

Under Representation of Black and Hispanic Students... High School Music

On the Under Representation of Black and Hispanic Students  
Within the High School Music Classroom

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the sociological factors by which the under representation of Black and Hispanic students may be explained, as well as offering solutions to the self-perpetuating institutions by which Black and Hispanic students are oppressed in the world of classical music/music education. The paper at hand extends and expands the body of Lisa C. DeLorenzo's analysis of urban education by challenging the three primary tenets by which Black and Hispanic students are marginalized (socioeconomic inequality vis-à-vis school effectiveness, lack of teacher diversity and representation within the industry, and the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy/curricula) within the high school music classroom. The discourse contained examines literature pertaining to teacher recruitment/training, culturally responsive pedagogy, race and socioeconomic status, as well as the implications of artistic citizenship and social justice within the music classroom.

*Keywords:* Urban education, cultural competency, curriculum, teacher recruitment, teacher training, curriculum, representation, students of color, social justice.

Under Representation of Black and Hispanic Students within the High School Music Classroom

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In my first semester of pre-service observation, I observed the music curriculum at an elite high school in the diverse borough of Queens, New York. In my observation of five disparate performance ensembles that ranged from jazz, choir and classical-instrumental, I quickly became aware of the overwhelming whiteness of these groups: of the approximately 250 students I observed, I took note of only one African American student. In an elite program within an ethnically diverse borough, *why was there only a single Black student?* Unfortunately, this observation was not an anomaly from either the “average” high school music classroom, or from the greater classical music industry. Nationally, the statistics that surround non-white musicianship are discommoding at best: People of color make up a combined total of 34.4% of students within high school music programs with Black and Hispanic students making up 15.2% and 10.2% of the total music student population (respectively) compared to a 65.7% White population (Elpus and Abril 2011). Furthermore, this under representation of Black and Hispanic musicians furthers itself into two vital populations in the classical music industry: Music Education and Music Performance. Not unlike the demographic profile of the classroom, there is a disconcerting under representation of Black and Hispanic teachers, wherein only 7.07% and 1.94% of music licensure candidates between 2007-2012 were Black or Hispanic (Elpus 2015). Importantly, one also recognizes that the lack of Black and Hispanic population in the music classroom further extends to the “Classical Music Industry” at large, which only serves to further exacerbate the alienation of Black and Hispanic audiences from the idiom. This alienation is reflected in the demographic profile of America’s musician population, wherein of the estimated 141,648 members of the workforce<sup>1</sup>, African Americans make up only 11% of the total population and Hispanics are not mentioned at all. Furthermore, the given date cites an

overwhelming whiteness within the field, noting that approximately 80% of “Musicians, Singers and Related Workers” have identified as White<sup>ii</sup> (Deloitte, Datawheel, and Cesar Hidalgo 2017). In an increasingly diversifying and globalized world, why is there such a white majority in classical music? Borne of educational conflict theory, as popularized by investigators such as Jonathan Kozol, one may argue that the over representation of Whites in classical music, and the under representation of Black and Hispanic people is the product of a tripartite, self-sustaining institution within the education system wherein non-White populations (Particularly, Black and Hispanic) populations are marginalized:

- A larger institution of socioeconomic inequality pervades the field of Music Education, wherein the various “overhead costs” are systematized against urban and financially disadvantaged youth. (**Systematized denial of access**)
- Teacher recruitment and teacher training further subjugate Black and Hispanic Youth via the institutional marginalization of people of color in the teacher-education-curriculum, the impetus and glorification on/of the “suburban teacher model”, and the self-perpetuating non-representation of teachers of color. (**Systematized denial of entry**)
- The crux of the “standard” or “traditional” Music Education pedagogy fails to reflect the expanding diversity of the contemporary American classroom, and thus disenfranchises non-white youth from pursuing the profession, either as performers or educators, which creates a self-fulfilling institution wherein non-white participants are alienated from classical music. (**Systematized denial of inclusion**)

#### **On Socioeconomic Status and Urban Education (denial of access)**

Socioeconomic status [SES] is by far the most thoroughly explored sociological issue when discussing the under representation of Black and Hispanic youth in the Fine Arts curriculum. In following this mode of discourse, one refers to issues of educational inequality

including teacher turnover, program continuity, and lack of extra-curricular activities— issues bred the greater financial disparity that plagues primarily urban schools. As evidenced in Jonathan Kozol's book, *Savage Inequalities* (1991a), the funding disparity between high SES and low SES schools creates an achievement gap among these institutions in all subject areas, as the funding-per-student ratio declines in communities with lower SES. Moreover, the correlation of suburbaneity vs. urbanity and high vs. low SES is an important consideration: According to Kozol's *The Shame of the Nation* (1991b), the correlation between urbanity, non-whiteness, and poverty reflects a definitive correlation in many instances. As such, the issue of SES becomes racialized, as the disparately low federal and state funding of urban schools is proven to target urban students, whom are demographically proven as majoritively non-White (Kozol 1991a, Kozol 199b). Quite plainly, the lack of funding in a given district creates educational inequalities that have systematically targeted students of lower SES, many of whom fall under an intersection of urbanity and/or non-Whiteness.

In the field of Music Education, issues of high vs. low SES are further exacerbated. Most plainly, the relatively high overhead cost of running a successful music program presents difficulty in districts where less money is spent per student. Known more plainly as *reduction of educational opportunity*, the existence of Fine Arts programs is severely diminished in schools and districts wherein less money is available per student. As such, those additional overhead costs (instrument/music purchase or rental, performance attire, accessories, lessons) are thrust upon the students hoping to participate, yet financially unable to do so. This notion of *denial of access* creates an institution that subjugates the voices of prospective music students (Albert, 2009). In low SES and urban areas, this population of students and their families often are not able to pay these costs, which creates *denial of access* from participating in these programs.

Quite often, the lack of funding for these program yields a decline in services provided to students, or at worst, the deletion of the entire program from the school curriculum. According to Elpus and Abril (2015), it was found that music participation found lowest rates of concentration in rural and urban areas (21.3 and 27.6%, respectively), as compared to the 51% participation rate within suburban schools. At this juncture, it is important to note an issue of great irony that surrounds music programs in high poverty areas: According to Bryk, & Driscoll, (1998), one of the foundations of hoping to close the achievement gap in “at-risk” schools lies in the school’s ability to foster a strong interpersonal community (Battistich et al 1995). In the realm of Music Education, one may find ample examples of this sense of community within a school ensemble. This fact becomes especially relevant in the discussion of teacher recruitment and teacher training (which represents the second tenet of the institutional subjugation of Black and Hispanic students, *denial of entry*).

As previously established, the lack of financial resources diminishes the adequacy of services offered to low SES students, which effectively sows the seed for repressing the number of prospective Black and Hispanic teachers and performers. Quite plainly, without secondary education within the music curriculum, students are not equipped with the artistic tools necessary to pursue the disciplines of performance or education. Additionally, one finds that in populations of lower SES, the prospective career path of Music Education and/or Music Performance become less realistic, as these students come from educational backgrounds that do not include ample music-making or music experience, which precludes them from an ability to self-concept/self-identify as future teachers or performers—which is noted in several studies as the primary factor contributing to a future career in the Fine Arts (Hamilton 2011; Rickels, Brewer, Council, et al., 2013).

### **SES pertains to more than the urban poor**

However, it would be foolish to think that socioeconomic status is the only factor discouraging Black and Hispanic students from participation in the Music Education curriculum. While a great deal of academic focus lies in the deficits provided to the urban poor, there is another demographic that is shrouded in a greater deal of mystery: The middle-class/suburban Black and Hispanic population that “choose” not to participate in the high school music program, despite having the resources to do so.

Socioeconomically, it is important to note the that spectrum of inequality extends beyond poverty, within middle class student populations on the lower end of the SES gradient within their community. In a nation where financial resources → success, it is vital to note that the gradient of SES within the middle class also creates an imbalance which implicitly targets lower SES students and students of color. As noted in Lisa C. DeLorenzo’s 2012 article “Missing Faces from the Orchestra: An Issue of Social Justice?”, the author alludes to several “extra” educational opportunities that are afforded to the financially advantaged, including the availability of private, extra-curricular lessons, as well as participation in out-of-school extra-curricular ensembles. While the notion that a lack of private lessons or participation in “honors ensembles” do not directly *harm* these non-participants, it is important to note that both of these institutions serve to further the achievement gap among prospective musicians, in that they amplify the presence of the already over represented: The White and the wealthy. Students with the resources of affording private lessons and ensembles gain the ability to outperform their peers, and thus are given extra consideration in classroom placement, solo recognition opportunities, and consideration for higher level ensembles. By effectively “bottlenecking” the path to achievement within the music classroom, issues such as these only serve to widen the

achievement gap, disenfranchising the participants that do not have the financial resources to compete with their peers.

While it is simple to fall into the fallacy that this demographic chooses not to participate due to lack of interest, it is evident that another institution is at play, wherein this population faces *denial of inclusion* from the idiom. Although the institution of *denial of inclusion* does not loom as largely as the *denial of access* faced by the urban poor, denial of inclusion is an institutionalized standard of pedagogy and aestheticism that celebrates an already overt Whiteness within the high school music classroom. For example, when considering a middle-class suburban school with a higher average SES, but a more variable gradient of income inequality (in which some students barely fit the description of “middle class” while others encroach on “wealthy”) other implicit in-school exclusions take place, based on unspoken economic inequality. When one discusses “denial of inclusion”, this notion extends to the under representation of Black and Hispanic teachers, the impetus upon the “white suburban model” of teacher training<sup>iii</sup>, as well as the relative lack of cultural and/or socioeconomic competency among school staff and faculty.

### **On Teachers and Teacher Training (denial of entry)**

Currently, there is a crisis regarding the lack of Black and Hispanic teachers in schools throughout the United States. In a survey of music teacher educators in higher education in the U.S and Canada, Hewitt and Thompson’s 2006 study revealed a 94% majority of White music teachers. Similarly, according to the 2013 study by Rickels, Brewer, Council, Fredrickson, Hairston, Perry, Porter, and Schmidt, the demographic survey of prospective Music Education students is overwhelmingly white, citing an 80.8% of the their reported study, as compared to a 9.2% Hispanic and 5.2% Black demographic. This demographic profile reveals a serious under

representation of non-White prospective educators, which harkens to the second tenet of this self-sustaining institution of Black and Hispanic under representation: *denial of entry*. Not unlike film, television and magazines, it is proven that positive youth development is contingent upon witnessing the success of relatable role models. As such, the current lack of representation among Black and Hispanic teachers and performers creates a semblance of “otherness” among the non-White student musicians. But what of those few Black and Hispanic prospective teachers that *do* decide to major in music, despite this perpetual system that seems to exclude them and/or the socioeconomic barriers that may also preclude them from higher education? (DeLorenzo and Silverman, 2016)

Beyond the disenfranchisement of Black and Hispanic students to pursue Music Education, it is there is also a systematized suppression of preservice teachers of color that further thins the applicant pool of future music educators. Most notably, many Department/Schools of Music operate on a “screening out” process in both the admissions process and the first year of musical study. For the most primary example, one reflects on the academic rigor placed on both Music and Education courses in the first year of study for undergraduate music education majors, and the rotational basis by which they are offered (Mishra, Day, Littles and Wandewalker 2011). In most NASM [National Association of Schools of Music] accredited colleges, a heavy impetus is placed on course work in Music Theory and Educational Practice, with undergraduate education majors forced to take the maximum number of credits per term. The heavy credit load, combined with a previous lack of educational opportunity in secondary education then creates “bottleneck effect”, wherein students that come from less advantaged musical backgrounds are subjugated into the population that gets “cut”

from higher education programs, which serves to subjugate the representation of practicing music educators as color.

### **On Programming, Performance and Curriculum (denial of inclusion)**

Finally, the aesthetic culture of the high school music classroom delivers yet another bought of *denial of inclusion* to Black and Hispanic students, in that the representation of programming and performers implicitly celebrates Whiteness as a standard of excellence within the form, despite the wealth of excellent Black and Hispanic composers and performers. The classical music world is far behind the recent impetus towards multicultural education, and as such, the realm of Music education follows suit in this tragic endeavor. For primary example, the artistic programming and direction of the typical high school music curriculum celebrates Whiteness as a paradigm in its inclusion of repertory programming, as well as pursuing (almost exclusively) the academic study of Western Classical Music.

To begin the discussion of cultural representation within the curriculum, we first turn to Kate. R. Fitzpatrick's 2012 article, "Cultural Identity and the Formation of Identity: Our Role as Music Teachers", wherein she states. "As students begin the process of formal school, they begin to form opinions concerning their abilities, due in large part to how well they can assimilate culturally into the school environment". As such, the cultural validation (or lack thereof), that students receive can be a determinant factor in student success and achievement. In the music education curriculum, the intrinsic ties between identity/culture and curriculum reveal the teacher's worldview, vis-à-vis the repertoire they believe is worth studying, preparing and performing. In this regard, one may note that there is an implicit degradation of non-white, non-European, and non-male contributions to the repertoire. While there is limited study on the demographic profile of performed repertory in the high school music curriculum, it is evident

that the focus of music study lies in the works of, “Dead White Men”, whom the idiom recognizes as the “greats” of Classical Music. For example, any standard survey would likely reveal that most, if not all music students are familiar with the names of the “European Master” composers, including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johannes Brahms, Frederic Chopin and Richard Strauss. However, what of Florence Price, William Grant Still, Tania León, Arturo Marquez, or any of the other innumerable composers of color whom have prolifically contributed to the idiom of classical music? It is very likely that these names would be met with blank stares, confusion, and ignorance, given their lack of discussion within the music classroom. Citing William E. Cross Jr.’s study of racial identity in the African American community (1971), we reconsider the importance of representation within the curriculum as means of positive identity reinforcement for our non-white students. By not programming music written by non-White composers, music educators are implicitly degrading the contributions of non-White contributions to the idiom, and effectively silencing the voices of students whom may have otherwise identified as future composers, educators or performers. Combining both the notions of *denial of access* and *implicit subjugation*, it is evident that these two factors combine to decimate the next generation of potential Black and Hispanic music teachers and performers. As previously noted, the prospective music student’s ability to self-identify as a future musician proves to be one of the primary factors in the decision to pursue music in higher education, followed by positive experience in a music group/ensemble setting. At this juncture, we turn back to the discussion of *denial of access* and *denial of inclusion* as an explanation for the decimated class of would-be music performers and educators. When Black and Hispanic students are funneled through a music education system wherein certain students are precluded from participation, how can they see themselves as future teachers or performers? And what of the

students fortunate enough to have these resources: To be funneled through an educational system that has systematically celebrated Whiteness as a paradigm, taught by teachers who neither look like them, nor experience/empathize with their worldview, *how* are those students expected to see themselves as members of this group, when they have been systematically been made to feel like the “other”? What solutions does the music educator have to break this cycle, and what resources are available to combat this self-sustaining institution?

### **Conclusion: The Social Justice Vision of Education for Artistic Citizenship**

In response to this self-sustaining, trichometric institution of subjugation, the music educator must establish a Social Justice Approach to teaching within the classroom. Effectively, this methodology begins to respond to and negate these three tenets of subjugation: *denial of access, denial of entry* and *denial of inclusion*. Coined by authors including Ginwright and Cammarota (2002), and David J. Elliot (2012), the Social Justice. Artistic Citizenship Approach of Music Education seeks acknowledge the socio-economic and cultural differences of a diverse student population, empowering these students to express their worldviews creatively. While this classroom practice does not fully address the socioeconomic factors that plague urban youth, or directly fixes the institutions of teacher training, the Social Justice Youth Development Model (SJYD) creates a first step, by which students in every diverse classroom are empowered toward multi-cultural discourse and self-identity within the music education curriculum.

Although not discipline specific to Music Education, Ginwright and Cammarota refer to the 1990’s Youth Hip Hop Movement as a means of spurring social change and youth empowerment. By igniting students as agents of social change, students are empowered to take control of their day-to-day lives, not as “steps towards changing these conditions” but awareness and agency within their own existences. Framing Ginwright and Cammarota’s model of

“Fostering Praxis: Three Levels of Awareness”, the music educator can foster praxis within the classroom via the focus on student-centered discourse surrounding a multicultural education. By not only programming and representing the work of non-white composers and performers, but fostering students’ self-efficacy in pursuing discourse, the music teacher may empower all of their students to partake in a transformative learning experience. Citing Julia Shaw’s 2012 article, “The Skin that We Sing; Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education”, the need for culturally responsive programming and discourse legitimizes the worldview and contributes to “thoughtful valuation” of the increasingly diverse classroom. Referring to an anecdote within Fitzpatrick’s article, in which the author reflects on a class period spent discussing a piece of outmoded and racist sheet music, in which she allowed students to respond and debate to the piece. Fitzpatrick writes that, “Although we lost almost a full rehearsal that day, my students gained an opportunity to share their opinions as well as the knowledge that their music classroom was a place where difficult and complex discussions of issues such as race were welcome”.

Although culturally responsive curriculum is not the panacea that will fix all the issues debated in the above article, it takes the first step towards empowering students to self-identify as musical and creative entities. By creating a classroom that is centered around all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, or any other factor, music educators can foster a sense of self-efficacy that may one day begin to rectify some of these greater sociological issues. Although validation and thoughtful discourse will not fix poverty, perhaps it will serve to empower non-white students to identify as the composers, performers, and music educators of which our country is in desperate need.

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<sup>i</sup> The term “Workforce” pertains to musicians and related workers who cite music related activities as their primary source of income.

<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note that the standard of demographic profiling in the United States defines “White” as, “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” (US Census Bureau). However, there has been recent dispute of this definition, citing many non-white populations from The Middle East and North African that otherwise self-identify as “White”.

<sup>iii</sup> While implicit inclusion affects *both* the urban poor and the suburban middle class, this inclusion is the *primary* institution at play when discussing the non-participation of the suburban Black and Latino middle class.