The Black Educology Mixtape is an open access mixtape that moves beyond academic articles to feature various art forms and voices that are typically muted. Our scope and sequence focuses on the past, present, and future of Black education, which has been historically and systemically caught in the underbelly of western education. The main tenets of Black Educology’s educational vision are rooted in critical race theory, with a focus on counter-storytelling, Black critical theory, Afro-pessimism, and Black educational epistemology. Our work is grounded in creating mixtapes that are both revolutionary and emancipatory in the name of love, study, struggle, and refusal.
The Cypher

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Abstract
The Black Educology Mixtape is a collective of Black people working to amplify and empower Black educational voices. Black Educology goes beyond the scope of academia to recognize the movers and shakers of emancipatory movements. We imagine this mixtape as a vehicle toward revolution. To that extent, this album informs, confers, and collaborates with educational voices across the Black diaspora. Our scope and sequence focuses on the past, present, and future of Black education, which has been historically and systemically caught in the underbelly of western education. Black Educology is an open-access mixtape that moves beyond academic articles to feature various art forms and voices that are typically muted. Though traditional mixtapes only include songs, we highlight text, audio, images, transcripts, and lyrics. The main tenets of Black Educology’s educational vision are rooted in critical race theory, with a focus on counter-storytelling, Black critical theory, Afro-pessimism, and Black educational epistemology. Our work is grounded in creating mixtapes that are both revolutionary and emancipatory in the name of love, study, struggle, and refusal.

Roll Call… Because These Incidents Be Critical

In our debut, we, as producers, have rooted our mixtape in a place of disruption. We’ve opted to further that disruption by introducing ourselves and our album through the cypher. In hip-hop, a cypher is a communal space whereby hip-hop artists use their voices to take up space and flow together on the same beat to create something new and beautiful (Blackman, 2013). Unlike battle rap—which pits one MC against another—cyphers emphasize the potency of what can be created through collaboration. We have created our own cypher, where each producer, each artist, and each voice becomes a valuable contributor to our act of disruption. Black Educology ain’t no rap battle because our focus isn’t on competing against one another or vying
for space atop the ivory tower. Instead, we work to produce a space where Black people can (re)claim their individual voices. The cypher works to create a supportive space where we harness the power of Black collective epistemologies while honoring our voices.

In the BE space, the cypher is a form of roll call for our producers. It’s our welcome to our community of readers as we invite them to come and know our hearts and minds as they relate to our experiences as Black educators and educologists. The topics covered in each mixtape originate from a collective space of pain, struggle, ingenuity, and joy. We cypher to curate collective projects around liberation—*The Black Educology Mixtape*. The following is a recently recorded “studio session” that shares stories from our lived experiences that led to the formation of our mixtape:

Gertrude: Nah, we don’t needa put it on a podcast, just talk.
Noah: Yeah, bet. All right.
Brian: All right.
Andre: (laughs)
Noah: (laughs) All right, welcome to the studio session and today we're here to have a conversation around *Black Educology*, this new journal—which we call a mixtape—and hear from the editors. It’s a project that we all have been working on for the past two years. We’re super excited to share some of the stories behind it, like why it is called “Black Educology” and why it’s a mixtape and not a journal. It’s just so we can share stories and get to know the producers more.

First, we’re gonna have a round of introductions. I can start real quick. I am Noah Morton, born and raised in Harlem, New York. I love dope conversations. I like questioning, “what is education?” ’Cause I realize that it’s not really asked a lot. And so sometimes, people would do some wild things and call it education when it was really domination—currently, thinking about education and freedom.

That was a real quick introduction. I have a cat named Sandy, the pigeon huntress of Harlem. And, with that, I’ll pass to the next person.
Brian: Yeah, my name is Brian Davis. I’m from hometown Philly—West Philly, born and raised. The playground is definitely where I spent most of my days. We’re not talking about Will Smith, though. I’m a doctoral student at USF. My main work is in equity and inclusion. And, for me, education has and always will be liberatory, shoutout to bell hooks. I was the subject of educational violence all my life because of the schooling project in the United States. And a part of our work and our duty and our voyage with Black Educology is to dismantle the schooling project. But also to offer an alternative through Black voices, through Black theory, through Black educational experience to—as critical race theory indicates—tell that counter-story. So, that’s what we seek to do.

Noah: Word, word. And the next person, as you feel moved to speak.

Gertrude: Gertrude Jenkins here. What brings me to this space is not just my experience with schooling and feeling overlooked and often under the radar as a student, but also how I’ve experienced those same feelings as a Black teacher. My research specifically focuses on how Black educators have created fugitivity in educational institutions throughout history in the United States. I would love for this mixtape to reflect what that journey has been for us. So I envision this as a space where we can normalize conversations around these experiences in education.

Eghosa: Jumping in, my name is Eghosa Obaizamomwan-Hamilton. I am currently focused on Black women educators. Mostly because I think being a Black girl student and being part of this apparatus of education that was mostly dominated by white administrators, white teachers, canonical curriculum, hegemonic lessons, schooling, et cetera, really made it clear to me as I moved up in education how important it is to establish my own humanity as a Black person. To make sure that I’m using my work to continue to humanize the most historically excluded people. Part of my joy in being part of Black Educology is the work we do to make the humanity of Blackness no longer conditional to the white gaze.

Our individual experiences as students have deeply impacted us and where we are right now as doctoral students, as educators, as people, and all that jazz. I’m just really excited to have made a space for us.

Andre: Oh, okay. I’ll jump in. My name is Andre St. LaRece (laughs). I’m really happy to be in this space with members of my Black academic community. This is actually a first for me because you don’t see that many Black faces within higher education. The further you go up, the less people of color you see. It’s really hard when sometimes the faces of color you do see, they’re not about that life in one way or the other or it’s not an instant community, as one would think. So, to be able to have and grow these relationships has been really important to my growth as a scholar.

This is the first time in higher education where I haven’t felt like it was an aspirational chore, but really an exploration of myself and my ideas in a space where, not only I’m held accountable, but I’m respected and actually feel that love. It’s not crabs in a barrel, but, you know, crabs building that mud hut together. I’m also a doctoral student at USF.
Right now, my current work focuses on the standardization of American myth-making in textbooks, testing materials, and learning materials as it relates to capitalism.

So, basically, how does capitalism exploit education as a force to dominate people who see education as a way of lifting themselves out of poverty and hopefully better their lives. While in reality, education is weaponized, so Black people go from the classroom to the jail. So, I began to question, how are our aspirations as Americans weaponized against us? And, in order to do that, me and members of this group found it necessary to build a space for other people like us to come together, have a studio session and be productive within it. So we’re not trying to build a place that’s gonna be burnt down by the white educational system, but one that can be uplifted to make sure our work is on equal if not an elevated footin’ and not just worthy of a system, but able to tear down that system and rebuild it in our image.

So, that’s why I’m happy to be here with y’all and happy to be working on this project of growth, both intellectual and emotional, which is also just foundational to Black life.

Noah: Word. And I’ll even say spiritual too. There is a whole spirit within collective liberation existence—whole genealogy. You all were talking about “education,” right? However, the mixtape is not called Black Education, right? It’s Black Educology. And there’s a reason behind that. I gotta say, before this project, I haven’t heard of educology before.

When I hear “educology,” I think of words like biology, with -ology, which means “the study of something.” We say educology instead of education. What is Black educology? How are we seeing Black educology? I’m happy to go first or pass it to another person.

All right, lit. So—

Andre: (laughs)

Noah: (laughs) The way I’m seeing Black educology is in two words—Black and educology. If I look at educology and -ology means the study of, so Black educology is the study of Black education and educational experiences within—within the world? When I say the—the world, it’s multiple. And Andre was talking about how a world is made by capitalism and domination. Eghosa was talking about the world that tries to disappear all culture that doesn’t align with it.

I see Black Educology as a way—as one way among many—to contribute to that whole genealogy of liberation; Black Educology as a possibility to imagine beyond these white gazes and build, while recognizing community in doing that. And so, definitely, it’s a way to contribute and to recognize the genealogy and liberation and to join that within Black education spaces.

Passing to another person, like, you know, what is Black Educology? Or BE, as we call it? And so, what does BE mean to you?
Gertrude: I definitely think what is dope about studying educology in terms of Blackness is the intentional removal of white gaze. I see studies often that talk about Black education in relation to whiteness. However, BE is more about who we are and what we’ve done, and what our ingenuity has been in the field of education. And I’d like to see more of that work centered, and I would like to see just one place where that’s always seen, and seen it in all of its forms, in oral and written traditions.

Eghosa: And just a simple thing, like, we’re committing to discourse around education with the voices of Black folks. And in a space that is often focused on one dominant narrative, we are forcing space where Black people can discuss education, what that means for us, and how we can utilize our own knowledge and epistemologies to move that discussion forward.

Andre: Like Noah said, the -ology is the study of education, right? So what are the theoretical, the symbolic, you know, all the things that make up education? But of course that would be from a very, let’s just say western point of view. We could’ve easily just called this critical educology, right? The study of the history, the formats, everything. But critical tends to be overused. Critical is also, like, a bucket. We do wanna include the ideas of feminism, of queer history, for example. But also, by saying that it’s Black educology, we focus on what it is to be Black and in relationship to educational institutions.

Black educology is important because it’s really based on some of the tenets of Afro-pessimism. It’s based in a critique of capitalism. It’s based on a lot of things that aren’t available in so-called critical studies. So, like Eghosa says, we are focused on Black people, Black experiences, and, most importantly, Black histories in relationship to education, not only focused here in the US, but globally. So, that’s where we at.

Gertrude: Oh, I’m glad you said that part ’cause I definitely think it’s important that we have a diasporic view of Black education. What does Black life look like in other parts of the world? And how are Black educators, students, and families challenging or how are they engaging with systemic pressures within the context of where they live? Like, how is Afro-pessimism discussed in Black UK spaces, for example? How do Black teachers in Brazil navigate racial injustice in schools and in other parts of the world? And, also, what does that look like across the Continent, as well? Black Educology gives us an opportunity to explore all of that.

Brian: I think you all did it justice. The only thing I would just add is that, as a group, we found it important to be specific about Black because the world has been explicitly not specific about our experience and our people and our history. So, we don’t use critical, as Andre says, we have to start with Black first because this is all for us and about us.

Noah: Word. Why is Black Educology called a mixtape and not a journal? I know a lot of people have been asking me about the “Journal of Black Educology” and I emphasize that “Yo, I'm not working on a journal, I'm working on a mixtape.”
They’ll be like, “Oh.” I continue with, “I’m doing studio sessions.” Shall we talk more about like, why is it called a mixtape and not a journal? Why are we refusing the language of journals and “issues” to express mixtape volumes?

Andre: Noah, Imma pass this one right back to you. I wanna hear your Harlem perspective because you are partially the origins of us using this fugitive language and why we wanted to be firm about “mixtape”. I would just wanna know, like, how these terms came to you and how you had to press upon us why they were important. Instead of asking us, Imma put you on the spot here, tell us about this; tell us about your perspective. And tell us about how being born and raised in Harlem, like, how does that really shift us out of that general, structural journal language?

Noah: Really? Yeah, word. There was certain things about the structure of a journal that just did not make sense to me: What does it mean for a journal to be called an “issue”? What does it mean to create more “issues”? And what are the different ways in which the language of journals can function as limitations?

I remember somebody was talking about how in some educational contexts, professionalism is a code word for “systematic erasure.” So, me coming from Harlem, the sounds that I hear on my walk to school, right—the music you hear that’s blasting outside the cars or whatever. I realized that we really are making a mixtape.

Now, sometimes whatever music that we—Black people—created was not always considered music, right? Well, sometimes people say, “That’s noise,” and that it can’t be musical. And so, thinking about Black Educology in relation to the tunes of theory that recognizes that the sounds we are, like, collectively creating resonate not only with the present, but also with the past and the future.

We refuse an “issue” and instead call it “mixtape volumes” to focus more on the sound and to amplify voices that have been systematically and intentionally muted. Valuing perfection limits sounds. Thus, crafting a mixtape resonates with a smooth form of communication. As we create language, new language follows. If the journal is a mixtape, then what are the “articles” called?

Sometimes, articles can refer to the articles of clothing. There exists different garments that try to strap you into a particular way of being. And so, we say if the journal is an album, then, you know, each “article” is a song or a track. Thus, it follows that we are no longer “editors,” but rather producers trying to find different ways to amplify the artists’ voices and to distribute their stories (tracks) to a larger audience. Mixtapes have different forms, right? They’re not always a CD or a cassette; that’s why we have different modalities of engaging, like the coloring book and the magazine edition.

Eghosa: And I just wanna shout out the scholars, the hip-hop pedagogues like Thandi Hicks Harper, Tricia Rose, Chris Emdin, Ruth Nicole Brown. You know, folks like that, who have led the way in this type of pedagogy around hip-hop and thinking about how hip-hop itself and things like cyphers or creating an album are inherently communal. And
what we are doing is communal and not gatekeeping, not being an academic looking-down, stealing, or taking, but rather, we’re building. And so, just shout out to the folks who have done the work to build scholarship around hip-hop pedagogy that allowed us to incorporate mixtapes, cyphers, and tracks in our work.

Gertrude: One dope-ass thing about music is its accessibility. So, in what ways is this mixtape gonna be accessible to Black people who don’t engage in university spaces? What y’all think?

Noah: Word

Eghosa: I like what you did there.

Noah: (laughing) I’ll pass it; I’ll pass to Andre for that one.

Andre: So, I mean, just in brief, this is a conversation that we have and we fight over, and we’ll spend 30 minutes going in circles, and it’s usually around the ideas of: What is the best way to access the information in the mixtape? Who is it for? Are we using language that excludes people while trying to dismantle that same language? By having supplemental materials like a coloring book that distills our ideas down to something just very, very simple to have a conversation piece, to build curriculum around some of the tracks in the mixtape, to inspire people to engage with the mixtape via Zoom or talks, inviting community members to actually just participate in the mixtape is a way of providing access.

But most importantly, I mean, I’m pretty sure y’all talk about this mixtape with the same enthusiasm I do with family and friends who are just interested. And so, word of mouth, you know, something we always talk about is our oral tradition. So, for accessibility, we have to think about more than just text and more than just oral, but I think—to build on what Eghosa just said—accessibility comes through community. And if we’re not building our community around the work we’re doing, then it’s just gonna be inaccessible, period. It’s just gonna be something that sort of stands in reference to and exists because of our experiences with the white academic institution, as opposed to how we further our work within our respective communities, however we define them.

Gertrude: To that point, I think about my own journey as a Black teacher; I did not engage with journal articles until I got to the master's and doctoral levels. And that’s simply because we just don’t have time, considering everything we got going on as Black teachers, which is way more than our white counterparts have to do. So when I think about this mixtape, I think about how we can make this information that should be common knowledge to all of us—and by design isn’t—accessible. How do we create pieces or how do we create different modes of information to get these knowledges to these teachers? I think that Black teachers are our most precious commodity. I think we need to be protected at all costs.
And, I think, you know, we can all agree that the education system does not cater to the needs of Black teachers at all. So how do we also provide a space that allows them to access that information and then also contribute their own information? Because, a lot of times, Black research scholars—they’re not the ones with their boots on the ground. So, in terms of who this goes out to and who puts in, I think it’s also important to allow teachers to access and to share a voice and a perspective and give their own ideas toward how we change things.

Noah: That’s real. Thinking about your schooling, which critical incidents do you remember from growing up in your educational experience that shaped the way you view education?

Brian: I think because this is the quotidian, like, everyday experience for Black people, we have critical incidents every day, you know? For myself, I would say something that I always think about K—college: You are always tested on anti-Blackness, right? All of the standardized testing through schooling, from its inception, is rooted in misinformation about Black people, Black history, and what they identify as American history.

So, throughout my life, I always had to study my own misinformation as a result of passing in school systems. I thought I was smart because I had straight A’s all my life, and I skipped two grades, you know, I was in all the gifted programs. I never questioned concepts in school because everything made sense. Things change when the questions are centered around your identity. As soon as you start asking questions about your history or your people, institutions and educators feel offended that you would even ask about who you are because you’re receiving a great education.

You know, you’re doing well, you write great papers, but as soon as you start writing about your experience, writing about whiteness and systems, that’s when they wanna have a dialogue about your paper. But when you are writing shit that augments anti-Blackness as a global project, nobody has anything to say about that. And that’s sort of the standard, that was the standard for me all my life. So.

Noah: Oh, word. One of the key words from what you said, Brian, was the idea of augmentation. White supremacist, capitalist society is segmented in one particular way. And when you start trying to augment it to focus on the distortions that have the potential to create ruptures in the dominant structures, then it is not considered worthy of time, energy, and resources.

For me, one incident I think about involves the idea of making the strange familiar and the familiar strange. I remember when my older brother got into a charter school. In order to get into that charter school, he had to win a lottery. And so, I remember in the full auditorium in P.S. 242, everybody was there with their parents and stuff like that. In the center of the stage, there was this golden bingo machine.

And the person on the stage was rolling the bingo machine and pulling out—not numbers, rather names of children. And if the children were part of the first 100 names
that were pulled out then they were offered and were afforded the opportunity for this new educational experience. Years later, I questioned, “What does it mean to raffle off educational opportunities?” At the raffle, the system of the lottery was legitimized because we want to give everyone an equal shot—the most equitable way to provide education is through a raffle.

And then I realized like, I just started thinking about what conditions, as Brian was talking about, make certain things make sense? What conditions make a raffle for educational opportunity in a Black community make sense? How can you dismantle those logics? This speaks to how BE is counter-hegemonic, right? And so, thinking about different ways to imagine collective liberation.

Gertrude: I think what’s interesting is how a lot of those moments that we’ve been in as children were considered normal experiences at that age. Like, you had no frame of reference there to question it. And I feel like that ends up being a lot of our experiences where we’re looking back and seeing the things that we thought were okay in the moment. And that reminds me of my own critical incident, which at the time felt very mundane. From kindergarten to second grade, I attended a Montessori school and I remember being one of very few Black students there.

And we were playing this really basic number game where the teacher put a whole bunch of cards with numbers on the floor, and we had to look around the class for them, like a scavenger hunt, to get as many as we could. And I remember the boys had found nearly all of them, but I did manage to find one. And I remember when all the cards had been found, we all went back to the circle, and we sat around. I had to be, like, maybe six, seven years old when this happened. And I had a number card that I think was like, 30. And then there was a white girl sitting next to me, and her card was, like, 15. And she nonchalantly just looked at me and said, “Hey, um, let’s trade cards.” (laughs)

And I went with that; I was just so with it. I was like, “All right, let’s just trade the cards.” I didn’t understand. And then, after the teacher announced who the boy winner was, that girl asked, “Well, who’s the girl winner?” And it was her because she had the highest number—the number that I had pulled! And I remember going back home that day and NOT reporting it to my father as something wrong. I was just reporting what the day was. It was my father who was furious. And I remember not understanding why he was so angry about it. He said to me, “Don’t let them white kids take ANYTHING from you; don’t ever let that happen again.”

And it took a very long time to understand exactly what he meant. I had to conceptualize that in later incidents that happened as an adult for me to understand and recall why he was so upset that I had done that. But I bring that up because just like Brian was saying, there are these very quotidian things that happen and you take them for granted. And it also makes me think of the current state of the students. Like, how often there is no teacher in that situation willing to check children during incidents like this and say, “Hey, you’re stealing someone’s card,” ’cause that's what was happening. And no reinforcement to me either to say, “Hey, don’t give up what you have.”
And that’s kinda what we learned and we’ve been conditioned into, and it also makes me think as a teacher about moments where I got frustrated with Black students for not putting they chest out in moments where I felt they should have. I’ve had to remind myself, “They’ve been conditioned in the same way you have, so why would they?” So, that kinda shaped me, you know, without me even realizing it at that time, but it definitely has shaped me as an educator; the curriculum that I write, the way that I teach—and even in recent years, it made me even more hypercritical of when seemingly innocent, invasive things happen and just how damaging they can be in the long run.

And I wanna point out the fact that I was lucky in the sense that I had a father who could point that out to me. That’s not always the case for Black parents because they’ve been indoctrinated in the same way.

Eghosa: What I love about what Gertrude said is also pointing out how schooling serves as a site of teaching Black students to socially reproduce the exact same oppressive systems that are around them, right? And then we become conditioned to that, and then we mirror those experiences through every level of education, K—8, high school, college, and post. Having people in your life to break that mirroring or to show you what you’re doing is key. And part of my work right now is, I’m looking at Black women educators because our experience as Black girl students a hundred percent impacts the way that we then frame our pedagogy and praxis.

Like, we are teaching in a way that is responding to the way that we were taught, what we didn’t learn, what we were lacking, and so we create space in our classrooms to make up for that, to push back against that, to disrupt against the reproduction that we have become so accustom to in schooling. Which is what makes schooling so dangerous for Black bodies, for Black people, for Black students. The reality is most Black students are gonna have a critical incident, are gonna have multiple critical incidents, are gonna go into careers where they have more critical incidents. You know, part of our work in this mixtape is to not only amplify those, but like, what are we gonna do to disrupt that shit?

What are we gonna do to stop it, to make sure people are aware and make sure we’re not reproducing it? So, I think we’re all seeing similar things around these themes, and my critical incident is along the same lines. It’s just being in school and learning that I need to make myself small, small, small. And the smaller I make myself, the more I’ll be able to navigate this system that wants to make me invisible for the things that I need and highly visible for the things that will punish, that will deter, or that will force me into survival mode.

I don’t know that I need to talk about my specific incident, ’cause I think what we’re all saying is there are so many incidents we could pull from every year of schooling, like the first time you were called the N word. And I’m sure we all have that. (laughs) You know what I mean? Everybody got that story. Even in our careers, where our ideas are appropriated or where they try to make it so that we are not seen as intellectually capable according to them. Or what about all the people that be surprised, like, “Damn,
you articulate,” you know? “Didn't know you had it in you” type vibe. That’s what I’ll add to this.

So I appreciate that we have all specific incidents, but I think, thematically, it’s really interesting to look at as a whole.

Andre: I'll pop in. So, I mean, Eghosa’s right. It’s like, where to start? I can think about two incidents. Like, I had so many, but then, you know, as you guys were talking, just the two that stand out all happened in the same time period. It’s when we moved from the Black neighborhood to the white neighborhood, and I think I might’ve been in fifth grade. And I just remember all of my language being wrong. But on top of that, I remember being on a ship—You know, we went on a field trip. I had never been on field trips, and this field trip was whale watching. So we on a boat, and I remember the principal asking me—and I don’t remember him asking anybody else—but he was with an adult colleague and said, you know, “Hey, how do you say it? How do you say either (/ˈiðər/ eether) or either (/ˈaɪðər/ eyether)?” And I remember thinking to myself, “which is correct?” And I remember saying, “It’s either.” And I remember him talking to his colleague, and I didn't think much about it. I just remember sensing a sense of pride, like, it’s either.

And the second incident was, you know, in that same year, we went to camp. We were all shining our piece of wood, and one of the little white kid's stuff went missing. And I got approached, and I was accused of stealing this little piece of manzanita. And I remember being young and saying, “Do you think I would actually take someone’s stick of wood, hide it somewhere, just so I could come back later? It’s wood.” And the camp counselors looked at me and said, “Of course we do.” And I remember in that moment just thinking like, dang, you know? And it blew my mind. And thinking back, I just remember having this distrust from white administrators, white beings, white persons and sources of authority, yet, like Brian said, still this need internally to say “either” when necessary.

And that’s been kinda the forefront of a lot of my educational experiences not having, you know, Black teachers since high school. I mean, and even then, I remember our social studies teacher, she was Black, and she called us sons of Ham. The other one was just like an old auntie who just didn’t care, and the other one was South African. And I could tell he didn’t like Black people. So you all have these experiences that build up over time, that by the time I got to college and had a Black professor who was from the Sahel, it was interesting because I’m thinking, “Wow, he’s speaking to me, yet I don’t feel like he sees me. But he’s going out of his way to educate me, but I really don’t think that he’s there on my side.” It was just such a weird feeling to, you know, feel less-than with someone who’s supposed to be, you know, your color. And that’s when I started to understand that color isn’t shared experience.

But then again, that’s when you come to a language problem where you grow up in the education system and whiteness prevails to teach you that everything is an add-on, it’s an adjective, right? Like, you’re a person that happens to be. And in the system, you strive to be a person who is surrounded by the accolades, the grades, the papers, who happens to be Black. But then there’s a point in your experiences that has always taught you that
you’re a Black American. And it’s only in language where you have that adjective—color—come before the place of origin. So, we’re Black Americans. The problem with that is Black is just a color, so color just always comes first. Because in no other race can you be yellow American, red American, but we get to be Black American, which highlights, you know, within the education system that is anti-Black, where that goes.

Certain educational experiences I had were anti-Black American experiences. Which sucks because right now, we’re living in an era that prizes people-first language, so a lot of people in this world are now people who happen to be handicapped, people who happen to face substance addictions, people who happen to face alcoholism. But no matter what, we’re gonna be Black people. And that was part of the realization that we get from Afro-pessimism, that no matter how many certificates I surround my name with, my body won’t block bullets. And that was a hard awakening.

The hard awakening was that I can walk around and say either all I want, I could talk about the order of adjectives all I want, but my tongue isn’t gonna stop the fact that my body is not immune to white violence or to Black crime or to white capitalism or to the brutality that we face every morning just getting up in the world thinking that we’re people. And so that’s why I like this space so much; it’s where we’re trying to create a space through Black Educology where we don’t have to use the word “Black” all the time to define ourselves, and we can eventually be free of it. And what that means—I don’t know what that means. I don’t know what it means to be free of the word but at least we have a space now where we can; we can build that together to where we won’t be accused of stealing sticks that belong to people.

And the funny thing as an adult is that manzanita stick incident, it should’ve taught me at that moment, that same moment that it happened, that stick represents everything good that belongs to someone who is not you. That stick, eventually, would be education, it would be employment, it would be food, it would be access to anything that is traditionally not applied to people who look like me or sound like me. Essentially, that experience in the fifth grade told me anything that you have that looks like ours is stolen from us. And so that’s why, moving forward, just like the Tut languages of our grandmas, Imma steal every stick I can—not to hoard, but to use as kindling to set on fire. And Imma stop there ’cause I have to start using metaphors, and then I just lose my head, but y’all know what I mean.

Gertrude : We was on that journey with you.