one of the activities in which Milena [Britto] and Fatinha [Santos] participated in 2011

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in a prison unit. Among the many activities we organize at Intramural Culture—an organization of family and friends of prisoners—we organized a Children’s Day. And brilliantly and with a lot of good will, Fátima and Milena . . . it was Fátima who took the photos, so there are very few of her. She had a very good camera and we didn’t. And we’re giving a talk in a prison unit at the Lemos Brito Penitentiary in Salvador, and we took the art of playing to the prison. It was visitation day and the inmates’ children were there, and it was Children’s Day, and we took many toys that we collected, that Milena and Fátima collected, and we took them to the unit and played.

And it was very interesting to discover that many inmates—who were 18, 30, 40 years old—confessed that they didn’t get to play as children. So, they even fought over the toys because they played more than the children: “No, it’s for the children,” “But I want to play too!” They played soccer; they played several games. So what I’m trying to say is that we need to understand that this process of integral development, which we call education, is a process that we understand as being able to break away from the process of domestication, with a process that has been established by a logic of education, by transforming, which is what we do at the Winnie Mandela School, with a process of development that takes into account caring, identity, individual histories, food, all of that, which is a part of the development process.

How can I care, how can I offer a book to read if the child or the adult is on an empty stomach? How can I offer a book to read if your story is that your dad and mom couldn’t learn to read, your grandpa and grandma who couldn’t go to school? And that’s not part of many children’s routines. Or, as some people have said, with a process that deconstructs all notions of knowledge and establishes a culture based on principles that are not ours and a trajectory, a story of struggle, that is not ours.

So, the idea at the Winnie Mandela School is to strengthen that process of integral development. To strengthen our history, so that based on our own history we can recreate learning, knowledge, and experience reflection in a constructivist, reflective manner, in a way whereby we produce knowledge that is truly transformative of our reality, and not knowledge to be stored away and that serves only a certain group. Thank you and thank you for this opportunity.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** Good morning, *bom dia*. I’m a junior as well as Cherrish. I recently switched to Berkeley High this year from Oakland Tech, another great school. And my experience there has been pretty amazing. There’s not a huge Black community there, but there are some spaces where we can gather, and—like I said—I was in *The Colored Museum* with Cherrish, and that was a really amazing experience. I don’t know, I’ve never really felt any micro- or major aggressions, luckily, yet.

**Cherrish Cook:** Good morning, I’m Cherrish. I’ve been going to Berkeley High School since freshman year, and—for me, I don’t know—I can honestly say as a Black girl there and a Black student in general, there’s not really a lot of safe places for us, because we are at a disadvantage compared to other students at Berkeley High. And I just feel like I’ve never really experienced that, and when we do have these discussions in class about things that affect Black students, there isn’t really a place where we can go and just be, like, because if I’m sitting in a class with a whole bunch of white students, and we’re talking about police brutality or something like that, I want to feel like I can go somewhere and sit down and talk to someone and be like, I am just tired of this, you

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know? This is really causing a strain on me, and I'm tired of seeing my people always targeted. We're always, you know, always at a disadvantage, and everything is so against us, especially our education system and all of that. And I just feel like there's never really safe spaces for Black students in general at Berkeley High. I don't know. I wish, hopefully I can bring this to attention and have these things brought to Berkeley High. That's my experience.

But overall, in AHA [Arts and Humanities Academy] I've learned a lot. Coming into AHA, we took ethnic studies, so I learned a lot about the LGBTQ community and immigration. I learned a lot about that with an amazing Black teacher, Miss Erby. AHA is inclusive—but it's not a lot of Black students still—but it's still a very good, small school.

**C. Darius Gordon:** Thank you. So something that really stuck with me, Andreia, is when you were talking about when you brought the toys to prison and people were fighting over them because they weren't able to play as children, how they just didn't get that opportunity. I think a lot of about Black childhoods, so I wanted to . . . question . . . the ways in which you all think education shapes Black childhoods, the way you think that maybe it has the right or responsibility to protect, to prepare young Black folks for Black life in society. So, if you could, speak a bit to the ways you think about the relationship between Black childhoods and education, to start with.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** First, when Cherrish spoke, it's incredible, that experience of being Black is very peculiar but at the same time very common for us. Not having a protected, safe space is an experience I've also had in Brazil, and that Onirê is no doubt experiencing now. So that's an important perspective. How much that . . . and what we've always considered is that it impacts the lives of all Black people. Not having that place of care and protection. In other words, to what extent do we develop and grow with a story of insecurity, uncertainty, dissatisfaction. And I don't know if we can measure how it affects the way we grow throughout our life, how we reach 60 years of age with such a history, when at the time when we should learn the meaning of care, when we should grow strong, at least until the age of seven, with love and protection, and yet we don't have that.

If we leave the space of our home, we are inevitably exposed, because of our racial belonging, to a very high level of violation and disrespect. It all starts with simple actions, such as comments about our hair. And probably other Black women here have heard the same story I've heard: "Why is your hair that way?" "You have to comb your hair; you have to cut your hair." "You have bad hair!" And to what extent does that affect a girl's or a boy's life? We can't measure it, we can't quantify it.

So, the school's idea is based on what we experience. And many mothers who have gone to the school . . . our project was initially conceived for a period of 10 years because we understood that, given our limitations, we had 10 years to accompany relatives together with their children, with the aim of reorganizing our community's life. So with one, two, or three children—and there's even a family we accompany with four children—we would invite that family to participate in the development process. That's our idea. We started with 12 children and today, up to last week, we had 27. We started the registration period, and we will probably have more.

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My vote even lost in that process because I said, we need to accompany those 12 children for 10 years, supporting the families, discussing with the families how to strengthen family ties in the development process, how to create a network of care and protection for the children, with them as the first cell of a process that would spread to other families and also to the communities. To give you an idea, many of the children who we started to accompany had been diagnosed. And here comes into play something we call the medicalization of society, where people are diagnosed to justify a certain inability attributed to them. For example, there's a trend now in Brazil to diagnose children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD]. So every child who is for some reason . . . there is no examination of the institution's operation, as if schools worked well. So, an issue is attributed to a child which is not really a problem, but rather something different regarding their learning. And the child is labeled: That child has problems. So, some of the children who showed up had been labeled with ADHD: "Mom, take that child to the doctor because she'll never learn to read." Children aged eight, 10, 12, 14 years. That was the diagnosis, and many mothers were convinced: "No, we're just bringing her here so she can play, because the teacher at school said she'll never be able to learn." And we started discovering that the children had always been wonderful in everything they did. They could count money to buy sweets at the corner store, they would take money from home to buy bread, they could defend themselves in an oppressive society, they could tell when the police came to the community. How could a child like that be unable to learn?

And [our] school's idea—and we're undergoing [this] process—is to deconstruct [that labeling process] within the families, to lead fathers and mothers back. To try to show them that, for example, they can give up some practices in order to strengthen their community. For example, drinking beer, which is a legal drug. A bottle of beer costs six *reais* in Brazil, and I can take that money and buy a notebook, rice, beans, books. I can make that money circulate in a way that strengthens my family. I can smoke less. If I smoke 20 cigarettes a day, I can try to smoke 10 and save part of that money to buy a CD, something to develop and strengthen that child's culture and identity. So the idea . . . and when Matheuzza—who is one of the school's coordinators—says, "This is an African territory," and that in the school every Black person is free, that's what she's talking about, about building that identity, building that history, that safe space. That's important . . . to transcend.

And it is very important for us to hear testimonies like these in order to understand what world we are talking about. Because sometimes, when you are 10, 12 years old and someone says, "Wow, your nose is too big," "you're a Black girl with a white soul," we take that personally thinking it is our problem. But when we gather a number of Black children and hear that beautiful rap by Wagner or Cauã's poem [students at the Winnie Mandela School], we stop to think. And we need to do that, we need that safe space, we need to gather as many children and relatives and mothers as possible to reflect on what White supremacy has done to us. How it has even made us think bad of ourselves. How it has created the idea that we are incapable. What do you mean we're incapable? Like Hamilton [Borges dos Santos] says, boxing class . . . is for self-defense but also to learn. What do you mean we can't learn, if we invented writing, we invented math, we built civilizations well before Europe got there? If we created the

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first library in the world in Africa? What do you mean we're not capable, if we've had brilliant people like Malcolm X, Muhammed Ali, Assata Shakur? What do you mean we can't?

So that's the idea behind a Black institution, so that [idea] can circulate among us, so we can relearn to learn our own way, so we can relearn to know ourselves our own way, in that safe space. Thank you and sorry for taking too long.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** Going back to elementary school, they had this habit of holding back Black kids, because they weren't at the pace that they needed to be, and if they got that extra help and support, it would have been fine, but they held back three of my other Black friends. The school was sort of diverse, but the majority was white kids. I was going to be held back in the second grade, but luckily my dad talked to some friends, and he got me to switch schools to a Black school in a Black neighborhood, which was really cool because they had a program where I finally learned more of Black excellence, and role models, and we had Black Jeopardy [an activity], which was really cool, and I learned all these fun facts, and we even sung "Lift Every Voice" every time we'd stand up and salute. It was really empowering, and I started to love my hair and to know the importance of it, because I'd always tried to fit in and flatiron it and whatever. But there's nothing wrong with it, you got to appreciate your hair in all forms and styles.

**Cherrish Cook:** Well, at such a young age, I guess you can say the school system kinda fails Black children in general, and that carries along into their adult life because teachers do shape your future. And I feel like the school system should prepare you for life outside of school, and I think some teachers don't care enough as they should. They just care that you're in the class, you're in your seat. They just want you to pay attention, but they don't really think, "Oh, what is the student going through?" "What is affecting them?" It's more of, teaching children is maybe like a burden to some teachers. It's not really more about a personal connection. And I feel like, like I said before, Black students are at a disadvantage and things affect us differently, so it's very important for teachers to care more than what they are expected to. And I've witnessed a lot of, you know, like, my brother, he was failed severely at Berkeley High. I wish they would have cared more about his education and his future, and I see that a lot. Some teachers just don't understand, and I wish they truly would understand how important it is to care more than what they are expected to.

**C. Darius Gordon:** So, something else that I think a lot about when we talk about anti-Black state violence, we talk about violence in schools, it's not just this ideological war, it's not just about changing the curriculum or reshaping pedagogical practices. It is also about the physical violence that happens in schools. You think about the increase in security and police forces in classrooms, you think about the over-disciplining, you think about the micromanaging of Black bodies, teaching them how to sit and raise their hands and when to speak, in this very violent way, this violent process. And so I was wondering if you all can speak to maybe some of the ways schooling engages in those physical violences and the ways in which—maybe in the case of the Winnie Mandela School—how you also work against those as well.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** Well in middle school, that's when more of this happens. Especially in my middle school, which was Westlake [Middle School], I noticed there would be other kids of color—but who weren't Black—who would fight or whatever, but

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they wouldn't get as severe punishment as Black students, who'd get suspended for three days and what not. I don't know, we had Black teachers, which is really dope, but those who weren't, there was some sort of barrier, and, like Cherrish said, they didn't understand as well as they should have, and there was a lot of blaming. If there was an incident, they looked to the Black student, they looked to us because we were somehow at fault, when it didn't really involve us a lot of the times.

**Cherrish Cook:** I guess, like, this whole—what's the word I'm looking for?—this whole thought that Black students are violent, disruptive, all of the above, I guess it perpetuates safety officers, teachers, or whatever to push Black students away instead of seeing the bigger picture. And when I went to, I was on a college tour and I went to UCLA, and these graduate students were doing research. And this one Black graduate student was doing research on why Black girls are suspended more than white girls. And she was explaining that, you know, the trauma that we face—and Black girls, we carry a lot of pain and we take a lot of pain—the trauma that we face in our lives can reflect at school. And teachers and administration, whatever, they don't stop to think what really is going on, what's beneath the surface. And so she was just like, white girls are suspended for fighting and talking back, and Black girls are suspended for drugs and alcohol. And so, I guess, I don't know . . . like, compare and contrast . . . I don't know. I guess realizing the bigger picture to Black students.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** We always carry that. I was thinking of a number of situations of violence. Violence that happens and that seems very subtle, right? For example, the fact that Black girls, some of the activities attributed to them in most schools are activities that wouldn't be attributed to white girls. For example, helping to carry heavy objects: "Help me carry this." There was an activity in my school that was picking up erasers. And the teachers always chose Black girls and boys to do that. Because they said it was something that had to be done by us. So that's a type of violence that, when you're a child, you don't necessarily perceive. But you start learning that that's the place you can occupy.

At our school, like you saw, police presence is recognized as an attitude of extreme violence. Children in Brazil, at least in the community where we mainly act in Salvador, know exactly what role the police play. And when Wagner recites that rap, it's because he lives that every day. We understand that the police play a role of control. And the fact that they are in uniform represents that authority. Many problems in public schools are dealt with by the police. Yesterday we were speaking of the penal state, and the penal state creates that. But obviously it's directed to a certain group, right? Because you see the military police in public schools but not in private schools.

But whenever there are conflicts in school, the teachers are unable to resolve them. A very frequent response in public schools is to suspend the student and send them away at a time when the school should be responsible for the students. At our school that is impossible. All conflicts are somehow resolved. We discuss it with them to learn how to resolve conflicts. And Black children have many conflicts, many of them even incomprehensible for some white adults. Most Black children live very conflicting situations. So our idea, instead of assuming a more violent attitude—that's impossible for us—is to resolve those conflicts. And we even discuss the presence: What does security mean? Does it mean control, police presence, police violence? So, our idea is to discuss

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among us what that presence means, but especially how to resolve conflicts among us. How to organize all those ideas, which oftentimes because they are so confusing, lead to attitudes that can be understood as violent and yet are often a cry for help because of a situation of violence, because of racism, which is causing some oppressive situations, and often the only way of screaming is by confronting someone who's like you. So that is how we understand that process. That police presence in schools is a measure of control and of disrespect of the many peculiarities that affect us.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** I just wanted to touch on the safety thing. There is a huge inequality on treating Black kids and white kids fairly, treating them with the same respect and consequences. To bring up the Parkland shooting, [the shooter] said something about, he was going to shoot up the school, like four months ahead of [the shooting]. But if a Black student had said something like that, immediately he would have been investigated, tackled, searched, or something like that, or even prosecuted. Something way more extreme. And even after, there was still [statements] like, "Oh, he's hearing voices," "Oh, he's . . .," but if he was a Black student, it would have been, "Oh, it's his fault," "Oh, he decided to do this . . ." I just think there should be a change. And I'm pretty sure it's just because of how in slavery we were treated as less than, and I feel like we're still not seen as equal or as human as white people are because—I don't know. We have to change that mindset, I guess.

**C. Darius Gordon:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yesterday Cat Brooks—who was brilliant—yesterday she made the point to make sure that everybody knows that slavery did not end. Doesn't matter what textbooks say, what teachers teach you, what we're being taught here, slavery is a relationship that persists. It's been repackaged, maybe reformulated, but it's a system that continues. So, I definitely agree.

So, trying to pull together some questions from the audience, especially for Cherrish and Muwazu. Thinking about the lack of spaces for young Black folks in schools, especially young Black women, what would you imagine those spaces to look like? If you could create them, what would they look like?

**Cherrish Cook:** I guess being around people that look like me, talking to someone that looks like me, so I have that connection. You realize: I'm not alone in this. You know?

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** People who understand that we have less privilege, and maybe be able to talk about that experience. Like to talk about how people get our names wrong, and how we get judged by that, and how it'll take three or four times to get our name right. And just little micro-questions, like, "Oh, do you comb your hair?" "How do you get your hair like that? Do you wash it?" Things like that, just to address that, and be like, are you tired? I'm tired.

**C. Darius Gordon:** And are there ways in which you might envision to galvanize around these struggles? Are there ways in which you might also affirm and support each other?

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** To kinda lift each other up? Lately I've been asking about hair tips, just different ways to—you know—I love all types of stuff like that just 'cause our hair is a lot different. I don't know, just lifting up. It's different when it comes, like, a lot of people compliment me, and my hair will be in a little puff or something, and I didn't do anything for three days. But when I really do something, and a Black person approaches me and tells me, thank you, it's like this deeper level of affirmation, I guess, which is really cool. I talk a lot about hair.

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**C. Darius Gordon:** This is a question again for the students, and hopefully Onirê can speak on this as well. How, in a reimagined educational system—in an alternative schooling practice—what is the relationship between teachers and students? If you could create a new educational institution, what would the relationship between teachers and students look like?

**Cherrish Cook:** Like I said before, more personal connections, definitely. I guess just having teachers realize significant things in the students' lives that might affect their performance in school, and, I don't know, caring more than what they are expected to.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** I think also more education that celebrates and also talks about the history of Black and Latino and all minorities, because we have such a Eurocentric education from kindergarten 'til now, like learning about Columbus and all that. So, I think having teachers that not only believe in diversifying our education but also understand it as well and show the good and the bad. And yeah, compassion for education and for students and for learning and for having the students succeed regardless of gender, regardless of race, and regardless of ethnicity.

**Onirê Onã Walê:** For me it would be a relationship where the student has more—how can I say it?—conviction to ask the teacher a question. And, like [Muwazu] said, to speak not only about the main white references, to speak more of Black references, like who created math, those things.

**C. Darius Gordon:** Andreia, I was wondering if you could speak about—you spoke on this a bit yesterday in relation to prisons—but I was wondering if you could speak in relation to schools as well, this intentional autonomous relationship from the state. How you remain rooted in being [an] alternative [to] state practices, state institutions. Right? The reason that your school came to existence. So, I was wondering if you could speak about how you envision your schooling and your schooling practices in relation to the state.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** That's important because the whole history—the construction of the identity we tried to create for the school—has to do with that void that existed well before my education, before Hamilton's, Matheuzza [Xavier]'s, Liu [Bitencourt]'s, Débora [Evequer]'s, everyone who is involved in the school. Because we realize that we go around the city, and almost the world, and nothing seems to have our identity. Nothing seems to be ready to receive us. We are always a foreign body, we seem to always be invaders, no matter where we are. So our main idea after going around, after burying many people, many youths, after sheltering many fathers, mothers, and siblings, and after seeing a process repeated within the prison system, we understood that it was time to create something that we realized could be an instrument for transformation with that identity. It is not a finished process; it is not a recipe. But it is a space that constantly attempts to transform, to construct.

The school has changed a lot since 2016. Because we started with a format that we knew had to be adapted whenever a new child arrived, whenever a new family approached, to the community's needs. So, we started creating that identity. There is something related to formal education provided by the state. For example, in prisons, the state is present with education. The school attendance rate—it's not compulsory to study—the attendance rate is very low, so a prison unit might have 400 people, out of which only 15 to 20 study. There are people who reoffend, who return to prison. In

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Brazil, the recidivism rate is estimated at about 80%; in other words, people who have served a sentence and return for a short period. And there are those who—as we always say—are unidentified, who are those who die, and there are those who reoffend. And if you look at the numbers, there are people who have been in the prison system five or six times, and they never learned to read, even if they went to school. So, we have a very serious problem. What kind of institution is that? What kind of education is being offered, where people attend and don't learn to read?

In Brazil there is sentence reduction for reading (e.g., São Paulo State Law No. 16,648/2018). And we have pressured [the prisons] a lot. That is, for a certain established period of reading, the person learns to read, they read a book, and is evaluated by a pedagogue, and that can lead to a sentence reduction, just like number of workdays. But most prison units don't adopt this system, because they oftentimes don't have a pedagogue provided by the state to accompany the process.

So, what we are saying is that education is an instrument of power, but that space demonstrates to what extent that power is inaccessible for us. Even if you spend 15 years in prison, you leave without having learned to read and write. So, to what extent [does] education and the process of development always place us at a disadvantage?

So for us to be in prisons . . . and as a doctor, one of the things I argue about with my work team is that we write a prescription—and doctors have ugly writing, but mine's pretty, anyone can read it—how can I scold someone who can't read the prescription? How can I expect them to take care of themselves and follow my advice? How can I hand out healthcare guides if they can't read them? I noticed that the girl here on campus was saying that you produce materials with information about healthcare, and we see several booklets here. Because having access to reading is the first step to get that power. And we are excluded from that power, we are denied that power. So, we identified that.

One of our projects in Intramural Culture [a program that fights for the rights and livelihoods of prisoners] is reading. We take books and promote that discussion, we take poets to recite. We take people who speak about the importance of reading. We take music, because we know it is a way for people to gain access. We take books, Hamilton presents books, we make those exchanges. Something that I wanted to say that is important is that the first 15 tables we had at the Winnie Mandela School, tables and chairs, were produced at the prison unit by the inmates. We asked for their help: "We're opening a school." There were some relatives of inmates who provided bread. They received bread, and once a week a group of inmates met and donated 40 loaves of bread to the school, and they gave the rest to their relatives to feed themselves. And those wooden tables that you saw there [in a previous photo on a slide] were made by the inmates' hands. So, we wanted to make that connection. So much can be done. We have many artists in prison, many people with many skills, writers, musicians, several poets, and we have tried to take advantage of that, using art. And that is what we understand as development toward a process of liberation, both of the body and the mind in that space that deprives people of various rights.

**C. Darius Gordon:** So, it seems like we have time for maybe one more question. This question is ordered very well, so I'm just going to read it: Violence and suffering often exist alongside the experiences of joy. How does joy take root in our own educational experiences? How do you work against and within schools in a way that empowers your

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experiences of joy? I'd love to hear from all of you. Basically, the question is: How do you find joy? What do you do against schools, within schools? How do you find joy in your educational process, in schooling, et cetera?

**Onirê Onã Walê:** Some teachers joke around with the students. Also, during the break, when people are at the cafeteria, the girls that work there joke around with the students, friendly jokes, that kind of thing. And during boxing class, when teacher Hamilton Borges encourages people to train self-defense to defend themselves on the streets, he also says that we shouldn't go around fighting for no reason.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** I personally, lately, since I've come to my new school, I have submerged myself in art and music, and that's kind of my joy, trying out any new experience I can get. Like I'm going to be taking a ceramics class next year, which is awesome, and hopefully a handcraft class that they have, and also just learning new things and being challenged. Like we learned in our history class—uncomfortable learning—like we learned about Sundown Towns [U.S. towns that practiced forms of segregation by setting early curfews for Black residents], and a lot of heavy, heavy stuff. But it's kind of like—it's sad, of course—but it's empowering to know so many things that I would have never known if I hadn't been in this class, or if I hadn't switched schools, or even if I just stayed in California all my life, I probably wouldn't have known of all these inequalities and disparities.

**Cherrish Cook:** Same as Muwazu. I'm a performing artist, I dance, act, I kind of try to . . . when I feel overwhelmed, I listen to music, try to think about positive things. Just try to, I don't know, like Muwazu said, I've also become open to a lot of new things that I did not know in AHA. I'm not a visual artist, I don't draw, but I try to draw. I'm very open to doing a lot of new things, and I really appreciate the teachers in AHA—Miss Ecury, Miss Erby—I appreciate everyone in AHA. I love dancing, I love acting, I just love performing.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos:** There's something interesting. I'm also not good at drawing, singing, and it's very bad, because people sing, everyone recites, everyone. The kids are very creative, they draw, they have skill, elasticity, flexibility, agility, and that strengthens them a lot.

But [it's] something we have because the people we call facilitators, mentors, at our school, are all young students, young Black students, like you saw. The average age of the mentors goes from 18 to 22, 23 years at the most. And that connection, that versatility, that youth re-signify at every moment is very important. So every day we walk into the school, there is something new, something that was created, a stimulating phrase: "Here you are yourself," or "You are a wonderful person," "You have potential." Math problems exhibited somewhere, something that we understand. Because we talk about pain because we experience pain. But we are a people, when I say, "a Winnie Mandela people," a happy people, joyful at our existence and at our potential to transform our future. So that space becomes a beautiful space even with its limitations, which are overcome by the energy that circulates there. So, it is a happy, colorful space that provides references for us to always remember where we come from. So, there are photos of the children from the photography course they took. And this is all over the school. There's a message box, there are curtains made by the kids, and all of that makes that energy flow. So, the idea is to turn that space, and to say that despite everything that

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racism does we are alive and proud like we learned to be, and strengthening the process of struggle and continuity of that struggle, of those processes of resistance.

**C. Darius Gordon:** *Obrigado*. Thank you. We're going to close out. Muwazu is going to perform a poem for us.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta:** This is a poem that a friend of mine wrote. She's a sophomore at Oakland School for the Arts. I was fortunate enough to be in a program with her, it was like sisterhood. It was a program that started in New York, just ended recently. It was a safe space outside of school, but it was held at Bronx Community College, and it was just really cool. She did the poem [at the program], and I did a little song after, and here it is:

*We call them pigs, but in reality, we're their pigs.*

*They put us in cages waiting for us to be slaughtered.*

*That's the only story we know, right?*

*But no, that's not the full story.*

*There's way more beyond that, there's way more.*

*Listen to us.*

*Prisons, aka houses, have held "colored," as they used to call us.*

*In these houses of hell we are caged, correct?*

*But like I said, there's more.*

*We are raped and sexually assaulted in these cages of ours.*

*We are put away and raped.*

*Isn't it enough that we already lose our citizenship and shunned by our family and the whole world?*

*"Criminal" painted on our faces but then we are raped by our own people, meaning "colored," as they used to call us.*

*Why is this matter silenced?*

*Why isn't anyone talking about it? Why?*

*Talk about our Black men and women being targeted in prisons and being raped in prisons.*

*Talk about it.*

*Start talking about it or we will raise hell.*

*And you might be wondering why I keep saying "we" in this whole poem.*

*No, I've never been to jail.*

*No, I've never been raped.*

*I may have been targeted; I don't know.*

*But I mean "we" because us Black people come as a pack.*

*They don't know what we go through.*

*They don't know our pain.*

*They try but they came Black people,*

*Brown people, we people.*

**C. Darius Gordon:** Thank you so much, everyone.

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**C. Darius Gordon** is a doctoral student at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education, in the Critical Studies of Race, Class, and Gender program cluster. They are interested in critical theory, social movements, and alternatives to schooling as they pertain to global (anti-) Blackness. Most recently, they have considered these topics in Brazil, Guyana, and the U.S. These days, they are thinking through the notions of fugitivity and *marronage* as frameworks for reimagining educational possibilities outside/against the state in order to envision a new relationship between education and society, specifically the ways in which education can contribute to the project of Black liberation.

**Andreia Beatriz Silva dos Santos** is a physician, professor, and coordinator of the grassroots community action group *Reaja* (React). She studied medicine at the Federal University of Health Sciences in Porto Alegre (2001) and received her master's degree in Collective Health at the State University of Feira de Santana (2008). She is a practicing physician within the jails and penitentiaries of the state of Bahia, a member of Brazil's National Commission for Criminal and Penitentiary Policies, and supervisor of the National Program for Basic Attention to Torture. She is a professor at the State University of Feira de Santana and member of the scientific committee of the Association of Black Researchers in Bahia. Currently in the doctoral program for Collective Health at the Federal University of Bahia, her research examines social trauma and national health policies in Brazil's penitentiary system. She is the coordinator of *Reaja*'s international mobilizations/communications and is also co-founder of the Pan-Africanist Winnie Mandela School in Salvador, Bahia.

**Onirê Onã Walê Borges dos Santos** is 13 years old and a student in the 7th grade. He is a militant-in-training for the political organization React or Die (Reja ou Será Mort@). He has participated in the International March Against the Genocide of Black Youth and also the first Meeting of Maroon Children in the Pan-Africanist Winnie Mandela School. His main influences are his mother and father, and he is a Miles Morales fan. He trains boxing for Black self-defense, and also likes video games and comics.

**Muwazu Chisum-Misquitta** is an energetic jazz performing artist and a Berkeley High School student. Since coming to her new school, she has participated in an all-Black play called *The Color Museum* and has sung in multiple dance shows. In her spare time, she rollerblades and skates at the Berkeley Skate Park. She looks forward to engaging in more student activism.

**Cherrish Cook** is a Berkeley High School student, and she is eager to find new ways to engage in student activism.

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