



**Black Educology Mixtape “Journal”**

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## **The Cypher: “We've Been Inside These Systems”**

**Andre Carter, Eghosa Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, simple ant, Stacey Ault**

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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. 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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## The Cypher: “We've Been Inside These Systems”

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### ABSTRACT

Black Educology (BE) transcends traditional academic paradigms by exploring education through a lens encompassing Blackness, education, and ecology. This cypher highlights that we are not merely about individual pursuits but we are really about that collective action aimed at challenging the rigidity of the academy. The cypher symbolizes community discourse disrupting prevailing narratives of marginalization and reclaiming Black identity as a source of empowerment and legacy. In essence, through the cypher, BE represents a transformative endeavor to redefine scholarly spaces, by way of the richness of Black culture, Black creativity, and community to envision a different academic landscape.

### Introduction

In our second issue of Black Educology (BE), we would like to address head-on that, yes, we in these systems, but no, we ain't tryin to be of them.

In each volume, we convene using the cypher to wax poetic about how we navigate the systems built to grind us down. The carcinogenic ethos of the academy is what we set out to push back against. We are intent on transforming these suffocating spaces into sites of possibility. We seek to rescript the exclusion of Black voices by uplifting them as assets through our collective building and resisting. In this track, Black Educology Mixtape Producers Ant, Dre, and Eghosa sit around a virtual studio to discuss what brought us to create a second volume of BE. Our conversation moves and meanders as we refrain and chorus each other's thoughts and experiences. We talk about systems. A lot. The systems of thought, systems of oppression, and the systems of education that have led us to seek others in an ongoing and creative discussion that centers Black experiences in formal and informal educational settings. In editing our cypher, we have done our best to preserve our spoken language as much as possible so read the text aloud to go on this journey with us.

**Dre:** Yeah. So thank you in advance, Stacey. I'm so happy you're here.

**Stacey:** Thank you for having me. So excited to share space with you all. I'm Dr. Stacey Chimimba Ault Professor Emeritus, and founder, CEO of the Race and Gender Equity Project, AKA, the Rage Project where we advance the healing education, advocacy, research and well-being of Black women and youth. So excited to share space and I'll pass it to whichever one of you wants to jump in.

**Ant:** I think I'll go since I'm the new kid on the block. My name is simple ant and those at USF might know me as Dr. A. I'm a professor and educator but, above all, I think of myself as someone who works diligently to try to unearth the creative potential of what our liberation could look like. I really try to align theory (i.e. what we know to be true) with how we act and move in the world. I've dedicated a lot of my life (and life energy) to bridge the gap between theory and action and try to encourage folks and encourage myself to move differently, to think above and beyond white supremacy, capitalism and all of the other things that often tear us apart.

**Eghosa:** Sweet. I can go next. My name is Eghosa Obaizamomwan-Hamilton and I am in my ABD (all but dissertation) stage. So I'm getting to the end. A lot of my current research focused on the power and prowess of Black educators and more specifically Black women educators. I'm looking at how historically, our moves from native schools to integrated schools have always been a core part of the political push, the civics push, the taking care of other young people and their impact on society. So, I'm real keen on that, and my presence in this space is working to amplify voices like those of Black women teachers, who are often erased from the history books and our understanding of Black women's impact. Essentially, I want to highlight that we are major in a lot of ways. And I was thinking about it earlier today actually, I'm not into the word marginalized anymore. I know that's been a big thing people use in academic spaces, but we are making space where there is none. So I don't feel like we can be marginalized, we can't label me or Black people or Black women as marginalized. And I think this journal is the epitome of that too. We're making space for different types of voices, creative entries, and sharing space with our community in a way that feels good to us. So yeah.

**Dre:** I'll jump in. My name is Dre. I've been working on a lot of projects recently. My most important is this journal. I'm the baby in the sense that I have a year of classes to go before I'm ABD, so I'm looking forward to the next couple quarters so I could really focus on where this journal's going to go, how it's going to be. My work really centers around this idea of space within education. We often talk about critical spaces and holding spaces and space as a metaphor and radical spaces, but never how to build those spaces. So I'm really curious about how do I build a method that creates, locates, and helps people build or have tools and materials to be able to build these so-called spaces, and what do they look like, and what *can* they look like to move us out of the imaginary and to the forefront.

**Stacey:** I heard a few things that really resonate with me and I think they're interconnected. And one is this concept of “different,” which makes me think of Othered as power, not as marginalization. And Dr. A talks about moving differently. Eghosa, you talked about different voices and so it makes me sort of think about the journal as difference, what does that mean? And I'd like to hear more about that. The other thing that really resonates is this concept of space and all of you sort of talked about space as well, making space, critical space, radical space, taking up space. So through that lens, tell me about the origin story of Black Educology. What is it and why? And I'll let us end with you Dre.

**ant:** I was just going to say I think the old heads should speak, the OGs.

**ant:** But I do have some thoughts to contribute as to how and why I jumped on board.

**Dre:** I can jump in and just give you a response that's really centered again on space. The journal is really rooted in this idea of us as upcoming or incoming and outgoing scholars. It is: Where do we publish? Where do we publish in our own voices to where we don't have to censor ourselves and we don't have to conform to the same intellectual ideology, ideas. Where can we be us in this space the same way we're us in this room? And a side of that was if we can do that for ourselves, how do we build a space for others to join us in that? And what would that look like? So really the origins begin in a question. It's, what will our space look like? And then secondary is, well who are we? What are we in? What kind of spaces does that require? And because we're all working in education, eventually what that became was, well, we're all interested in these angles of education from these different perspectives. It's like we want to study education from something that unites us all is this shared identity of this shared ontological Blackness. So it's just like, well then how do we take that and look at education through that specific lens? And that's what gave us BE, that's what gave us Black Educology.

**Eghosa:** Yeah, and I'd just add as an OG, as ant says, Black Educology really was rooted in being in and carving out a space where Black scholars can come together and create. When you bring Black people together in the same space, dope things are going to happen. And so these big ideas that we were able to cultivate as a collective and then actually make happen, I think is important to note. We continue to give, take, and be in spaces with each other to create possibilities. And then, in this space, we are essentially trying to push back against and disrupt the traditional, rigid, and sometimes noninviting space that are publications and journals. We as Black scholars want to be able to speak how we speak; we want to be able to put work out for the audiences that we want and we want to be able to research with Black people as Black people and that be validating in itself. And so I forget, I don't remember who said it, maybe it was Toni Morrison, but if you don't see yourself somewhere, then create it yourself. And that's kind of what we were trying to do so that we can make space for not only ourselves but other folks who look like us. And I think the nature of what we are doing is turning journal spaces on its head by challenging what is considered scholarly by having poems, by having art, by having youth voices; this is part of the subversive nature of what we're doing.

**ant:** Axé. I would just add that for me, I learned about BE doing my nine to five at USF. BE so reminded me of the struggle that I went through as a grad student myself; searching for that place of validation, a place that recognized that our lives and our work matter, that how we think and move and organize in the world matters. And I feel like for me almost instinctively I saw BE as being part of that answer. You know what I mean? Because it was this space of creativity, but also of hella deep contemplation, you know what I mean? It's a kind of space that I think we as a people need to really figure out the best way forward given the unworkable premise of white supremacy really. And the last thing that I'll mention is that I get really passionate when I think what BE is.. It's BE, Black Educology, or the mixing of Blackness, education and ecology. And for me that was really significant because it transcends just looking at race, class, gender and any of the other socialisms that afflict us humans. It automatically puts us Black people in conversation with the more than human world as well. And I know, Dre, I don't know if you want to speak on this, but we've had conversations about how that wasn't the original kind of idea of BE, especially the ecology bit. And I think that's kind of where I've brought my own spin on things, just given the nature of the work that I do.

**Stacey:** Thank you. I'm going to put a push pin in a couple things. One is this kind of concept of where do we go from here? I want us to go more into that conversation. I'm also really interested in this transcendence of Blackness, education and ecology. So I'm going to hold both of those. But before we do that, just this concept of being and the creativity that surrounds, permeates, and comes out of Black Educology really strikes me every time I read, see, and listen. Even now, in my own work, deep contemplation is the place where creativity is birthed, right? You mentioned creativity and deep contemplation and I don't think you can separate those things. You got to be rested, you got to imagine, you got to dream, you got to contemplate. That's where creativity is born. And I'm interested in Black Educology specifically and the creativity that surrounds it. I think about the cypher, I think about the mixtape, I think about just the call and how it is. Again, it's like that concept of different. Eghosa can you start us off in a conversation around the creativity of this space?

**Eghosa:** I think for where we are now, originally we had the cypher, we had the mixtape and we're trying to expand it even more so now with the way we're thinking about the layout of the mixtape and incorporating more voices. How do we get Black undergrad students? How do we get Black students, students of color, and youth voices in here? What can we do to expand this work? So when thinking about music, which is obviously deeply rooted in Blackness, as every genre of music we have spearheaded, whether it's been appropriated or not, we have been the origins of that. How can we expand our work to include more voices? So in part, the cypher is rooted in that, cyphers are a space where people come together, rapping over the same beat, flowing, creating off the top, and trying to make music as a collective. And that's like a metaphor for what we're doing. Our cyphers, we're talking off the top, we're talking in community, we're building off of each other. And so that is the mixtape. Dre, you can pop in

here too. The mixtape is really pushing back against traditional journals where you have to have your statement of the problem, research methods and all this stuff, which is valuable and we have as well. But by putting it out as a mixtape, we are forcing open what is considered knowledge, what is considered scholarly, and who is considered knowledgeable and scholarly in this academic space. We are trying to incorporate other voices that may not get to publish or something like the bonus tracks, where maybe we get a dope piece from a Black scholar that doesn't quite fit the call, but we want to make space for them to publish anyway. It's dope. We're going to find a way. And so that's the ethos of the bonus track. So we're kind of incorporating this whole musical metaphor because music is building, music is community, music brings folks together and music is Black.

**ant:** I would like to add to that too, everything that Eghosa just mentioned is inherently collective. And that's a stark difference from traditional academic research where everything is so individualized. It's your dissertation, it's your intellect, it's your intellectual property. We're flipping that on its head by saying that everything is collective—from the cypher to the mixtape, to the bonus track—it's all collective. None of those elements can happen in a vacuum. The cypher, it takes two or more to tango. And then with the mixtape, you got your writers, your producers, lyricists. Yeah, I think in many ways BE is a living testament to a collective struggle. And maybe struggle is the wrong word. I'm with Eghosa and with Dre too; I feel like I'm tired of living in a marginalized paradigm. There's so much beauty and strength to us as a people that yeah, it's beautiful to let that out. And I'm a hip hop head. So for me it's just hip hop in general is the ultimate expression of taking a really shitty situation, for lack of a better word, and expressing that freely and in something that is intrinsically beautiful on its own. And that's kind of what I use as my inspiration to do all the work that I do.

**Dre:** I'm a person experiencing Blackness. And so I started to meditate on that. What does that mean? So BE, what is being outside of, like Eghosa and ant said, what does being outside of the constructs of race, of gender, what does it mean to meditate on just being? And I feel like now y'all can stop me because y'all know me, but I feel like I'm flipping the alchemy script. So you got gold on the top and Black or the base material on the bottom, but when we flip it, I'm thinking Black is that final stage because what we're going through is this sort of, if I'm a person who was Black, then I'm the easiest to move past. So what is it now to see our Blackness as something to escape via fugitivity, something to treasure as in our history and our artifacts, something to hold and to cherish as in something to pass on, as in a legacy, something to share as opposed to something that is stolen?

**Stacey:** Before we keep going, Eghosa or ant, do you have anything to add or riff off of what we're talking about right now?

**ant:** I just wanted to say this idea of looking into Blackness really touches me because it makes me think about the actual color palette. Black is the only color in existence that is of all colors. You know what I mean? The way you derive Black is by literally mashing and mixing. Every color turns to Black. And I just found that really powerful. Dre had me thinking of an MLK quote that I heard a while back, 'it's only in darkness that you can see the stars.' That's why I love the darkness.

**Eghosa:** Only in darkness can you see the stars; I love that. And it reminds me of growing up, I was born in '84, so thinking about the nineties and the constant juxtaposition of Black and white I remember in high school, again, time matters so we're talking like 20-something years ago, but I was in a classroom and all the posters on the wall, they have bodies and babies and all these different posters but usually it wasn't my skin color. The "normal" skin color in quotes is white. But there was one Black baby on a poster and it was the one poster that was talking about HIV and AIDS. And I was like maybe 15 but I'll never forget how that made me feel. The only way I can belong in this space as a Black person, the only way someone like me can belong is in this tragic or negative way. And, follow me here, when we go back to BE, and we go to pushing back against the only way in which we can exist, especially in the academic world, it's when other people are extracting from our community or other people are getting data from

folks that look like us and then leaving and bouncing. We are trying to stop that. Alexis Pauline Gumbs said something like, we're trained to consent to the extraction of everything beautiful about us. And what we're doing is trying to first of all stop that extraction and also feed ourselves, water our own soil, and grow together in community in a way that sometimes this world tries really hard not to allow us to do. And so yeah, that was my train of thought, how I grew up in this idea of Blackness as negative and how empowered I feel in being in spaces like this where I get to determine what that is.

**Stacey:** You moved us into this concept of growth and of earth and of, I think, ecology. So let's go back to that intersection, Blackness, education and ecology. It sounds like you all have had some conversations about the potential and the promise inside of that intersection. Can we talk about that a little bit?

**ant:** I felt like if we could center Blackness in education and, at the same time, contextualize that we are not just living to live, but that our life is part of a larger dynamic and fluid universe, we could all begin to see the connections between Blackness, ecology and education more clearly.. That's the possibility of BE. Just trying to get people to understand that, yes, racism, white supremacy, sexism, classism are a thing and they're real, but also they are something that happens amidst this landscape of other relationships between us people and the planet and the earth. And it matters to me because in this culture to be 'dehumanized' is one of the worst assaults on our quote "humanity." But looking at that more deeply, what does it say about how we 'humans' value the rest of the living, breathing Earth? That we see "it" as an it, and we use that as justification to objectify someone that is not 'human.' Sorry, I don't want to get too philosophical here, but the point that I'm trying to make is that it's important to sit with and understand how we exist at the nexus between society and ecology, you know what I mean? Anyways, that's it. But Dre, you should tell us what you originally meant because you coined the term didn't you?

**Dre:** The study of education from a Black perspective. What is it? How do we do it? What issues, what things do we need? And without knowing it, I was coming from a sort of apocalyptic educational thing, just like how has education served Black people in the past? What is the meaning of education and how do we see education? And that comes from me growing up hearing that Black folks don't care about education. And as a child realizing, well, education wasn't the way out, why should I care about education? And quite honestly, I didn't care, because in my community education was a jail for children. It didn't lead anywhere. It was where I had to go. I had to leave my house. So even the notion of why should we care, it's just been sort of wiped out. And it's so interesting to look at my experience going from almost failing high school to being in this space. It's just that our institutions kill learning for a lot of the students to where there's no value in learning. Because what they're learning is how to participate in a system that is going to eventually crush them. I just can't get ahead. Now, many white narratives will tell you the same narratives that we grew up with. You're just not trying hard enough. And I've seen too many of us work ourselves to the bone and take too much because we're not working hard enough to support capitalism based on our bodies. And I think until we solve that problem, people just won't realize, unless it's fixed for us— either by us or with the help of others— that it's just going to continue to climb the ladder. And it's very interesting to think about educationally and physically. People were okay leaving trash and pollution and things in our neighborhoods. They were happy making us objects along with the detritus that they left behind. They were happy to build a system that was going to further push us towards the edge, not the margins, but the edge of society. Oh, and then with ant coming in with the ecology bit, I see that as part of my current thinking of what it is to be a person experiencing something. But then when we start thinking about ecology, what does it mean to live within a system as part of that system and maybe to create and maintain a better system, one that's in harmony with a brighter future? It's so funny when I think about it like that, I become, suddenly, a Black optimist. And it sounds like I'm real hopeful. I think that's part of my BE journey. I can say that with all sincerity, but when we were first starting on this, you couldn't tell me about no hopeful future. You could tell me about the environment and I would tell you, "Well, it's going to burn." But when I start thinking about our role and especially our role as Black people within maintaining and building

ecological systems of education to keep us pushing forward, then it's like, okay, well alright, maybe I see a little future; then I could be a part of this. Some of y'all still going to burn though, but...

**Eghosa:** I'll be here.

**ant:** It gives me hope that, from an ecological standpoint, there is no death. Even the things that we think die really enter into a cycle of rebirth. I think a lot about compost and how when a tree falls and begins to decay, that very decay and withering away of a life form is literally what gives life to the next generation of plants and animals. And so, in a similar way, my radical optimism is like, I can't wait for all this death and decay we experience on the daily to give way to something that is actually life affirming. In that collapse of consciousness and of what we thought was education, it's been beautiful for me to witness how all of these distinct, different, and yet very connected responses are happening all around us, moving us to better places. And I think these alternative movements, like BE, are part of that legacy and lineage. From an educational standpoint (what's the word for cutting edge? I'm trying to get away from that kind of lingo) movements like BE are at the forefront of a sea change that's about to happen—that's already happening. Everyone feels that the way we've been living is not working and it won't work because again, it's antithetical to life. And anything that is antithetical to life must end at some point.

**Eghosa:** That made me think of, well, a couple of things. One, you were talking about death and well, let me start here. David Stovall said something like schools, and academic educational spaces are corrosive and deadening places. So when we think about that, then I was thinking about ecology and soil, and I'm so all over the place and I apologize, but this is where my mind's going. But the rotten tree analogy, one bad apple, the police, for example, people are like, it's just one bad apple. But it's like the whole tree, the soil, the things feeding the soil are producing rotten apples. So you taking away that one rotten apple that you can see is not going to change what we got going on here. So for us Black people, how do we uproot the soil? How do we create fresh blossoming fruit? How do we feed the soil? Well, we need to feed it so that it can produce the type of fruit, the type of beauty that we are deserving of. Yeah.

**ant:** Man. The gems. Yeah, sorry.

**Dre:** I love that. I think that that changes what we're doing. We're collecting thoughts from people who are at the forefront of that, and we're bringing them to one place. And that's another part of the BE arm is we start collecting the works of just Black scholars, especially around education. And we start sharing those works. Because I think for me, and I think for all of us, education is central. It's central to learning. And we're interested in learning and that's where we start changing that soil. I don't think a lot of people see the tree, literally. I just don't, you can't have the same kind of conversation we have here because a lot of people just don't have an entry point. And so when you collect the works via poetry, visual art, and start that conversation in the home, I think that's when we start being able to see; now do you see the tree?

**ant:** And I think what I would add to that is it's so powerful to me that we're talking about music, and the creative process. I forget who said it, but some famous hip hop artist has said hip hop is the scholarship of the streets. And to me, it's always been light years ahead of anything that traditional academic writing could ever produce. And the reason being is because academic discourse, almost by design, is inherently backwards looking. So if anything gets published in say 2023, you're looking at data that's sometimes 5, 10, 15 years old, depending on the author. But with a poem or a song, it's an intuition. It's a feeling. In a similar way BE is, yes, something that is informed by the scholarship and what we know to be true, but also how we feel on the inside and not being afraid or ashamed to pen it down as something valuable and worth commemorating via a mixtape. The more I think about it, the more I feel like art is the way to make those connections, just like you said, Dre, because yeah, it's very difficult for people to realize the extent of what they're in or how far things like white supremacy or colonization have gone in our society.

Like my mom, I can't talk to my mom how I'm talking to y'all, but again, we are for Black people who can vibe on being Black. But also having gone through the rigamarole of higher ed and all that entails . . .

**Dre:** We've been inside these systems. Man. We've been in the guts of the system. And I think that's actually something you said that makes us different. What makes us different? We put feelings into this project. When you read academic journals or academic papers, there's no them, there's no central. We're not afraid to be the subject and object and talk about how we feel. And I think that's one thing that makes us stand out, a sense of emotion and urgency. So I think in addition to the data collection or the reporting or the words or the format, there's a feeling there that I think makes us unique and stand out.

**ant:** I hear you, Dre. I'm just thinking about how we as a collective are trying to think outside of that box. By using what is of us—be it art, music, poetry—we tap into something that's more true than the academy ever will.

**Eghosa:** I was just going to put in the chat. My daughter's just waking up. I'm going to have to bounce soon, but I think I don't want to bounce without us kind of trying to full circle it.

**Dre:** Let's full circle.

**Eghosa:** As always, dope conversation. What is the collective hope and vision for our second mixtape and where do we, BE, go from here, especially with both Dre and I graduating from USF, how we continue this work that we started here? I'll throw that question out to y'all. What is the collective hope and vision for this mixtape? And where do we go from here?

**Dre:** I'll jump in. I'll say off top, making this sustainable and making this last and moving into a space where we have even more freedom to create and build.

**ant:** I would say that it is about sustaining, but also how we're able to be in relationship with other folks that are doing like-minded work. I really see BE as **mycelium**. It's like each kind of rebellion is its own little spore, but we're all connected in the underground. You know what I mean? I think there's a lot of relationships that can help sustain the project. But if nothing else, just on a human-to-human level, it would be great to co-create and be in community.

**Eghosa:** And I envision and hope that this becomes a hub, if you will, for lack of a better word, for organizing, for uplifting, for loving, for sharing what Wilderson calls Black energy, that we kind of bring that up, bring that through our work, through BE, and through how we build relationships. It's not just about, "Let's have folks publish something creative," but how are we building together? How are we using our connections together? How are we using the work that people are doing, the scholarship that they're bringing to make space for, to extend, to encourage growth, to encourage, change, and transform education in our communities? That's my hope. That's where I want to go from here. And because we're building, we'll have more minds at the table—well, the proverbial table—to do what we need to do as a community.

**Dre:** Yeah. Yeah, I like that. I like that when you said that, I see part of that original vision that was maybe an afterschool program. There's something physical I'm seeing. Maybe I get silly with mine, but I'm like always maybe a little puppet show that just talks about BE, just go off. But yeah, I feel you. Yeah, I think that's a good place to stop. ant's sleepy, I'm hungry. And you got a whole baby.

**Eghosa:** Definitely feel you on the hungry vibes, for sure. So let's eat these apples from these uprooted trees and be about our business.

**ant:** Shoot.



**Dre:** No crumbs.

**Eghosa:** Leave. No crumbs.

**Dre:** No crumbs.

**ant:** It's a rap.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Notes on Contributors

**Stacey Ault**, Ph.D., is the Founder & CEO of the Race and Gender Equity Project a non profit focused on creating spaces that create change. Dr. Ault believes that the most meaningful and sustainable solutions center the leadership of those most impacted by racial and gender injustice, and employs this approach to support nonprofits, educational institutions, and social impact organizations in their anti-racism, and restful leadership, journeys.

**Andre Carter**, is a longtime student with shifting interests and affiliations. He prefers to work in mixed media environments where the ephemeral intersects with the tangible. His current work is bent by the gravity of structural death.

**Eghosa Obaizamomwan-Hamilton**, is a first-generation Nigerian American raised in Sacramento. She is co-founder of Making Us Matter, a Black woman-owned nonprofit educational organization, and co-founding editor of the Black Educology Mixtape (Journal). She is also the author of *We Will Not Walk Through Rotten Orchards: Abolition and (Re)nourishing the Soil of Black Communities Through Insulated Praxis in Education* and *We Are Transformers: On Being Black, Women, and Pedagogues*. Currently, she is pursuing a doctorate through the Department of International & Multicultural Education at the University of San Francisco with a concentration in Racial Justice. With over 16 years of experience in education—her writing, teaching, and research meet at the intersections.

**simple ant**, Ph.D., focuses on the intersections of race, gender, class and nature. He moves to create restorative paths towards re/membering and re/learning how to live on, and with, the Earth. He is inspired by educators and scholar/activists who envision a world where education heals the traumas of imperialism, colonization, and consumer-capitalist patriarchy.