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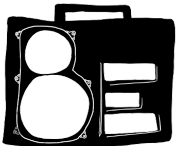
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The Black Educology Mixtape is an open access mixtape that moves beyond academic articles to feature various art forms and voices that are typically muted. Our scope and sequence focuses on the past, present, and future of Black education, which has 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.



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Go Good: Reading, Mapping, and Teaching the Territory through Space and Time

Christin Washington

Abstract

Go Good will take the form of a digital memorial, incorporating short stories, voice notes, music, and photographs, among other fragmented artifacts, to honor mythical life, death, and spiritual afterlife. It will borrow from the transnational account of a Guyanese woman who travels with, hides, and passes along her spiritual possessions. Reliant on affect and memory, this digital altar aims to swell the imagination, encounter new worlds, and restructure the frames placed around control, materiality, home, and humanity. This song offers reflections on the beginning of the production process of a forthcoming digital research project. While this song is a meditation on many of Toni Morrison's writings, it is mainly a site where Washington places lessons learned from the Guyanese elder in conversation with Sylvia Wynter's piece, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre" and Toni Morrison and Angela Davis' 2010 conversation at the New York Public Library. This community remains apt for a woman and immigrant who not only navigated multiple territories, but through her teachings, offered a rich map of humanity that extended to a place she could never fully know but could deeply perceive. Produced with the principle of memory as generative, "Go Good: Reading, Mapping, and Teaching the Territory through Space and Time" will provide strong rationale for methodological approaches that explore and showcase different genres of the human.

Try to think what it's like in the world if you can't read. What other kinds of things jump out at you. Use everything—*EVERYTHING*—to become the best human being you can be.

—[Toni Morrison, with Angela Davis \(2010\) at the New York Public Library](#)

A blunt silence followed the earnestness of Toni Morrison's second "everything" as her eyes panned a hushed audience twice over. Her short chuckle after "human being" loosed air back into the room, and the wind suddenly returning to my airway alerted me that I sat not in the

front row of this 2010 New York Public Library unmoderated conversation on literacy, libraries, and liberation between Toni Morrison and Angela Davis, but in my living room, staring into a screen with seized breathe twelve years after the live talk. Morrison had shared this bold truth, incontestably rehearsed through the writing processes of her numerous canonical texts and in response to an attendee who had stood before her and Davis asking questions to these giants. The immediate query that Morrison was responding to came from an anthropologist who was asking about the state of Third World women's speculative literature. Morrison, however, weaved in two preceding questions: one on film adaptations of books that attempted to appeal to visual literacies and the other on written protest and the role of the storyteller. Announcing that the letter, a beautiful and permanent thing, isn't going anywhere, Morrison visibly relished the reality that "there's no one way" (Morrison & Davis, 2010) She announced this to underscore the significance of other art forms, such as theater and portraiture, and the ineffability of life slipping into the skeleton of symbols that stood for sounds and to tap into other sensibilities using the modality most attractive to the creator.

Reading in Lands of Lethal Abundance

Use everything. This advice felt familiar. Not because Morrison had used this phrase before in both *Tar Baby* and *The Bluest Eye*—for different reasons, admittedly—and not because science fiction writer and MacArthur Fellow Octavia Butler had used it to describe the approach writers employ, as she referred to the coming of her never-released *Parable of the Trickster*, though at its core, each assertion implied just how demanding and lethally abundant life could be. Instead, it felt familiar because it fit like the right puzzle piece being neatly pressed in between all the irregular grooves of a life I had faithfully witnessed before (Figuroa-Vasquez, 2020). Morrison's offering highlighted the importance of resourcefulness for people who do not have access in the form of credit or capital, and therefore have to understand the thing—the tech, the language, the reading—in the most complex ways to survive, often developing their own signs and tools to navigate territories that are new to them. More notably, I could envision the Guyanese elder who I call on and borrow from to develop my forthcoming research project, *Go Good*, learning multiple territories without formal training to travel with, hide, and pass along her spiritual possessions. I became enamored with the fact that there were precise words to describe the methodological approach to survival and the sharp visual, culinary, and spiritual literacies that sprung from it—varying literacies to read new territories while distanced from hegemonic academic spheres. And *I* had always been privy to them. In fact, I exist as the corporeal documentation of this knowledge production.

I had found my overarching methodology, and its bend welcomes the decentralized archive of fragmented artifacts—short stories, voice notes, music, recipes, photographs, and their accompanying spirits, memories, and affect—wafting about in minds, in bodies, in bins, in bookbags, in boxes, in voicemails and voice memos, and in hearts. Morrison had affirmed their abundance, challenging me to cleave the imposed Western codes of paucity and dispossession from my approach to achieve a multisensory and multimodal retelling that is faithful, speculative, and rhizomatic of how these artifacts became evidence of diasporic survival. In essence, as a representation of a life spun from all of these spiritual possessions, *Go Good* jumps out through collage art and speculative fiction.

A Digital Map to Wynter's Survival

Through the study of Sylvia Wynter’s “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre,” it becomes apparent that the guiding methodology bears enormous weight. Wynter informs her readers that the prerequisite of Western rule was the overrepresentation of neoliberal European code onto other (often Indigenous) genres of human in Third World or “underdeveloped” nations under the guise of modernity. Further enacting their overextension of code, Europeans weaponized academic scholarship to justify their devaluation of non-Western epistemologies and implementation of more carceral, possessive, and restrictive ways of knowing and being (i.e., raced, classed, gendered, disabled, or ethnic beings). They produced hierarchies with a narrowly defined *human* at their pinnacle, with everyone relegated to the lower tiers designated as Other, psychically deceived into pursuing the status of Man, an alleged personhood that could never feasibly be reached.

Differing from the practice of defining the human purely by what we are—“we” lightly used in this context where it refers to the exclusive biocentric, religious, and economic characteristics assigned to the Enlightenment-produced *human*—Wynter lays out seeing the human, being the human, and defining the human as the metacognitive process of what we do to understand ourselves in relation to one another. One is the map and the other is the territory. One is *what* we map, and the other is *why* we map. Quoting the warnings Einstein issued right after the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, “Everything in the world had changed except the way we think about it... unless mankind could come up with a new mode of thinking we would drift towards unparalleled catastrophe,” Wynter challenges us to “separate discursively as well as institutionally, the notion of the *human* from the notion of *Man*” (Wynter, 2006, pp. 159, 161; emphasis in the original). Only the exclusivity of Man would justify that level of devastation to the Other. The demands of survival and the seduction of psychic emancipation at the level of written and spoken language within numerous societies underscores the imperative to navigate the territory, to disentangle the human from the Man. So evocative is the force of this freedom, it is enough to give dreaming a rest. However, Wynter informs us that we must not luxuriate at the level of genre. Like Morrison’s passionate encouragement to fail restrictive and imposed Western knowledge production and its relentless reproduction of the unattainable Man during her conversation with Angela Davis at the New York Public Library, Wynter’s work demands we understand how things jump out—to survive first but to get free second. What else could she be defending if not the human jumping out of the bondage of the Renaissance and Enlightenment-era Man, a body freeing itself of an unwelcome spiritual possessor to welcome another into its corporeal archive? And what other than a haunting could that be?

Using everything, I plan for *Go Good* to jump in and out of space and time, haunting Man through the design of a digital altar and service. Like the parts that make archival fragments whole, the particularities of the ancestral tradition “would never come back,” but their meanings have survived the journey, for they “had been there all along” (Morrison, 1988). These fragments and the spirits they bring beg questions of historicity and inform rhizomatic stories and cultures Man could not contain. While they could be read through the written word, familiarity with and priority of the letter is not a prerequisite.¹ Using speculative fiction and collage art to exercise a model of abundance, I intend to explore how she surveyed and survived the territory without the

¹The “letter” refers to the written word as Toni Morrison uses it during her talk with Angela Davis at the New York Public Library in 2010.

disciplining of academia to create a visual, culinary, and spiritual digital text. The digital serves many functions here: First, it informs the creation of the text; second, it creates the text; and third, it houses the text. In other words, the digital is both a tool and a methodology, and through the Black feminist praxis of grounded theory, it is also an epistemological framework for the development of *Go Good*. Through it, I plan to elucidate how this Guyanese elder not only taught her map, but also taught the function of the map in order to see, survive, read, and reimagine the territory for ourselves.

Teaching Dissemblance, Disassembly, Assembly, Rearrangement, and Revival

Speculative fiction and collage art are both ways to map genres of human that no one discipline has the capacity to describe, to identify the codes we have created to form relation with one another. They allow you to use everything, even the bits and pieces, to mold the present self in relation to the past and in conscious orientation toward a future. Under Man’s overrepresented rule—the governing language, form, and content—Black and Indigenous folks have used the principles of speculative fiction and collage art—

resourcefulness	assemblage	layering
multinarrative and multisensory storytelling	disidentifications	fragmented and autonomous artifacts
nonlinearity	mixed media	juxtaposition

—as cultural tools to dissemble and disassemble, assemble and rearrange, and revive and make anew their distinct genres (Benyehudah, 2020; Germain, 2020; Hernandez & Taylor, 2020; Muñoz, 1999). Fundamentally, these practices can be taught through these two methods under the overarching instruction to “use everything,” which has also become the defining pedagogical approach (Morrison & Davis, 2001).

Similar to what I hope to convey through this visual, culinary, and spiritual text, and to what Wynter makes abundantly clear, it is not enough to teach my map or even teach the presiding map, my intentions to peel its layers back notwithstanding. Imparting the knowledge of how to map is indispensable; at its heart, it is a navigational exercise on how to read the scale of even unrecognizable territory. This brings it into focus by way of what jumps out for the individual, including fragments and absences of memory, approaching its breadth and its constant change with calm, confidence, and community. It is teaching to understand the unfixed-ness of the human, which is to say embracing the futility of projection and refusing its violence that pledges to transform everyone unlike us under our code or likeness. So while it is possible and even helpful to teach the platforms and methods I intend to use, teaching the territory involves the why, the methodology of dissemblance and disassembly, the methodology of rearrangement and revival.

Go Good, then, would become an immersive heuristic that refuses narrow definition as universalizing truth, replication as restrictive practice, and exclusion as prerequisite of the human. It would become a pedagogical tool embracing what La Marr Jurelle Bruce calls parapositivism, a philosophical approach that resists “the hegemony of positivism” which “stipulates that meaningful assertions about the world must come from empirical observation and interpretation to generate veritable truth”; a praxis of deviation so as to engage with “the

phenomenal, the spiritual, the aesthetic, the affective, and the mad” (Bruce, 2021, p.10). If parapositivism is a philosophical approach, then teaching more than one way, teaching how to use everything to find one’s own way through speculative fictions and collage art, is a subversive pedagogy. And who better to have taught and passed those lessons along than my elder who maneuvered through a colonial Guyana, lost children and left house, traveled up and down the east coast of the United States, kept home for the unyielding spirits of her corporeal archive, and faithfully fulfilled her role as matriarch to four generations.² The beginning of the production process has been stirring but deliberate. My intention is to explore visual, culinary, and spiritual literacies to honor the ways things jumped out to my great-grandmother, a woman whose quotidian life was extraordinary, haunting, and magical. My hope is that visitors of the digital altar—or attendees of the intimate ancestral service—encounter new territories, acquaint themselves with unfamiliar maps, engage with the literacies most natural to them, reckon with codes long since forgotten, and become awash with the meaning waiting for them, even through unparalleled catastrophe and collapse. My plea is that you begin. Go good.

² Left house is a Guyanese phrase.

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