“Educate to Liberate”: Frantz Fanon, Power, Consciousness, and “Black-Centric” Education in the United States and South Africa

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Abstract

This essay compares education initiatives of the South African Black Consciousness and U.S. Black Power Movements. Focusing on the ideological influences of Frantz Fanon, it compares these movements’ critiques of American and South African pedagogy. Although they originated out of university student activism, both the Black Power and the Black Consciousness Movements primarily focused on activism in primary and secondary education.

Introduction

We must strive to win the fight against the non-White in the classroom instead of losing it on the battlefield.

—Administrator of the Transvaal, 1961

As your governor, I shall resist any illegal federal court order, even to the point of standing at the schoolhouse door in person, if necessary.

—George Wallace, 1962

Fred Brooks, a black power advocate, and leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), is largely unknown to history. Rising on the morning of 18 August 1967, he was destined for a nearby park to teach and convey lessons to the African-American youth of

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Nashville, Tennessee. This task was a routine for Brooks. The previous Wednesday, Brooks spoke passionately about the Nat Turner Slave Rebellion of 1831, the deaths of fifty-five white plantation owners, and general “Negro ‘history’.” However, the morning of August 18th was different. This day’s message was planned to be about the “life and times” of the Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, but what made this morning different was that Brooks’ instruction at the informal “liberation school” could land him in jail. With the threat of arrest for continuing the “park classes without a permit,” Brooks led two dozen students and other teachers by the hand into the park in defiance of the law to speak about Marcus Garvey.\(^3\)

Brooks’ liberation school, like many others across the nation, faced criticism and attack. Nashville police reported to the Tennessee Senate judiciary committee that the liberation school “taught racial hatred to its Negro pupils.” In response to these accusations, the Metropolitan Action commission, a local office of economic opportunity, severed connections with the school. Moreover, Brooks was forced to hold these classes for “pre-school and elementary ages” in the park because the St. Anselm’s Episcopal Church “ousted” the school because of its teachings. Six hundred miles to the North in Chicago, Illinois, teachers at another liberation school piled books in front of the windows to keep out “unwanted prying eyes of the Straights” and feared their phones were tapped. Liberation schools and their education minded activists were subject to suspicion, accusations of teaching hatred, and concerted attempts to shut them down.\(^4\)

The United States hardly held a monopoly on the legal and judicial intimidation of education activists, however. A continent away, in the Republic of South Africa, activists of the

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South African Student Organization (SASO), a part of the Black Consciousness Movement, were routinely rounded up by security police in the Western Cape while demonstrating and recruiting on various black campuses. Further, organization officers were harassed and arrested. For example, in 1972, SASO President Jerry Modisane was arrested while on tour on the charge of “trespassing.” As SASO writers pointed out, “the white government has been intimidating and harassing black university students” for the purpose of “intimidating and frightening us from our resolve.”

Methodology, Literature, and Structure

In addition to shared experiences of police harassment, the American Black Power and South African Black Consciousness Movements were united through analogous educational ideologies and activist tactics. This paper compares Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements, contextualized within education. The goal of this study is threefold: (a) to examine the transnational, ideological influence of Frantz Fanon on the Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements, (b) to consider similarities in critiques from the movements of American and South African pedagogy, and (c) to outline similar actions by both movements that focused attention on primary and secondary students in their in respective countries.

This paper argues that, while Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements originated out of university student activism within the United States and South Africa, the primary focus of these movements was not higher education. Groups like the SNCC—a major organization in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement—and the Black Panther Party (BPP) within the United States as well as SASO in South Africa turned their attention towards primary and secondary education. These various African-American and black South African organizations

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had parallel interpretations of primary and secondary schools as an environment where young black minds were incipiently taught to view white society as superior and, consequently, black society and themselves as inferior. As such, these organizations began concerted activism to provide "black-centric" education and liberation from oppressive white society for the coming generations of black youth in both nations.

**Literature**

Extensive comparative methodology to studying the history of the United States and South Africa is a recent development in the discipline. However, as early as 1916, Maurice Evans, a British immigrant to South Africa, wrote a comparative study of race relations in the southern United States “from a South African point of view.”

By the 1950s, more studies examining the United States and South Africa in the context of race were published. This focus on race, the most obvious comparative theme, continued through the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, the 1980s brought an evolution in considerations. George M. Frederickson, in his seminal work, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, readjusted the focus towards answering questions about white supremacy and Euro-racism. Race as a theme remained but had gone through a recalibration.

Within the last fifteen years, comparative investigations of American and South African education have increased in frequency and diversity of topics. While race and parallel

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experiences under white oppression, racism, and exclusion remain integral. Studies began focusing on the agency of African-Americans and black South Africans in the context of resistance to and protest against apartheid. Moreover, similar to studies that traced the construction of segregation and education in both countries, work has been done comparing the slow exodus out of race-segregated education in a post-Brown America and a post-apartheid South Africa. And, while George M. Frederickson’s exceptional work *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* provides an in-depth examination of American Black Power and South African Black Consciousness, a study examining these movements concerning education, both primary education and secondary education, is absent. This paper seeks to build upon and continue the established comparative discourse as well as shed light on the mostly neglected topic of the relationship between Black Power and Black Consciousness’s educational ideology, critiques, and activism.

**Structure**

This paper begins with a historical background of racial education and resistance in the United States and South Africa. Second, it considers ideological connections of both movements.

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vested in a growing black nationalism of the 1950s. Then the paper shifts towards a comparative investigation of Black Power and Black Consciousness critiques of occidentally administered primary and secondary education as well as examining initiatives of both movements to counteract the incipient goals of white education.

**Bantu and Brown: A Historical Background**

In October 1953, the *Republiek Van Suid-Afrika* enacted the Bantu Education Act. Establishing racially based educational provisions, the Act brought all Bantu, or “native,” education under central control of the Government of the Union. The act made illegal the establishment, conduct, or maintenance of native schools, not under the auspices of the South African government, which were not “registered as prescribed.” Moreover, ambiguously defined provisions put independent schools on unstable footing as the Minister of Native Affairs and the Native Affairs Commission could revoke a school’s registration if the school was deemed not in the “interests of the Bantu people…or is likely to be detrimental to the physical, mental or moral welfare of the pupils or students attending or likely attend such schools.” Another provision of the Bantu Education Act made unauthorized schools a criminal act subject to fines and imprisonment. The government of South Africa, essentially, made non-governmental education illegal. Having begun the doctrine of *Apartheid* (meaning “apartness” in Afrikaans) in 1948, under the guide of Hendrik Verwoerd, the Bantu Education Act was yet another brick in the wall of racial segregation. Six years later, during a cool June day in 1959, the government of South Africa extended *apartheid* officially to higher education through the Extension of University Education Act. Indeed, as the title of one Walton R. Johnson’s article suggests, to study education is to study *apartheid*.\(^\text{11}\)

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\(^\text{11}\) Bantu [Native] Education Act of 1953, Act no. 47, Senate and the House Assembly,
A resistance movement by black South Africans to Bantu Education began almost immediately. The strongest, “most vigorous campaign” against Bantu Education was under the auspices of the African National Congress (ANC). Between 1955 and 1956 the ANC called for a boycott of native schools and the establishment of “cultural clubs,” which, as South African historian Jonathan Hyslop asserts, were “effectively alternative schools.” However, after 1956, concerted efforts of resistance against Bantu Education by black South Africans essentially ceased and a period of “acquiescence” began.¹²

This period of acquiescence—not to be understood as “allegiance”—was the result of three convergences in South Africa. First, and most important to the succeeding discussion, was the “inability to evoke a mass political movement of youth.” Second, the alternatively minded “cultural clubs,” established as part of the ANC boycott, “lacked the resources” for sustainability and did not have the infrastructure to service a significant portion of black youths. Third, the ability of the state of South Africa to educate urban native students and provide at least a facsimile of certification attracted parents concerned with the future employability of their children. Yet, while the years of 1956-1976 were marked by acquiescence, it was not completely void of episodes of resistance.¹³

In contrast to the adult led ANC boycott of the middle 1950s, periods of resistance to Bantu Education in the late 1950s and 1960s were driven by black students. These early riots and protests had a definite political flavor as they centered on operational grievances of Bantu

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¹³ Hyslop, The Classroom Struggle, 66 and 78.
schools. For example, the 1959 student led riot at Lovedale was to protest the quality of the hostel food and a curriculum that required manual labor. Further, the students demanded the end to apartheid based ethnic segregation of hostels. In general, student riots, protests, and walkouts were based on a combination of “authority conflicts, racial oppression, educational problems and material conditions.” In response, the state, citing agitation and subversion, began a campaign of repression of these student’s movements. While students continued to protest Bantu Education and boarding school operation, increased state clamp-downs caused students to abandon overt political bases to their resistance. These second-generation protest movements did not succeed due to a combination of a separation between rural and urban black South Africans as well as an absence of a “strong school student organization…which could make school students a coherent social force.”

Brown & Black Studies: Resistance to Racial Education

The histories of state supported racial education in the United States and South Africa began to diverge in the 1950s. With the judicial opinion of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, the doctrine of ”separate but equal” became the doctrine of the land underwritten by the Supreme Court. However, 1936 bore witness to the beginning of legal challenges to ‘separate but equal’. Murray v. Maryland (1936) saw the young lawyer Thurgood Marshall succeed in his litigation to have Donald Gaines Murray admitted to the University of Maryland School of Law. Though this did not deconstruct ”separate but equal” doctrine, it served as a vanguard precedent for future cases. Fourteen years later, in very similar circumstances, Herman Sweat applied for admission to the University of Texas “white-only” law school. While the University of Texas hastily established a “black” law school, Marshall argued, similar to Murray, that the academic caliber

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14 Hyslop, The Classroom Struggle, 94-100.
of the “black” law school was below that of the “white” law school, therefore not adhering to “separate but equal.” The Supreme Court in 1950 found in favor of Sweat. In the same year, the Supreme Court heard the case of *McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education*. George McLaurin, the plaintiff, had been admitted to the University of Oklahoma’s doctoral program in education. However, because of segregation laws in Oklahoma, McLaurin was required to sit apart from his white colleagues. Citing the Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause and the school’s restrictions that “inhibit his ability to study, to engage in discussions and exchange views with other students,” which are fundamental to education, the Supreme Court ordered the cessation of these unconstitutional restrictions. Yet up to this point, the end of segregated schools was only challenged and decided within higher education.¹⁵

With the holding of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas [Brown]*, efforts at desegregating schools extended into primary and secondary education. Further, the decision in *Brown* effectively overturned *Plessy* and the doctrine of ”separate but equal.” The Court held that, while the schools had been objectively equalized, “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” One year later, however, the Supreme Court revisited its *Brown* decision in *Brown v. Board of Education II [Brown II]*, and declared that school districts must march toward desegregation “with all deliberate speed.” Even with these judicial opinions many states remained obstinate and the Supreme Court continued to hear cases to deconstruct racially segregated schools. For example, *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) delegitimizes the usage of concerns of social unrest or violence by state governments as a tactic to prevent desegregation. *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968) established systematic factors—facilities,

faculty and staff members as well as transportation and extracurricular activities—to determine compliance with *Brown*. In an effort to dispel the ambiguity of “all deliberate speed,” the Supreme Court, in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* (1969), ordered immediate desegregation of Mississippi primary schools. And in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1970) the Court later affirmed the usage of busing to integrate public schools that had managed to elude integration for sixteen years. While the state of South Africa was increasingly repressive to black youths protesting educational issues, and by extension Apartheid, the United States government took increasing initiative to desegregate schools.\(^{16}\)

While this gradual end of racial segregation in education occurred through the means of the federal court system, African-American students also attacked and made demands of education. Historian Martha Biondi documents the demands of African-American university students. Black university students fought against *de jure* segregation in America’s higher learning institutions, especially in the North. While African-Americans had pierced the racial membrane of colleges and universities, most of the early enrollees were Black athletes or students of college educated parents. Admission remained highly “selective” and inclined towards individuals to improve athletic standing and distinguish the university. But, as the effects of the Civil Rights Movement began to impact higher education, enrollment of black students from a variant of backgrounds increased.\(^{17}\)

This second wave of black students was more politicized and militant than the vanguard of the early 1960s. As such, they protested and demanded the admission of a larger number of black students. Their protests bore fruit. Between 1970 and 1974 African-American enrollment in institutions of higher education increased fifty-six percent. Yet, even with these advances, students still saw areas for improvement. Citing a “whiteness disguised as universalism,” black students protested for a role in the “definition and production of scholarly knowledge” and they wanted African-American faculty members as well as a “desegregation of college curricula” and the creation of courses on Black History and culture. Black students wanted a revolution to come to American campuses and, in a critique that shaped community action, they demanded academic programs that focused on African-Americans.\(^{18}\)

**Ideological Frameworks: Frantz Fanon**

Frantz Fanon heavily shaped young American blacks’ activism that ran parallel to later legal developments. Stokely Carmichael, a founding member of first SNCC and later the Black Power movement, stood before a podium at UC-Berkeley to address the crowd gathered on 29 October 1966. Through the rhetoric, philosophies, and calls for action as well as social critiques, proclamations, and provocative statements comparing integration to the sedative drug thalidomide, Frantz Fanon, a black philosopher and social critic, was at the ideological forefront of Carmichael’s speech.\(^{19}\) Fanon was born in 1925 on the Caribbean island of Martinique, a former colony and still under governance of France. After studying psychiatry in France, Fanon began to formulate a criticism of colonialism based on observations while a psychiatrist in the

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\(^{18}\) Ibid.

Antilles—the chain of islands which includes Martinique. These observations eventually coalesced into his first book *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (in English *Black Skin, White Masks*) in 1952. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon promulgates an idea he termed “intellectual alienation.” At base, intellectual alienation represents the dualities of separation and inclusion. Through “drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values” and invoking racial tropes of savagery in the form of “times of cannibalism,” European civilization alienated “Negroes” from modernity and a global cultural and historical heritage. As Fanon asserts, “the Peloponnesian War is as much mine as the invention of the compass.”20 Indeed, Fanon refused to “be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values” nor would he “dedicate himself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization.”21

Fanon’s critiques are complex but became profoundly influential on black radicals across Africa and the African Diaspora. He argued that European society alienates the “black man” from global history and culture through locking him “into his body.” It seeks to monopolize culture, history, and civilization by encasing the black man in the past, making him a “slave of the past,” and forcing him to balance the “balance the balance sheet of Negro values.” Fanon opts out of that inherently racist framework. “By going beyond the historical” he “will initiate the cycle of…freedom.” Fanon influenced future thinkers of the Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements and especially impacted their respective conceptions of education. European society has tipped the scales of civilization in its favor; it “pretends superiority.”

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20 The compass, of course, was invented by the Chinese. By referencing the Peloponnesian War and the Compass, Fanon is purposefully connecting Western and Eastern Civilization. This demonstrates Fanon’s global culture undergirding his argument that humanity has an inherent claim to knowledge, inventions, and history. This global culture is an inheritance for all, it is not to be brokered nor bestowed.

Fanon notes, there exists an “unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization.” Further, Fanon conceptualizes “European society as a means of stripping” the black man “of his race.” Unambiguously, European society and its colonial outposts in North America and South Africa alienates the black man from global culture by citing a historical unequal “balance sheet of Negro values” and civilization that European racism and ignorance—purposefully or accidentally—created. European knowledge and education, then, is inherently deficient in a just recognition of Negro civilization.²²

Nine years later, in 1961, Fanon published the book Les Damnés de la Terre (in English The Wretched of the Earth). Between the publishing of Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth Fanon served in a French hospital during the French-Algerian War (1954-1962). Fanon’s experiences during the war sharpened his already fierce criticisms of European society and colonialism. For him, colonialism was Europe taking leadership of the world through “ardor, cynicism, and violence,” a leadership akin to slavery which held “four-fifths of humanity.” Indeed, Europe was “the wretched of the earth” who spoke of high civilization and cultural achievement, but “sway[ed] between atomic and spiritual disintegration” and hypocritically discussed Man while murdering men at home and abroad. As such, Fanon called upon his black brethren to cast off this “heavy darkness,” to abandon “sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry.” For the black man to achieve his own “expectations,” he must create, invent, and discover as well as develop states, institutions, and societies that draw their “inspiration” from elsewhere.²³

²² Ibid.
The destruction of colonialism would rest on action of the youth of a country. As Fanon suggests, the established leadership of a colonized country, possessors of a colonized mind, those with the “exceptional privilege of being able to speak words of truth to their oppressors,” will continue to “affirm their solidarity” with the colonizer. As their attachment to European culture and society prevent them from the actions that are necessary, these men will be judged for their passivity, indifference, and “cold” complicity. Fanon called for the youth of a country to unite with those already struggling against imperialism and colonialism in order to “deal the death blow” and “dig the grave in which colonialism will finally be entombed!”24

**Extending Fanon to the United States and South Africa**

Fanon extended his critique and connected European colonialism to the United States and the experiences of black Africans to African-Americans. Fanon suggested the existence of an African national culture—akin to Pan-Africanism—that opposes the culture of “ostentatious and narcissistic Europeans.” Turning to African-Americans, Fanon believed that blacks in the United States felt the need to “attach themselves to a cultural matrix” and that “their [African-Americans’] problem is not fundamentally different from that of Africans.” In essence, the experience of blacks in the United States was similar to that of Africans under European colonialism as whites, globally, put blacks in “the same bag.” Indeed, as the United States was founded as a colony, the “narcissistic” European culture was transplanted and the United States “became a monster, in which the taints, sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe” grew “to appalling dimensions.”25

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25 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 215 and 313.
Fanon’s influence on the American Black Power and South African Black Consciousness Movement is an aggregate. First, critiques of European society and imperialism in Africa are simultaneously attributable to the United States. Second, in racial motivations, European culture and intellectuals purposefully had ignored black civilization and used racist tropes to disenfranchise black men from global, historical culture, thereby artificially creating a justification for colonialism; or, in the case of South Africa, creating a justification for the apartheid rule of a majority by a minority. Moreover, this purposeful ignorance pervaded the intellectual institutions of Europe and the United States. As such, Fanon instructs that the global black community must develop institutions outside of the “inspiration” of the “narcissistic” Europe and United States.

Carmichael and the founders of the Black Panther Party were well versed in the philosophies of Fanon—as were many other radical African-Americans in this era. Ironically referring to UC-Berkeley as the “white intellectual ghetto of the West,” sitting just north of the largest black ghetto in the Bay area in Oakland, Carmichael connects criticism of Fanon about European and American educational institutions to the absence of a just recognition—Fanon terms it “unjustly unrecognized”—of African and African-American civilization and culture. Indeed, it would not be until 1970 that UC-Berkeley would have an African-American Studies / African Diaspora Program within its curriculum. Carmichael mirrors Fanon’s criticisms of colonialism and the hypocrisy of Western civilization. For Carmichael as for Fanon, Western civilization “moves across the world and stealing and plundering and raping everybody in its path. Their one rationalization is that the rest of the world is uncivilized and they are in fact civilized. And they are uncivilized.” Further, Carmichael attaches to Fanon’s framework of “opting out” of the need for justification. While Fanon refuses to equalize the “balance sheet of
Negro values” in order to justify calls for inclusion into global civilization, Carmichael removes the legitimating of acts of African-Americans from the “hands of white people.” The Black Power Movement will not wait “for white people to sanction” its existence and purpose and no longer will black people continually be “forced to defend their position before they move.” Fanon’s critiques of “intellectual alienation” blended with unjust ignorance of African civilization, the hypocrisy of Western civilization, and divestment of the ingrained need of white sanctioning influenced Carmichael and the Black Power Movement in the United States.26

**Fanon and South Africa**

Academics have done some work demonstrating Fanon’s influence on South Africa and the Black Consciousness Movement. For example, Sociologist Thomas K. Ranuga’s extensive study, “Frantz Fanon and Black Consciousness in Azania (South Africa),” illustrates the “dynamic” connection between the social critiques of Frantz Fanon and the philosophies of Black Consciousness, particularly the writings and articulations of the “father” of South African Consciousness Steve Biko. Steve “Bantu” Biko, while at the University of Natal Medical School for Blacks, helped found the South African Student Organization and presided over a major change in approach to fighting apartheid and white supremacy in South Africa. Ranuga suggests that Fanon’s philosophies influenced Biko at a “most critical juncture” when resistive political groups like the African National Congress (ANC) were driven underground. As such, heeding Fanon’s call for youth action, Steve Biko and others found the ideology of Black Consciousness to fill a political “vacuum.”27

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26 Carmichael, “Black Power Address at UC-Berkeley.”
27 Thomas K. Ranuga, “Frantz Fanon and Black Consciousness in Azania (South Africa),” *Phylon* 47 (3rd Quarter, 1986), 182 and 186.
Black Consciousness reflected Fanon’s critiques of Western colonialism and imperialism, calls for a Black Nationalism, and reversing “intellectual alienation.” Delivering a paper at a 1971 conference at the Abe Bailey Institute for Inter-racial Studies, Biko mirrored much of Fanon’s philosophies on colonialism. Extensively quoting from Fanon, Biko cites the critiques of colonialism and “intellectual alienation.” For Biko and Fanon, the usage of racial tropes—like cannibalism—is part and parcel with colonialism. Colonialism cannot exist without a justifying civilizational mission and reminiscence to the “white man’s burden.” At its base, Black Consciousness was a nationalizing movement. While Fanon had written about a black national culture, Biko defined it. Being “black” was not about skin pigmentation. Rather, it was a “reflection of mental attitude” wherein you committed yourself to destroy a system that uses blackness as an excuse to define you as a “subservient being.” As such, any man who aspires to whiteness and directly or indirectly serves the state and therefore apartheid is not black but “non-white.” A black man—be he African, Indian, or Colored—needs to be “conscious” of self in order to achieve national liberation, freedom from apartheid, and victory over white supremacy. The ability to achieve “consciousness” and divestment of inferiority is through action in education and youth.

**Parallel Interpretations: Primary, Secondary Schools, and Black Criticisms**

American Black Power and South African Black Consciousness were parallel movements of Fanon’s singular black national culture, but they additionally mirrored each other in their criticisms of white-sponsored schools. These dual critiques were necessarily understood within the framework of colonialism. Fanon had connected European colonialism and its impacts on

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black Africans with the experiences of African Americans within the United States. Moreover, he echoed other post-colonialists who discussed the insidious process of “colonization of the mind.” Yet, his criticisms did not resolutely postulate the mechanism for this process. Black Power and Black Consciousness believed that the established educational systems of the United States and South Africa inculcated inferiority, that they alike “colonized” the young impressionable minds of black youths.

Black youth were inherently important to the Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements. Focusing on the future, Carmichael suggested that the literal goal of black power—that “black people must be seen in positions of power”—was focused primarily on changing and eliminating an inferior mindset for “the generation that comes after us.” Biko, in an allusion to an issue discussed later, saw black South African children as the innocent recipients of a racist colonial doctrine that instilled a sense of inferiority and subservience towards white South Africans. For both Black Power and Black Consciousness adherents, black youths represented simultaneously an opportunity at rebirth and an expression of dominant society’s efforts at maintaining white supremacy through incipient ways. Childhood innocence and implicit trust were destroyed by the actions of repressive racist regimes. But, through the efforts of both movements, childhood innocence can be saved and the next generation as well as black society in general emancipated. For Black Power and Black Consciousness, the treacherous institution which transferred the doctrine of subservience was the educational system.29

The educational systems in the United States and South Africa were understood by Black Power and Black Consciousness as tools for inculcating inferiority into young black youths. Black leaders, like Carmichael, charged that white society did not know how to operate

institutions, educational as well as others, “the way it is supposed to function.” Education was to suppose to operate as a mechanism to help people “gain access to X, Y, and Z.” However, in the United States it was to deny and remove opportunity to black children—ninety-four percent of black children—who attended school in the ghettos of America. As these children were not given the tools to succeed, they would naturally go through life feeling and being inferior.  

Additionally, white-operated schools inculcated inferiority through the curriculum. For example, the Black Panther Party criticized the “inferior, racist schools in the black community” as their curricula did not educate black youth appropriately, requiring remedial education and that “they do not learn in school about the history of their country and its institutions.”  

Within South Africa, criticisms were extending towards primary and secondary schools. The September 1972 SASO Newsletter contained the best articulated criticism of Bantu education:

> But the whole structural rottenness of Education for Blacks does not begin in the University and thus it becomes necessary to delve into primary and secondary education for Blacks so that Black children can be given the opportunity to look fresh at the definition of themselves and their environment. It is at this level that our children are taught to see whitemen [sic] as superior and to in fact accept our “slave roles” in the racist society.

These critical indictments of primary and secondary schools within the institution of education mark a fundamental strategy of both the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements. Black student youth became a primary focus for both movements. In order to change things for “the next generation,” efforts must literally be focused on the next generation. Further, as inferiority and subservience was inculcated in white-sponsored schools and through the primary

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30 Carmichael, “Black Power Address at UC-Berkeley.”
and secondary educational system that was where resistance, reform, and activism must be focused.

**Toward a “Black-centric” Education and Liberty**

Fred Brooks and the Liberation School he oversaw in Nashville was one brick in the wall of educational resistance, reforms and activism that focused on black students in primary and secondary education. As previously stated, both U.S. Black Power and South African Black Consciousness placed youth and education at the center of their movements. Additionally, both movements believed education was inherently political. In part, “black-centric” education became a means for the liberation of the global black community. Black Power through SNCC and the BPP and Black Consciousness through SASO translated social criticisms and community goals through various channels in order to reach the “next generation” and reverse the inculcation of inferiority. In the United States, SNCC established Freedom Schools in the South and, as Fred Brooks story demonstrates, Liberation Schools. The BPP founded a variety of programs that focused on black students to provide an education to remedy a deficient inner-city education, to educate about black history, and reveal the corruption of American society.

As education was a manifestation of dominant white society both in the United States and South Africa where black students globally “must fit into pigeon-holes set up by the system,” education was viewed in an unequivocal political context.  

Black Power and Black Consciousness wished to liberate the black community from its white oppressors. In their Ten Point Program, also entitled “What We Want and What We Believe,” the BPP made clear that they demanded freedom and the “power to determine the destiny of our black community.”

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Regarding education, the BPP demanded an education that “teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society” and “exposes the true nature of this decadent American society.”\textsuperscript{34} For them, education was to be a tool to reveal the system’s relegation of black communities into expectations of subservience and its iniquities. As scholar Daniel Perlstein points out, there was a strong effort to connect “new pedagogical functions to direct-action protests.”\textsuperscript{35} In South Africa, SASO connected education and politics more explicitly. “Education in South Africa,” as SASO’s Manifesto noted, “is unashamedly political and we therefore, believe that Black education is tied to the liberation of the Black people of the world.”\textsuperscript{36}

**SNCC and BPP: Schools and Programs**

In 1964, SNCC founded forty-one Freedom Schools in Mississippi. As one part of the Freedom Summer, Freedom Schools were established to offer “young black Mississippians an education that public schools would not supply, one that both provided intellectual stimulation and linked learning to participation in the movement to transform the South’s segregated society.” Following this goal, Freedom School curricula in Mississippi included a combination of academic subjects, a cultural program, and political as well as social studies. Further, they provided the opportunities to black Mississippi youth to operate newspapers and participate in statewide student conferences and local organizations.\textsuperscript{37} Charles Cobb, SNCC member and architect of the summer Freedom School program, noted that the Freedom School had “The responsibility to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro

\textsuperscript{36} “SASO Newsletter: Conference Issue,” 24.
Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands and questions.”

Additionally, Cobb’s prospectus outlined the goals of Freedom Schools to include supplementing the education they “aren’t learning in high schools,” provide a “broad intellectual and academic experience” that they can “bring back to fellow students”, and “form the basis…for school boycotts.”38 Freedom Schools had the dual purposes of correcting a “repressive and oppressive,” inferior educational system and instilling a political mindset among young black Mississippians.

This political mindset would be developed through a “black-centric” education. In order to “give students the perspective of being in a long line of protest and pressure for social and economic justice,” the curriculum of Freedom Schools would teach “Negro history.”39 Recalling Fred Brooks and his Liberation School, young black students were taught “Negro history” that focused on historical examples of Nat Turner and Marcus Garvey, black men who campaigned for justice. But, black history also served to correct an identity problem. Black students in the United States were divorced from a rich black history of “protest and pressure” by an educational system which did not educate them in their history. As SNCC member Mary Varela saw it, to educate young black Mississippian students in “Negro History” would solve “the identity problem” and “create a vision for himself as a political entity and as an agent for social change.”40 Further, as Perlstein demonstrates, to solve the identity as well as other problems for the black community, SNCC members came to understand “that oppressed people learn by being

brought together and addressing their own problems.”"\textsuperscript{41} The BPP adopted these convictions into their community and educational programs.

The Black Panther Party [BPP] community and educational programs, meanwhile, continued on the path that SNCC Freedom Schools had blazed. The BPP established programs like the Inter-communal Youth Institute (which became the Oakland Community School [OCS]), Junior & High School Tutorial Program, Liberation Schools, Oakland Community Learning Center, Teen Council, Teen Program, and Youth Training & Development. The BPP demanded of education to “give our people a knowledge of self,” which mirrored SNCC concerns about identity and connection to community because if one cannot relate to himself he has “little chance to relate to anything else,” including political movements.\textsuperscript{42} Communal and educational programs of the BPP focused on simultaneously remediating an inferior education that did not provide economic opportunity and made African-Americans financially inferior. An inferior political education kept the tools out of the hands of black students—and their future adult selves—to challenge their position in society thereby perpetuating inferiority. Historian Donna Murch has demonstrated that black students who attended BPP Liberation Schools—in major operation between 1969 and 1971—received a political education that included inculcating a “revolutionary consciousness” as well as black history and BPP doctrine.\textsuperscript{43}

Likewise, the Inter-communal Youth Institute / Oakland Community School (OCS), opened in 1971, focused on providing a rigorous academic curriculum and progressive learning

\textsuperscript{41} Perlstein, “Teaching Freedom,” 306.
environment as well as a “community-based education.” Housed in the Oakland Community Learning Center (OCLC), OCS students absorbed more than just academics as the OCLC also was the sight of the BPP’s legal and educational program, busing to prison program, food stamp and welfare counseling, BPP fundraisers, lectures on African-American politics, GED classes, consumer education classes. As scholar Robyn Spencer points out, the OCS’s activities in the OCLC “brought together the Panther’s community service mission with their goal of community education.”

Black students, whether in BPP Liberation Schools or the Inter-communal Youth Institute / OCS, received an academic education and a political education to, as The Black Panther article “Educate to Liberate” noted, help liberate them from “an educational which is completely controlled by the power structure.”

**SASO: Formation Schools**

Education for SASO and Black Consciousness was directly tied to politics and liberty. It could “never be neutral” as it was “either for liberation or domestication.” As previously discussed, earlier resistance to the Bantu Education Act was unsuccessful do to the “inability to evoke a mass political movement of youth” and a conspicuous absence of a “strong school student organization…which could make school students a coherent force.” SASO would be this student organization and their educational programs would help mobilize black South African students. As SNCC and the BPP reached students through institutions like Freedom Schools and community education initiatives like the OCS, SASO would reach black South

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African students through teachers. Black South African students would become politicized, protest against apartheid, and campaign for their liberation. Black Consciousness would give black students in South Africa the hope that they could be agents for changing their future. As scholar Saleem Badat has suggested, a “black-centric” education in South Africa was to “foster social change,” construct a “black unity,” and galvanize the black South African community into “collective action.”

SASO would utilize teachers to transmit their philosophy of Black Consciousness and help develop black unity. Teachers in Bantu Schools had a history of resistive action from within schools. Scholar Crain Soudien has demonstrated that Bantu School teachers would “deliberately point their students to statements that were untrue and propagandistic.” Further, they would encourage their students to join libraries and read classical literature. Teachers, Soudien points out, were “encouraged to see the loopholes that existed and to teach in their own ways that which they knew was good for their students.” SASO would articulate the philosophies of Black Consciousness to teachers in their annual Formation School as they knew that teachers in Bantu School primary and secondary schools were important to their efforts. With a focus on the inculcation of inferiority that occurred in Bantu primary and secondary schools, SASO knew that “the role of the teacher at this level is of prime importance and the formation school will investigate in great detail the whole area of primary and secondary education.”

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Schools made suggestions that university “students qualifying at training colleges should be conscientised [sic] and encouraged to join teacher associations.” Through teachers “conscientised,” the dictum of Black Consciousness could be disseminated to primary and secondary students. Indeed, as scholar Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu has shown, the Soweto uprising of 1976—which protested the usage of Afrikaans and English in classrooms of Bantu Schools—could be directly traced to young, politically conscious teachers from Fort Hare, Turfloop, and Zululand Universities as well as teacher-training colleges who were “often linked to SASO.”

**Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates that “black-centric” education and liberation were inextricably linked in both the Black Power and Black Consciousness Movements. The early 1950s saw a divergence in national progression of segregated education. As the U.S. Supreme Court, even as early as 1936, was beginning to dismantle racially segregated institutions of higher education as well as primary and secondary schools, South Africa was strengthening and centralizing the segregation of all schools. Yet, writing in the 1950s and 1960s, the black Caribbean psychiatrist and social commentator Frantz Fanon had an indelible impact on the racial philosophies of Black Power and Black Consciousness, helping overcome the two countries’ otherwise diverging civil rights trajectories. Fanon’s criticisms of European colonialism, “intellectual alienation,” and society were simultaneously utilized by the leaders of Black Power and Black Consciousness, and shaped the educational doctrines of these movements. As Fanon looked towards the youth of Africa, Black Power and Consciousness began to focus on youth and white controlled education

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as a source of inculcating inferiority through a lack of opportunity and ignoring African civilization and history. Black Power and Consciousness organizers alike connected education with political motivations of liberation and used “black-centric” education to politicize black students to be agents of social change.
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