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. We feature a collective of Black people working to amplify and empower Black educational voices. Our scope and sequence focus on the past, present, and future of Black education, which has been historically and systemically caught in the underbelly of western education. 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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African Diaspora Literacy - The Mixtape: Leaning through and from the African Diaspora

Jarvais J. Jackson

ABSTRACT
This paper reveals the lasting significance of music in Black folx experiences, highlighting its various roles from communication to healing. It introduces African diaspora literacy as a solution to distorted Black histories in classrooms, promoting understanding and unity with a pro-Black stance. The study is centered on Black Joy and uses a mixtape format to navigate six key historical periods that promote pioneerism, resilience, and innovation. This engaging exploration of African diaspora literacy provides an active framework for educators and individuals to celebrate the wealth of Black culture.

For Black folx in the African Diaspora, music has been.

- A way to celebrate.
- A mode of communication.
- An antidote for healing.
- The thing that has maintained mental health.
- A source of hope.
- Influential.
- From the carving of drums to the mixing of beats, music for Black folx has been.

Music has been.

Whatever music has been, there are many lessons that can be learned from it. In this track, I invite readers to join me on a journey through the magic of Blackness. A pro-Black journey. Being pro-Black doesn't imply being against anything else; it merely advocates for an unapologetic, positive, and proactive stance on Blackness and Black individuals. It should not be misconstrued as implying that scholars and educators exclusively prioritize Black children (Boutte et al., 2021; Boutte & Compton-Lilly, 2022). This won't be just any journey, but a mixtape as we get a taste of historical periods from the beginning of time. This mixtape is for EVERYBODY. It’s for teachers, parents, community partners, and everyone in between because music has been a cultural dimension that brings people together.

This mixtape explores African diaspora literacy (ADL), learning about and from Black folx wherever they are in the diaspora. Why? Blackness has been omitted from, distorted, and mistold in classrooms for centuries (Jackson, 2023). This omission of Black histories is a form of the curricular/pedagogical anti-Black violence happening in schools (Johnson et al., 2019). That is, schools' omission of accurate Black histories and knowledge sends a message to Black students that their histories are not essential or nonexistent, while simultaneously sending a message to non-Black students, particularly white students, that the histories that are taught—those of dead old white men (some living old and young too)—are the norm, the standard.

The teaching of whiteness as a norm perpetuates, among other things, white supremacy and heteropatriarchal hegemony. The “norm” that is taught in schools omits the gruesome atrocities that were and are committed through white supremacy and the erasure of non-white cultures and identities. Teaching Black students through this lens dehumanizes them and continues to uplift whiteness, strengthening white supremacy. The nuances of whiteness as the norm go beyond the scope of this paper, but I encourage readers to engage with scholarly works that outlines how it complicates education (for further reading, see e.g., Gillborn, 2005; Kinloch & Lensmire, 2019; Love, 2023).

What happens as a result of whiteness being situated as the norm in education? Black students are subject to classrooms that encourage dreaming and those dreams aren’t of the greatness of Africa like Mansa Musa and Kemet or the impact they can make like Bessie Coleman, James Baldwin, Charley Parkhurst, and Ida B.
Wells-Barnett. Those dreams are of the very people who want to be us; the Europeans who saw (and see) the value
in Blackness but attack(ed) it while imitating it. But we won’t go there. While literature illustrates the Black sorrow
(Kearl et al., 2023), where is the joy? Let me be clear here, while it is critical that curriculum does not whitewash the
tellings of whole histories like the brutality of the European colonization of African countries and enslavement, and
Europeans taking credit for African contributions to global knowledge of music, art, agricultural methods, science,
and mathematics, starting with and emphasizing only Blackness as victimization sends messages that become
embedded in Black people’s beliefs about self and everyone else’s images of Blackness as one dimensional. Thus, I
emphasize the need for Black JOY.

In this article, I situate ADL as a vehicle for teaching and embodying Black Joy. When referring to Black
Joy, I draw on Kearl et al.’s (2023) notion that it “provides a way of refusing white educational discourses while
reimagining education as a homeplace where Black students can experience their full humanity” (p. 1). ADL serves
as a remedy by involving individuals from all backgrounds in the rich histories of the Black community,
emphasizing the beauty and brilliance of Black culture and heritage (Jackson, 2023). The beauty of ADL is that it is
a journey for students and adults. Adults (teachers and administrators), too, are learning and growing, being victims
of the same miseducation of Blackness. Although many educators are in the process of learning and unlearning, they
cannot stand by and wait until they have learned before these lessons are passed on to students; rather, they have to
engage in a learning journey with their students.

Boutte et al. (2024) present ADL in four components that connect like a puzzle: Black Historical
Consciousness, African Values and Principles, Black Cultural Dimensions, and Historical and Contemporary
Perspectives. Drawing from this conception, I bring forth Historical and Contemporary Perspectives to examine
what we can learn about and from the past as we continue to move forward. I emphasize about and from, as there
will be new perspectives on old histories that we can learn, untold stories, and lessons that can impact our lives
today. This approach honors Sankofa, the West African Adinkra symbol that represents learning from the past to
move forward (Jackson et al., 2021).

With the focus on the Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, I further use Boutte et al.’s (2024) six
historical periods as a guide. Those periods are as follows:

1. Ancient Africa and the African continent
2. Enslavement
3. Reconstruction
4. Jim Crow
5. Civil Rights Era
6. Contemporary life in the U.S. and African diaspora worldwide

To be clear, this list is not exhaustive; it is a living list, and others might conceptualize the periods
differently. However, this list provides a guide to begin organizing our thinking around key time periods for Black
people; particularly Black Americans. As this is a living list, I offer an addition that fits between the Civil Rights Era
and Contemporary life in the U.S., what I see as Reconstruction 2.01, which accounts from the period following the
Civil Rights Movement to the early 2000s, with some extension to the presidency of Barack Obama. Each of these
periods has its uniqueness, but there are some pervasive themes of pioneerism, innovation, resilience, resistance,
intelligence, and a litany of other characteristics that Black folk have exhibited regardless of the situation or
circumstance.

For this track, I present these historical periods as a mixtape. I will provide a brief glimpse of the mixtape
culture for readers who might not understand. While not unique to Black culture, I present a historical and personal
background from the Black perspective. Mixtapes made their debut around the 1980s. Mixtapes were a chance to get
just the right mix of music for different occasions. One might have a mixtape for a road trip, a party, or show
musical taste to a love interest (Real News Network, 2015). It was an opportunity to get a little bit of multiple
different artists or genres on one medium. Mixtapes started on cassette tapes and made their way to CDs as
technology changed. Reflecting on my younger years, mixtapes were an essential part of anyone’s musical
collection. I remember my first portable CD player, a Walkman, which my grandmother bought me for my birthday.
Initially, I had to get mixtapes from the various places they were sold, such as the beauty salon/barbershop, the flea
market, or the neighborhood mixtape man. There were mixtapes before there were drag-and-drop playlists that could
be shared instantly.

1 I attribute the naming of Reconstruction 2.0 to a friend, Lauren Mims, J.D.
I use mixtapes in this track to pay homage to Black music influence but also to guide us through the times and eras of Black folk. I do combine reconstruction and the Jim Crow era in this mixtape. Hear me out, though. The two periods were very different, but many themes are similar in the case of Black resilience. In this mixtape, each historical period will be represented by a song from or about that period; it will serve as the theme as I walk readers through what we can learn from the period and uncover some hidden knowledge and knowings that can enrich teaching and learning. I have outlined the mixtape playlist in Table 1, and I encourage readers to listen, read, and learn from the African Diaspora. This is a mixtape of Black Joy, and as such, while there were notable struggles throughout each period, I focus on the beauty, brilliance, and joy of Blackness through this journey.

Amid the many anti-Black policies and laws that are present in the United States, such as no-knock warrants and stop and frisk, schools continue to be places where Black students are disenfranchised, spirit murdered (Love, 2016), punished for dreaming (Love, 2023), and victims of anti-Black violence (Johnson et al., 2019). African Diaspora Literacy is built on the works of scholars such as Carter G. Woodson (1933), who boldly stated, “There would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom.” This statement came as he described what schools were doing to Black students. He stated, “…to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching” (p. 3). Thus, ADL serves as an antidote to the lynching still occurring in classrooms nationwide.

I am challenging readers to acknowledge the commitment that it takes to teach these histories in classrooms where erasure is continuing as we see book bans, legislation, and textbooks control the narratives taught. This is not something that one can just pick up by happenchance or when convenient as this comes with the risk of being attacked. Love (2023) reminds us, “one cannot stand for just only when it serves their political career” (p. 124). While teaching isn’t the traditional political career, it is one that is controlled by politics and requires a relentless pursuit of justice for all students. I don’t mean the typical all, where Black and brown students are second thoughts, but all students acknowledging their uniqueness and the beauty and brilliance of who they are and the impact their ancestors have made on this country and world. As readers journey through this mixtape, I ask that they position themselves as a learner and leave this track with the will to assist with dreams, uplift spirits, and be an advocate against anti-Black policies and practices in whatever role they play in schools. We all have a part to play.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Period</th>
<th>Song</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enslavement</td>
<td>“Wade in the Water” Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruction</td>
<td>“It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)” Duke Ellington (Ellington, 1932)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruction 2.0</td>
<td>“Stand By Me” Ben E. King (King, 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Life in the U.S and African Diaspora Worldwide</td>
<td>“Alright” Kendrick Lamar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Black First, Black Always: Ancient Africa and the African Continent

Don't you know that home is
Where my heart lies
Across the ocean
Into the African skies
Through the hills and valleys
Over the mountains
Africa, is where my heart lies

Alkebulan.

Africa.

The Motherland.

Home.

While Africa has many names, one thing is undoubtedly true: Africa is the start of life and humanity. There is much to be discussed and argued about that statement. Still, many scholars, regardless of religious or scientific background, will agree that human life as we know it started in Africa (Blundell, 2006). Sadly, for many of us who matriculated through the U.S. education system, we were not taught about Africa as the birthplace of humanity; instead, we were often introduced to Africa through the context of colonization, particularly with the transatlantic slave trade. It was almost as though Africa was created solely as a breeding ground for other countries for exploitation. Moreover, instead of learning about the 55 different countries of Africa, we learned about Africa as if it were one country. In this section, I seek to disrupt that troublesome narrative and challenge teachers to introduce pre-colonial Africa to students.

During my dissertation study, I observed an African Studies teacher in an elementary school. It was the first year the school implemented the program, so I was really interested in how the teacher, a colleague and a friend, would approach the new course. On the first day, as the students learned, I, a then 27-year-old Black man (and former K–12 educator), discovered that Africa was initially called Alkebulan. This name loosely translates into the mother of mankind or the Garden of Eden (Čirjak, 2020). What I particularly like about the translation of the Garden of Eden is how it paints the picture of a paradise. According to the Christian Bible’s account (see Genesis 2:4-3:24), the garden of Eden is not only the site of life, but it was abundant in the needs of life. Africa, too, reflects that concept.

To account for the many resources available in Africa is not the scope of this paper and would take centuries. It is important to note that Africa’s resources were plentiful and covered areas such as land and natural resources, labor, and capital. Natural resources included oil, gas, coal, gold, and salt. Africans led the way in innovation in agriculture as the land present allowed food distribution to migrate from East Africa to West Africa (Green, 2013). Leading the way in knowledge, early written communication can be found in Kemet, modern-day Egypt, with hieroglyphics and the earliest libraries such as al-Qarawiyyn Library, the Library of Alexandria, and Timbuktu. Occupying the lands of Africa were people like Mansa Musa, the richest person in history to date (Morgan, 2018); Queen Nzinga of Ndongo and Matamba, a fierce warrior; Ibn Battuta, known for his navigation and travels in Africa, Europe, and Asia; and Mansa Abubakari II, who traveled to North America centuries before Christopher Columbus. From their inception, the stories of Africans have been ones of innovation, resistance, and power: characteristics that are still present today.

Thinking about incorporating these teachings and more about ancient and modern Africa, I challenge teachers to examine the skills and standards expected to be taught and find ways to critically add to sometimes vague learning objectives. In Table 2, I share some of these ideas. It takes some work from teachers as they, too, are,
in many cases, learning this information for the first time. I ask readers to commit to adding at least one pre-colonial historical lesson to their teachings regardless of the content area or grade level.

### Table 2

**Connecting African Topics to Skills and Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills/Standards</th>
<th>Ways to Connect to African Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map skills</td>
<td>Explore African geography through Mansa Abubakari II's sea voyages and Ibn Battuta's travels. Investigate the impact of African exploration on map development and discuss the significance of ancient trade routes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Understandings</td>
<td>Examine Mansa Musa's wealth and delve into the effects of colonialism on Africa's economy. Explore the economic systems of African civilizations beyond Mansa Musa, such as the Kingdom of Aksum or the Mali Empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>Analyze maps showcasing Africa's rich natural resources and study artifacts and primary sources for deeper insights. Connect the analysis of natural resources to discussions on sustainable practices and the role of indigenous knowledge in resource management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics tools</td>
<td>Discuss ancient African mathematical tools like the Ishango bone, illustrating early counting methods. Integrate discussions on the cultural context of mathematical tools, emphasizing the contributions of various African civilizations to mathematical advancements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**God’s Gonna Trouble the Waters: Enslavement**

*Wade in the water*
*Wade in the water, children,*
*Wade in the water*
*God's a-going to trouble the water*

- Negro Spiritual

The story of enslavement told in schools sterilizes and romanticizes the gruesome atrocities that occurred when Africans were kidnapped from their lands. In modern-day schools, such as in Florida, decision-makers even try to force narratives such as enslavement as personal benefit for Africans who were enslaved (Planas, 2023). Whew. What Africans who were enslaved endured for centuries was inhumane, gruesome, unspeakable, and a host of other descriptive words, but through that, they maintained agency and resisted. That is the message that ADL seeks to share. ADL doesn’t overlook the atrocities but uplifts the resilience. The message I hope readers get from this section is one of hope and resistance.

Negro spirituals, like the one I opened this section with, served as a symbol of faith, a means of communication, and so much more for those enslaved. The beautiful thing about these spirituals was that it wasn’t just a song, but a reminder to stay hopeful and, in many cases, a form of communication. The hope that Africans who were enslaved had was not empty; rather, it was full of faith, regardless of the beliefs they practiced. For
example, in “Wade in the Water,” there was a recurring notion that God would trouble the waters; if one would just take the step to go to the water, God would perform the miracle. In addition to the hope, the deeper meaning, the communication, was also clearly to instruct those seeking freedom to get to the water as they escaped. Water would eliminate a scent trail for dogs. Many songs also included call and response that was used during work, in escaping to freedom, and generally in songs. It is a practice used in music, at church, and across other Black cultural aspects, and it is a powerful tool for teachers to engage their students in their classrooms (Boutte et al., 2024).

I share this example of the use of songs to highlight the hope for a better tomorrow held by Africans who were enslaved and their resistance to remaining enslaved for life. In many instances, resistance is not taught when discussing enslavement. For starters, many assume that our ancestors did not push back at all. False. For example, some of the day-to-day acts of resistance included sabotaging tools, pretending to be sick, intentionally lingering in a state of illness, securing food through cunning methods, and manipulating the conflicts between the master and overseer (Oakes, 1986). Aside from escaping, some of the more overt examples include verbally sass and assaulting enslavers, even extending as far as arson and well-thought-out organized rebellions (Oakes, 1986). The fact that schools have omitted discourse about the resistance of Africans who were enslaved has found some Black people ignorantly making proclamations like, “We are not our ancestors,” which is disrespectful to the things that they endured and shows the lack of knowledge about the ways their resistance is the reason we are where we are today.

Knowing these things, I implore teachers to have open conversations about enslaved peoples’ resistance and how that resistance has informed other movements. Furthermore, while we are not enslaved physically, many of the injustices that we experience daily in some ways keep us on a leash, one that could be broken with resistance. For some, hearing the word resistance means torches and guns, ready to fight, but how can we make change through resistance in our daily lives? In Table 3, I share an example of an activity that can be used with younger or older students, with modifications, exploring resistance.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resistance Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Resistance</td>
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</table>

Discuss the concept of resistance through discussions of fairness, equity, equality, and injustice. Explore different examples of resistance, such as the Stono Rebellion (enslavement), Stone Wall Revolt (LGBTQ+ rights), the Civil Rights movement, and Black Lives Matter. From this, encourage students to think about a change they would like to see in the world. Using a poster board, have students create protest signs, informative projects on their issue, or other creative protest methods. Allow students to share their creations and share their issues to inform others. Ensure students acknowledge any examples of resistance that influenced their thinking.

### Black Joy: Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era

*It don’t mean a thing, if it ain’t got that swing*
(doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah)

*It don’t mean a thing all you got to do is sing*
(doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah)

*It makes no difference*

*If it’s sweet or hot*  
*Just give that rhythm*  
*Everything you’ve got*

(Ellington, 1932)

Citizenship granted.

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2 See https://therealarah.medium.com/we-are-not-our-ancestors-and-thats-no-compliment-to-us-e972a32a5765.
Voting rights.

Separate but equal.

The end of the Civil War was supposed to be the mark of equality in the United States. Enslaved Africans were freed, or at least were supposed to be. They were given the right to vote and own land, among other things. Not too fast, though. White people in the U.S. did not see Black folk as equal to themselves. In response, states passed Black codes and enacted other discriminatory practices, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and limits on where Black folk could work, live, or just be. Sigh. While the war was over, and the South lost (yes, the confederacy lost), white people in this country were not done fighting. So much so, in many cases, Black folk were left to fend for themselves and attempt to navigate the new world they were living in. These were not easy fights, but Black folk employed agency when possible, such as during the great migration, when some folk decided to escape the South and head to the North for better working opportunities and overall treatment (it is debatable as to whether it was as easy as assumed); another example being Black folk choice to engage politically, as they were determined to no longer be treated as a second-class citizen.

So, I titled this section Black Joy. As a reminder, the lens through which we are looking is one of pro-Blackness; we are looking for the beauty and brilliance of Blackness. Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era was not an overnight situation for Black people, but what is evident is that Black folk did not lose their willingness to fight, but more importantly, they did not lose their joy. One expression of that joy was through the Harlem Renaissance. During this time, Black folk used their artistic skills to display who they were culturally. This art took the form of painting, photography, music, dance, poetry, and other forms of creative expression. From the Harlem Renaissance, many artists arose, such as W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Ma Rainey, and Ethel Waters.

I emphasize the Black Joy in this movement, but to be clear, there were some not-so-joyous people, some of whom also took that discontent to paper. In their expression through their art, they highlighted Blackness while critiquing America. Nevertheless, there was still an abundance of joy. The song chosen for this section, “It Don't Mean a Thing,” sung by Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington, gave me a dose of the joy from this era. They sang about music and its need for rhythm, but sung it in such a way to give listeners the ability to apply it to their life. A particular message I received was, that regardless of what life is giving you, just give it all you have and the best will come. The lyrics “It makes no difference if it’s sweet or hot, Just give that rhythm everything you got,” reminds me of the need to give life your best regardless of the circumstance. Their song amidst such times reminds me of dancing in the rain; for many Black people during that time, that’s precisely what they did. When Black people weren’t allowed to go to white schools, they built their own. When they couldn’t shop in the same stores, they created their own. When the dance hall didn’t allow them to sing, they started their own juke joints.

Although life might be saying the opposite, finding our joy is one way we will be sustained as we continue to move forward. The Harlem Renaissance can be found in many state standards, but aside from content, I employ teachers to think about how their classrooms create, maintain, or destroy Black Joy. How might our students engage better overall in our classrooms if they tap into their joy? In Table 4, I share an activity encouraging Black folk to reflect and (re)claim their joy.

### Table 4

(Re)claiming Black Joy

Life often feels like an endless cycle, and amidst its monotony, the pursuit of joy can be challenging. This activity encourages you to escape life’s routine and discover your Black Joy. There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to Black Joy; what matters most is finding that joy and revisiting it regularly. Choose one or more activities below to initiate or sustain your journey of Black Joy.
Potential Activities

1. **Mindfulness:** Engage in activities like Yoga, Meditation, Stretching, or similar practices to center yourself in the present moment.

2. **Journaling Exercise:** Consider the following prompts:
   - Can you recall a specific moment or experience when you felt overwhelming joy?
   - What activities or people bring joy into your life?
   - How do you express or experience joy?

3. **Find Community:** Participate in an event or activity with your community, whether with family, friends, or even strangers.

4. **Constant Gratitude:** Write down three things you are grateful for in your life. Decide on the frequency of reflection, whether daily, weekly, or monthly.

5. **Create a Joy Map:** Mark locations or areas in your life associated with joy, such as favorite places, positive memories, or places you wish to visit.

6. **Write a Letter to Future Self:** Focus on the joy you hope to experience in the coming weeks or months in a letter to your future self.

7. **Affirmations:** Come up with affirmations you can regularly proclaim to reinforce a positive mindset.

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**We Need Each Other: Civil Rights Movement**

*When the night has come*

*And the land is dark*

*And the moon is the only light we'll see*

*No, I won't be afraid*

*Oh, I won't be afraid*

*Just as long as you stand*

*Stand by me*

(King, 1961)

One of the most popular Black movements discussed in schools is the Civil Rights Movement. What is discussed about the Civil Rights Movement is an entirely separate concern, but we know it is talked about. There are various opinions about the approach of the Civil Rights Movement, the folx who were leaders, and what was asked for or received. What can be seen, though, is the collective efforts that were in play. It was not just “I” it was “US” and “WE.” For that, as expressed in Ben E. King’s song “Stand by Me,” there is a reassurance that fear won’t exist because I know we have each other. Yes, Ben’s song was to a “darling,” so possibly singing to a love interest, but the same concept can be applied to our brothers and sisters in our community.

Images of the Civil Rights Movement usually depict folx in groups, sometimes arm in arm, taking a stance for their rights. These visuals reify an African principle of communalism. Communalism refers to a dedication to the inherent interconnectedness of individuals and the importance of social bonds and relationships; a core characteristic of African people (Boykin, 1994; Boutte et al., 2024). It is through communalism that we accomplish goals and ensure the well-being of those around us. It is not every person for themselves, but a collective effort to ensure that everyone has what they need, and because everyone has what they need, we are all well. This concept is also commonly referred to as Ubuntu, or I am because we are. The notion of community is not to say that there won’t be communal disputes; what is important is how those disputes are handled (Jackson, 2023).

One of the most critical lessons on communalism that we can learn from the Civil Rights Movement is that everyone has a part to play. We sometimes get caught up in the desire to want to be at the forefront, but the reality is everyone cannot. Some names and faces are synonymous with the Civil Rights Movement, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and John Lewis. The reality is, those folx would not have accomplished the things they did without others who worked behind the scenes and before them. Before Rosa Parks, there was Sarah Mae Flemming, who was forced off a bus in Columbia, SC, in 1954. She sued the bus company and won, giving
lawyers case law when fighting the Montgomery Bus Boycott case Browder v. Gayle. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is known for his prolific sermons and speeches, most iconically the “I Have A Dream” speech at the 1963 March on Washington. Not talked about (until recently) is one of the key organizers of the march, Bayard Rustin. We hear about Thurgood Marshall but not of his mentor, Charles Hamilton Houston, dean of Howard University’s School of Law. All of these are examples of the fact that while one person is sometimes recognized, others are helping to ensure things are accomplished.

To bring this idea to the classroom, I urge teachers to transform their classrooms into communal spaces. Spaces of collective responsibility that reassure students that they are not alone, place accountability for all community members to share the duty of maintaining the community, and makes room for agency, resulting in higher achievement (Boutte et al., 2024). For this section, rather than an activity, I challenge readers to examine their classrooms or shared spaces with others. Reflect on these prompts and make actionable changes toward community:

1. How do you currently foster collective responsibility in your classroom to create a communal space? Reflect on specific practices or strategies you employ to assure students they are not alone in their academic journey.

2. Considering the significance of social relationships in a communal space, how can you further encourage and support student interactions to strengthen the sense of community within your classroom environment, aligning with Boykin's (1994) understanding of communalism?

Love: Reconstruction 2.0, A Black Renaissance

‘Cause your love is my love  
And my love is your love  
It would take an eternity to break us  
And the chains of Amistad couldn’t hold us

(Houston, 1998)

There was a moment in time after the Civil Rights Movement when Black people flourished. It was not a random flourishing, but it came from the seeds planted in the past eras. From the work that was done preceding this time, we were able to see things such as Shirley Chisholm becoming the first Black woman elected to U.S. Congress, Thurgood Marshall becoming the first Black person on the United States Supreme Court, and Colin Powell becoming the first Black person and Condoleezza Rice the first Black woman to be U.S. Secretary of State. We saw Black entertainment continue to rise, such as Black Entertainment Television (BET), JET Magazine, and Ebony Magazine, not to mention the creation of hip-hop. There was a moment, even just a second, when equity seemed to be real. Granted, this was also a time that legislation harmed Black folx with things such as the crack epidemic, the “war on drugs,” and Regan’s “tough on crime” initiatives, resulting in mass incarceration. That said, there was so much Black excellence happening also; it was a moment for Black folx to rise again, a reconstruction, a renaissance.

What held this renaissance of Blackness together? Love. When researching this period, I turned to music, of course, and such a movement of love was happening. It was all types of love, both romantic and communal. Whitney Houston, who frequently sang about love, even offers, in the lyrics shared in the opening, what I think is a description of the love being shown communally. A tight love. One that has allowed Black folx to stay together through whatever has come our way. While I use the description of tight, the love that is among Black folx has been described by Black folx in every aspect. The love that Black folx have isn’t just any kind of love, this love is complex as it defies the typical love that America pushes; one based on productivity and capitalism (Smith, 2022). Smith (2022) explains America’s love, one built in white supremacy, requires one to give of oneself whether that is talents or product. It is not reciprocal, rather, it drains one of all of them self and often with nothing in return. The love that is based in interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Smith, 2022). Black love though, the thick love (Morrison, 1987), the radical love (Smith, 2022), the revolutionary love (Boutte et al., 2023; Wynter-Hoyte et al, 2022). Black love that is hard to describe, but is felt (Smith, 2022).

What does love have to do with schooling? It’s the foundation of good teaching and learning. Relationships. James Comer (2001) asserted meaningful learning only takes place in the presence of significant relationships. Baines et al. (2018) situate love as the foundation for culturally relevant teaching but emphasize that it requires all parties' investment. Love is different for everyone, but there is a universal understanding that love is a commitment.
and upholds our ethical responsibility as educators to do no harm (Boutte, 2016). Baines et al. (2018) helped teachers think through what love in the classroom, offering three areas of responsibility and commitment:

(1) knowing themselves through ongoing self and institutional examination; (2) knowing families by building trusting relationships, learning from family wisdom, and supporting families’ rights in their children’s education; and (3) knowing histories to be able to identify and replace curriculum, pedagogies, and practices that marginalize, distort, and invisibilize (p. 22; emphasis in original)

Again, this is a deep-rooted love that is not only in words but action and commitment. I challenge readers to think about how love fits in the classroom and what lessons can be learned from love itself. How might it support our efforts for Black education, and how do we maintain love in a world of hate?

Let’s Go Back to the Basics, We Will Be Alright: Contemporary U.S.

We gon’ be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me?
We gon’ be alright

(Lamar, 2015)

So now we are here, on the last song on the mixtape. The moment that is now. This section, as we conclude, will be a little different. I won’t give a background or even try to figure out a moment to point out. What I will do is ask readers to reflect on all of the other periods and the themes discussed. There is so much to be grasped from what has happened; hence, I circle back to the concept of Sankofa. As we move forward into contemporary times, we cannot forget to learn what we can from the past. Yes, things are different; we have access to technology and knowledge like never before, but we cannot forget what our ancestors taught us. Since schools have not comprehensively included Black history, it is our responsibility to dig deep to learn from the past and, in Dr. David Johns's words, “teach the babies.”

We have to go back to the basics. As we unveil some of these hidden Black histories and re-engage with familiar ones from a different lens, we must adopt some of the practices used even in contemporary times.

Black was first and will always lead the way.

Hope is still relevant; Resistance is always needed.

Black Joy will sustain us.

Communalism will help us (re)claim our power.

Love will always bind us.

And knowing this reassures us that We gon’ be alright.

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Notes on Contributor

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