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"What's Happening Baby?" Lessons with My First Teacher, Mrs. Mary M. Temple Rhodes

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Abstract

This article is an ethnographic telling rooted in Black feminisms and radical identity praxis. I center the life and labor of Mrs. Rhodes/Mama and name my experiences with her, growing up in Chicago and in Chicago public schools to historicize the legacy of Black liberatory practices. I ask the question: What can Mama teach us about how we engage Black youth in urban education? I conclude with four assignments she offers for personal and professional pedagogies: cultivating Village that reflects and affirms strong Black identities, listening & serving, maintaining joy, and looking beyond standardized metrics.

Keywords

Black feminisms, Black liberatory practices, Black storytelling, Hip Hop, radical identity praxis

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Introduction

With any story I tell or article I write, I am mindful, to lead with home. Home is the first institution that named and shaped me. Other institutions would come—the block, church, and various jobs that culminated into a career. These intuitions, more importantly, the folx within them, enable me to collect stories through generations, reaching back to the 1930s when my parents were born. Outside of home, the most persistent institutions have been Chicago, Hip Hop and school. The intersection of these three has produced more genius than can ever be captured in one article. However, I take the time here to name Black liberatory practices witnessed, experienced and afforded to me through Mrs. Rhodes. I called her Mama—a diva with a different outfit for every day of the work week and a singing rival to Roberta Flack. She was an artist who made dot paintings with ball point pens like Seurat and made magic in a cast iron skillet with onions, garlic, and bacon grease.

The plan to co-author with Mama began several years ago when I first began engaging with Black feminist literature as a graduate student. I traveled back and forth from Durham to Chicago for data collection several times. I would pour myself into the transcripts and analysis. There were times I would crawl into Mama's bed and read drafts aloud—so I could make sense of the words and so she could ask me audience questions. It was a beautiful time for both of us. When I suggested that she was a Black feminist, she shrugged. When I read the stories of the women involved with the study alongside the women whose work I used as my foundation: Anna Julia Cooper, Pauli Murray, Patricia HillCollins, bell hooks—and called her name among them, I saw her pride. Whereas I identified the women interviewed for that project with pseudonyms (of Black women poets), I was keenly aware of writing with Black women and wanting to use their *actual* names—the names of those whom we know in insulated places and have been the foundations that elevate us beyond our wildest dreams.

For this article, I first discuss the significance of Black mothers as our first authors/institutions and name radical identity praxis as the framing. Next, I offer stories of my mother, and I name my experiences with her, growing up in Chicago and in Chicago Public Schools to historicize the legacy of Black liberatory practices. I take my time with her poetry, specifically "What's Happening Baby" (1969), to discuss ideological alignments with rap and Hip Hop across generations because (1) Hip Hop is a culture of knowledge production, artistic expression, criticality, protest, entrepreneurship, and style and (2) Hip Hop *is* urban education (Irby, 2015). I ask the question: What can Mama teach us about how we engage Black youth in urban

education? I conclude with four assignments she offers for personal and professional pedagogies, especially for folx who teach Black children[1] in urban settings: cultivating Village, listening & serving, maintaining joy, and looking beyond standardized metrics.

Significance: Ancestral Knowledges and Praxis

Long before I sat in graduate school classrooms with Dr. Eileen Parsons, who introduced me to the grounded theory of *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and Dr. Michele Berger, who plunged me into the poetic activism of Audre Lorde (1934–1992)—I had Mama. She consistently communicated love in environments that called for her children's protection and survival. She cultivated networks of sisters, aunts, cousins—othermothers and demanded that all education be used in a socially responsible way (Hill-Collins, 2009). I consciously share the lived experiences of Black mothers transmitting love to her children (biological and communal) to "honor our mothers' sacrifices" (Hill-Collins, 1990/2009, p. 187). Additionally, bell hooks (1990) reminds us in her work of homeplace that she wants to

> …remember these black women [of her genealogy] today. The act of remembrance is a conscious gesture honoring their struggle, their effort to keep something for their own. I want us to respect and understand that this effort has been and continues to be a radically subversive political gesture. (p. 384)

In late 2010, when I first considered writing my dissertation with Black mothers, I resisted. For one, I still had the naïve idea that my dissertation would be the pinnacle of my life's work (when my education career was barely out of its first trimester of conception.) Second, assuming the first was true, I did not want to be pigeonholed into being a Black mother expert. I was neither a Black mother nor an expert of any imagination. However, I was/am a Black woman. And the longer I strategized and broke bread with the women who would become my colleagues, participants, co-conspirators, and othermothers, I understood that the notion of career pinnacles and pigeonholes functioned as a colonial chamber, which prevented me from seeing the expansiveness of Black women and Black mothering. The work I engaged with those mothers in 2010 essentially broke open the multiverse of intersectionality for me. I understood not only the pervasive deficits of scientific, government, education, mothering, media and legal discourses that shaped the lives of Black mothers, but I was able to better understand institutional power circuits from the perspective of *the least of these*.

The Frame

I approach this writing with an ethnographic lens that is not *auto* in the sense that I am writing *by myself* but with the spiritual guidance of genealogical, communal, and academic Ancestors[2] that I name throughout this manuscript (Brant, 1994; Morrison & McKay, 1983). I write with my mother, through 40+ years of witnessing, journal entries, snatches of conversations I've remembered or recorded, her poetry, heavily repeated parables, the hand-me-down stories of other folx that knew her and her journal entries. She would write about various holidays and folx not leaving until 2 a.m. and include entire lists of what she cooked; watching Richard Pryor videos with Daddy over and over again; learning the steps of a drug intervention; routine prayers for our entire family; concerns for her students; even some of my daily activities including a third-grade homework assignment, "Billye can't find information about salamanders…"; and when she drove down to North Carolina to cook for me while I was taking doctoral comprehensive exams. She often ended entries with "Thank you God" and "Amen."

The last of her entries was on April 9, 2021 (almost four months before she passed away). Even with severe neuropathy, she still wrote with careful calligraphic penmanship and began, "I must thank my wonderful daughter for this beautiful book. I would be even more thankful if I knew what I should write in it. I guess it might be a good idea to start with my earliest memories…" She recalled the ages of her parents when they were married, the color of the bike her youngest brother rode, food her mother brought her from Camp Wallace to feed her from her lap, and the Port Arthur address of her father's cousin, "Cu'en Bea," who took her in for a while when she was barely five years old (and she saw her smack her husband with a skillet!)

I write with an erotic power—the use of an empowered, creative and knowledgeable energy "of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (Lorde, 1978/2007, p. 55). It means waking up to write when Mama talks to me at 3 a.m. This erotic power requires sitting in the various, sometimes contradictory, ways I show up throughout the entirety of my existence. This is particularly important as I center the voice and work of my mother because she—like all of us—was incredibly textured. "The mama that raised me in the 80 s fits an entirely different description from the one that raised my two brothers in the 60 s. And the friends who knew her across all those decades have their [kaleidoscope] angles as well" (Sankofa Waters, 2023, p. 708). Here, I apply a *radical identity praxis* and welcome all the angles of Mama, whose life offers

lessons of liberatory practices and pedagogical tools on behalf of Black families and Black children.

Radical Identity Praxis

Radical has several definitions, according to Oxford. The most common is an action affecting or trans/forming the fundamental nature of something. To earnestly know or change anything, you must get to the root of it. As Black folx in America, our roots have, very simply, been cut. And I don't mean this in terms of DNA—which is indelible—but the tangible hi/stories that are shared branch to branch, creating connectivity and identity across generations and geographies. Resolving these cuts for Black Americans requires reflection and action at the roots—a praxis (Davis, 1990; Freire, 1970/1990). "Within the word [praxis] we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers" (p. 87). I name this collective articulation *radical identity praxis (RIP)* to disrupt institutional anti-Black racism by prioritizing home (roots), which is necessary to cultivate Black folx' wholeness and autonomy.

For this work, radical identity praxis (RIP) is the frame that constructs the storytelling and analysis according to the following questions: How have the knowledges learned from Mama (my root), mapped onto my personal narratives and professional pedagogies? How can those learnings teach other folx who do this work? What tradition am I applying to narrate stories/data? (I name Black Storytelling as the tradition).

Black Storytelling

Black Storytelling is a non-linear reflection and practice of various identities. Black folx—do it through conversing, posting, cooking, worshiping, breathing. In "Black Storytellers and Everyday Liberation" (Sankofa Waters, 2023), I name three forms, firsthand, handmedown, and kaleidoscope, which are "rooted in critical race theory, several denominations of Black feminism (because Black feminism is for *everybody*) fugitivity, art/music, indigenous [knowledges] and critical ethnography" (p. 707). We verbally and textually record, reconnect, reward, and repeat these stories toward everyday practices of liberation. As such, I grew up at the feet of some of the greatest storytellers: Uncle Aaron (1931–2020), Uncle Jerry (1928), Uncle Eugene (1929), and Daddy (1931–1997). You had to sit close enough to my aunts or Mama to hear them signifying in the kitchen or the basement card parties. Their stories were funny, poignant, spiritual, sometimes "tall," and I had no idea I was learning and living history.

My First Institution: Mama

Mrs. Mary M. Temple Rhodes (1938–2021) identified as a middle-class country girl from Galveston Island, Texas. She was the youngest of 10 children raised by John and Zola: eight biological, two from other family relations. She moved to Chicago in 1961, sight unseen, behind her first husband. She was barely in her 20s. About three years later, the first husband went back to Louisiana, or wherever, shortly after their second son was born. All Mama had then was a Black leather jacket given to her by her favorite brother, her two boys, and unwritten recipes she watched and learned from her parents, who owned and operated Temple's Café[3] for nearly 10 years. Oh, and Uncle Carey (born in the early 1900s), who'd also moved up from Galveston probably 20 years prior. He always had a Crown Royal bag full of change for me when me and Mama visited with him later in his life. And there was also his ex-wife, Aunt Willa, who looked out for Mama like her own until the day she died. Aunt Willa was a Chicago staple. She lived a beautiful life to 92 years; her funeral was the first one I attended that felt like a party. She remarried (Uncle West) in 1945 and was a retired foster mom by the time I was born. She migrated from Mississippi, worked with the Chicago Park District for over 25 years, and was politically involved with the 6th Ward. She had a TON of pictures posted on one of the walls in the built-on back room of her house on 82nd and Vernon. All the folx she other/mothered. Me, Mama, Zee, Nette, Lynn, Ruth, Sandy, and Oprah. Lots of pictures of Oprah. Aunt Willa was the plug.

Aunt Willa first introduced herself to Mama while she was working. Mama had several jobs. The first one I know about was Pride Cleaners on 79th Street. At some point, she worked at The Malibu, on west 63rd Street. One night she had a headache, and the guy at the bar asked her why she was there with a bad attitude. She flatly told him, "because I need the money."

Him: How much you get paid a night?

Her: $40

Him: (reaches in his wallet. Hands her two twenty dollar bills) Get your coat.

That's how she started dating Fast Eddie. No doubt, Mama had to learn a lot of things fast—a country girl in a big city with two little Black boys, both under the age of 5. Chicago taught Mama a lot about attitude; how to navigate people *and* space. The blessing is that Chicago is laid out like a grid, and roughly every 8 blocks is a mile, which is important if you're trying to

map your way around between buses, trains, and taxis. State and Madison is the "middle"—downtown Chicago—zero, no higher. And like most folx who came to Chicago from Paducah, Memphis, or Galveston, she made her life south of State Street. Specifically, east of the Dan Ryan—400 blocks is King Drive, 800 blocks is Cottage Grove, 1200 blocks is Woodlawn, 1600 blocks is Stoney Island, 2000 is Jeffery, 2400 blocks is Yates, and 2600 is Colfax—*far* south in Jeffery Manor, where we settled for over 40 years. I slow us down in Chicago not just because I love my city, with all of it's contentious complexities—because place is an active participant (Cutts, 2012; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Not just in terms of defining density and politics, but culture and possibilities. *Place* is where folx grow up, find themselves, and free themselves (Sankofa Waters, 2023). And before long, Mama could go anywhere in Chicago without having to ask for directions or without Eddie. Which was wholly necessary after he was murdered. Her migration story is important to my work because many of these folx—my folx—arrived in Northern urban centers for more job opportunities and presumable safety. And while I am certain that my mother did not go to Chicago seeking work in public education, it was a calling she settled into for more than half of her life because she believed in serving *the least of these*.

After The Malibu, Mama worked at the Women's Clubs Publishing Company in the dark room developing film. She picked up a job at the Industrial Relations Center at the University of Chicago working as a typist, where she met Beulah, formerly Rhodes, from Paducah, Kentucky. Beulah was the eldest sibling of Bill, my Daddy, whom she was introduced to in 1968. Mama graduated from Governors State University in 1975 with a Bachelor's in Education which kickstarted her career with the Chicago Public School system. Her first job was at W. E. B. Du Bois Elementary near Altgeld Gardens, where Mrs. Ernestine Qualls and Mrs. Mary A. Leonard coached her and became my godmothers. She transitioned to Beethoven Elementary, a K-8 school nestled amid the Robert Taylor Homes, where she remained for most of her teaching career. By the early 1980s, she a was biological mother to three children—across two generations, and her work as a grand/other/mother spanned *five* generations. She had become a textbook othermother with "a reputation for never turning away a needy child" (Hill-Collins, 1990/2009, p. 198). Her classroom and administrative practices—as much of her life holistically—was rooted in motherwork. She even provided substitute teaching in her neighborhood schools several years after retirement in 2002, marking 30 + years in Education.

She was my first teacher, and it is difficult to talk about her in the past tense because her imprint is still palpable. When I was really little, she played "Honey Chile" with me. I honestly thought it was a game everyone played.

She would prepare my tea set, make something warm and herbal, and we would sit at the table and discuss our day. Of course, we would have to drink from the cups with our pinkies raised and preface every statement with "honey chile…" Birthdays were extravaganzas that ranged from dinners at Planet Hollywood to MC Hammer and Boyz II Men concerts with my closest friends. She fought for the last Black Cabbage Patch dolls for me during the Christmas rushes. Supporting Black businesses was the norm and an extension of the Village. I was poured into by folx who looked like me—my orthodontist in Chatham, school teachers in Bronzeville, Girl Scout troop leaders in Hyde Park, piano teacher in South Shore, enrichment classes at Chicago State and Olive Harvey, church in Washington Park.

I watched her take food on a dinner tray to my father every night and accept weekly prison collect calls from my eldest brother before she dropped tears into drafts of her lesson plans. She worked to maintain balance. We sang songs, created intricate thank you cards with carefully crafted calligraphic penmanship and made adventures during regular days of the week. We road-tripped for college tours, and she enlisted me as a debutante (even though I fervently resisted, but I earned a partial tuition scholarship) and made sure I participated in study abroad programs, even if when I got back home, the lights were temporarily disconnected. "Extra-curricular matters on your applications and in life!" I listened to her dismiss folx who said she was spoiling me: "My child is well provided for. Period." She demonstrated how to love unconditionally. I watched her do the same for the children she brought home on random weekends, two of my paternal cousins who lived with us intermittingly for two years. And a 14-year-old girl, Da'Ché, whom she met while she was servicing schools and families in Region 4. Mama adopted her after Daddy passed away, and I now call her my big-little sister. (When I say "adopted," I mean she came to our house and basically never left.)

Every morning, for at least eight years, she prepared an oatmeal breakfast for me and lunchboxed sandwiches. Mornings that I was bused to school, she'd fry up a breakfast sandwich for me *and* the bus driver since I was the earliest pickup point on her route. Otherwise, we'd ride in together—hit the Dan Ryan listening to Felicia Middlebrooks on WBBM news radio, Tom Joyner on WGCI (if she was taking me to high school), or just sing songs. Walled along the expressway for two miles stood the Robert Taylor Housing projects—28, 16-storied buildings in U-shaped formations of 3, with 4,415 units that housed up to 27,000 folx. Nestled alongside and between them was Beasley Academic Center on 52nd and State, where she'd drop me off at the front door. On 47th and State was Beethoven Elementary School, where she

parked and primarily taught seventh-grade Social Studies. I have a series of her teacher pictures across decades: big fro or wide roller set, thick hooped gold earrings, necklaces, flowers and patterns printed on her blouses. It was almost like you could smell the Chloé perfume wafting through the photo paper. And this is how she showed up to work just about every day I can remember.

Her classroom was adjacent to Mrs. Judy Blackwell and Mrs. Dorothy Jemison (mother to NASA Astronaut Dr. Mae Jemison). Every day I was greeted by them and Mrs. Sue Fowlkes—Beethoven's larger-than-life principal and governing othermother and later Dr. Grace Dawson and Mrs. Lula Ford. These women helped form my foundational cohort of teachers, textbooks and cheerleaders. Their names melted into the fabric of our uniforms, our hustles, and our dreams. And while I/we know their names like the morning intercom Pledge of Allegiance, too often when we study literature regarding urban education, parent involvement, and teacher preparation, the ink of their contributions is invisible.

My Second Institution: School

We are told that school is a neutral institution that allows us to claim social and economic mobility. However, schools—from preK-12 to postsecondary, including teacher preparatory learning spaces—are built on colonization and anti-Black racism. Schools strip Black folx of our identities by colonizing the mind (Alatas, 2004; Fanon, 1967; Thiong'o, 1986). This colonization manifests through implicit and explicit anti-Black curricula (Anderson, 1988; Anyon, 1980, 1981; Cutts, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Love, 2019, 2023; Yosso, 2005), tracking, zero-tolerance policies, police staffing, hiring practices of Black and Brown folx, community isolation and co-opting, and even creating mandates that restrict natural hair and specific types of clothing (Milner, 2008; Morris, 2015; Oakes, 1995; Tyson, 2011). Black folx' earliest lessons of anti-Black racism are transmitted in preK-12 schools. These lessons continue through postsecondary and beyond for Black folx immersed in an American culture that substantiates whiteness as property (patriotism and colonialism); Blackness as poverty; labor and discipline; and exceptionalism as the capital carrot to chase. "To this end, there are persistent curricula that promote character education, meritocracy and competition, respect for authority, and fluency in white intellectualism" (Sankofa Waters et al., 2023, p. 299). We are taught in "languages of the colonizers to reject [our] heritage and embrace Euro-Western worldviews and lifestyles as the human norm" (Chilisa, 2011, p. 8) However, strong Black identities nurtured in *home* always trouble standard (read: Eurocentric) curricula and foster urgency to decolonize educational spaces.

At the start of my Master's degree, I learned a few theories that gave language to many of my experiences growing up and in school. I have always separated the two: growing up and school. For sure, other institutions significantly shaped my life. However, school was the one that had me in a building away from home for 6–8 h at a time, three-quarters of every year. School concentration has an impact that can easily supersede home and everything else. We tame our tongues and dry out our voices. On the track "Momma," I hear Kendrick Lamar (2015) spit:

> I met a little boy that resembled my features
>
> Nappy afro, gap in his smile, hand-me-down sneakers…
>
> He looked at me and said, Kendrick, you do know my language
>
> You just forgot because of what public schools had painted.

And I think, let's not forget "momma." This is why I was all in for Bill Tate and Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1995) work that drew lines from critical race theory to K12 education. Then, Ladson-Billings's (1995) work on culturally relevant pedagogy, which bridges critical race theory and tenets of Black feminist thought (Hill-Collins, 1990/2009), blew my mind! As Mwalimu Shujaa articulated in 1994, works such as these explicitly chart the difference between *schooling* and *education,* emphasizing interlocking systems of oppression.

"100% Intelligent Black Child"

Baba Asa Hilliard (1992a, 1992b; Cutts, 2020) regarded Black children as brilliant from inception and once you know a Black child is brilliant, you treat them accordingly (Muhammad, 2020, 2023). I grew up with Phife Dawg in my headphones talking bout: "Okay, if knowledge is the key then just show me the lock. Got the scrawny legs but I move just like Lou Brock, with speed, I'm agile. Plus I'm worth your while. 100% intelligent Black child" (A Tribe Called Quest, 1991). I would (and still) scream that last part loud: "100% INTELLIGENT BLACK CHILD!" I argue that competence and humility are valid points to *approach* cultural consciousness. And our work in education must move toward a full disruption of Eurocentric curricula that does not privilege the lives and labor of folx of the global majority. We must engage dialogic exchanges that help us make sense of our lives through reflection, analysis, action, and dreaming (Freire, 1970/1990; hooks, 1994; Kelley, 2003; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). This is the type of liberatory education I experienced at both my grammar and high school. With teachers,

administrators, food and custodial workers, and security folx who looked like me. Who shopped at the same stores as me. Who went to the same church services as me. So often, I hear folx ask, "when did you have your first Black teacher?" Always. For me, it's more like, when did you have your first teacher who *wasn't* Black? (To answer the question, kindergarten, and not again until 5th grade.) And the more important question, "in what ways did they—*all* of them—pour into you?"

My mother chose Beasley as the institution for my primary education. Beasley Academic Center is a first- to eighth-grade school (connected to the Child Parent Center and preschool program.) It was named after Edward Willingham Beasley (1898–1977), a Black pediatrician in Chicago, and opened on the South Side of Chicago in the fall of 1978.

> An all-[B]lack elementary school, across street from a housing project in Chicago, is proudly offering an outstanding example of providing high quality public education. And this accomplishment is being achieved without accepting a single cent in federally funded programs…. The center is unique. It has no enrollment zone, and 350 of pupils are bused from other districts in the city. As a result pupils attend Beasley because of parental preferences. To get a child into the center parents are required to sign a contract to abide by the school's rigid policies and to see that all homework assignments are done. If a child shows up in a class unprepared, the parents will hear from the teacher. (Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 1979, pp. 465–467)

During one of the cyphers for the Black Storytelling project (Sankofa Waters, 2023), Kahn shared that his mother enrolled him in Beasley for kindergarten immediately after he came home from his previous daycare and asked her if he was (is) Black. She was concerned that he didn't see himself and responded accordingly. For our parents, Beasley was a lighthouse in the Chicago public school system.

As Beasley learners, we were surrounded by teachers who doubled as our othermothers/fathers, and for many of us, the transition from home to school was seamless. The ethos of care and expectations for excellence were the same. In the late 1980s, Mrs. Ollie McLemore (whom some folx referred to as M.O.M) became the principal, and the whole school suddenly seemed to be decked out in gold—highlighting one of our school colors—like that scene in *The Wiz* (1978) with Quincy Jones shimmering and playing at the piano. Every morning after the first bell, we recited the Beasley Creed. For formal ceremonies, we had to sing all. three. stanzas. of *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (and I have never forgotten any of them.)

MOM was grand and she ensured that our national reputation as Black scholars was legit and just as bright as her rings; our teachers and staff seemed to all have the same assignment. We were encouraged to excel in architecture contests, spelling bees, and basketball tournaments on local and national levels. We hosted folx in our auditorium, from DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince to Presidential candidate Bill Clinton. We had fun. And our exposure felt *global.*

In 5th grade, one of our enrichment teachers, Mrs. Franklin ($3 to whoever can tell me her first name,) gave us this thick, Xeroxed booklet of Black inventors that we had to learn for the entire school year, with a weekly test on top of it. For sure, there is a valid critique regarding rote memorization and simply banking information (Freire, 1970/1990). However, in these black-and-white sheets, we saw ourselves as innovators, patent holders, visionaries, and manifesters. I didn't even know we could fill a page, let alone a booklet. We learned that we could easily see and touch ten items a day created by a person who looked like us: refrigeration equipment (McKinley Jones), the hot comb (Walker), the telegraph, which contributed to the telephone (Woods), the 3-position traffic signal (Morgan,) the ironing board (Boone), improvements to the ink pen (Purvis), electric elevator doors (Miles), shoes (Matzeliger), the Murphy bed (Goode), processing and preserving blood plasma (Drew), and so important—that George Washington Carver did not *invent* the peanut. Rather, GWC created 300+ uses from it (as well as sweet potatoes), such as milk, plastics, paints, dyes, cosmetics, medicinal oils, soap, ink, and wood stains.

Mr. Albert Gross used computer games to teach us about purchasing stocks. Dr. Philistine Tweedle taught us typing, as she told us, to enhance our bartering toolbelt once we got to college (because going to college was an unyielding expectation.) Mr. Aaron Jackson taught us how to make keychains and jewelry boxes in shop class. One of our counselors, Mrs. Yvonne Miller, also served as our engineering coach and taught us how to make bridges for competition. Mr. Joseph Adamek taught us literature, etiquette, and accountability. Doctora Carmen Palmer taught us Spanish and hosted the *Bilingual Bicultural Student Friendship Exchange* trips for us to connect with other learners and local businesses in Pilsen (at the time, a predominately Mexican neighborhood in Chicago.) Mr. Scott Sands would play Sade as we worked through math problems and came to our homes for 1:1 tutoring. This is just a sample of 8, out of at least 70 folx, in the classrooms, offices, enrichment rooms, cafeterias, custodial and engineering closets, crossing lanes, everywhere. Everyone in the building was responsible for our well-being and genius.

These are the folx Mama (and Daddy) trusted me with from 6 to 13 years old. To the present day, I see them out and about—at sorority meetings, late nights at the 24-h eating spot in Hyde Park, shopping, church and they show up to important life ceremonies 20 years later (thank you, Mr. Thomas Green). I take time here to write about Beasley because of the critical need to historicize the legacy of culturally *affirming* pedagogies and to lift the names not just of my personal genealogy but of the Village of othermothers and otherfathers that take up the critical work of cultivating genius (Muhammad, 2020).

Down the Street

In some ways, Beethoven (which opened in the early 1960s) was loosely regarded a geographic rival school for Beasley, we were approximately one mile apart on State Street. Both were nestled in the heart of the Robert Taylor Homes (the city began demolition of the homes in 1998 and the last of the 28 buildings was demolished in 2007). The density of Chicago would conventionally classify both as "urban intensive" (Milner, 2012, p. 559) schools. Important to note, urban education has conventionally become a proxy for under-funded public schools in heavily populated cities ostensibly built to serve Black and Latinx children—and those who missed the lotteries and family incomes for private institutions. It has much less to do with geography and knowledge but more about access and historical caste systems (Milner, 2012).

Mama and my school Village, peers and learners with Barbara Sizemore and Marva Collins, taught in an era where Black children were considered crackbabies and superpredators. Black boys were certainly targeted. Love (2014) explained that Black male youth who embody Hip Hop swag—"wearing, articulating, and celebrating their Hip Hop cultural belonging"—are often labeled by educators as "unteachable, threatening, and criminal" (p. 301). These deficit-based schooling practices also hold true for Black girls in the ways we are policed, adultified, tokenized and othered (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Crenshaw, 2015; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). For these reasons, I lean into Coles' (2023) race-inclusive definition of urban education "as the schooling of historically marginalized racial and ethnic students of color … within a densely populated city (or city section), which is often characterized by the larger social complexities of racial segregation and varying levels of poverty" (p. 1185). And although Beethoven was public and Beasley was magnet, the same ideologies and language loomed across both schools where race and class were sometimes conflated.

Both schools were governed by the Chicago Public School system, the mayor-appointed superintendent/CEO, and their respective local school councils; the student population of both has traditionally been predominantly/all Black since its inception. The successes of Beasley and Beethoven were measured mainly according to how well their children behaved, the cleanliness of the building/campus, how much parents complied with the rules, and the ability to excel in scantron metrics of reading and writing established in places far from our homes like offices in Washington D.C. and Iowa. Meanwhile, the folx across both of these buildings were collectively concerned for our protection and agency.

From the perspective of a student and resident, *Chicago Tribune* staffer Phillip Jackson (1988) wrote,

> I grew up a few blocks from Beethoven...
>
> The moment I crossed the threshold at Beethoven I did not feel that I was on the South Side in the heart of the Robert Taylor public housing project. I did not feel as though I was at a poor inner-city school where many times minority children are written off before they ever write their first word.

Everybody always has an opinion—sometimes posed as facts—about what's happening in urban areas. It's important to hear multiple perspectives from folx who experience these spaces from the inside out.

I experienced the same ethos of care and expectations of excellence across Beasley and Beethoven, as a daughter and afterschool student. I remember being in the office with Mama making carbon copies on the machine you had to roll the papers through and getting purple stains on my fingers from the ink. I would volunteer to do it for her because I loved the smell and the fact that I believed I could *feel* the words. I remember her hand-written grids of lesson plans she submitted every two weeks, and she taught me how to type very tidily. Mama's classroom was off the fourth flight of stairs, and I remember how she poured herself over decorating her doors, bulletin boards, and hallways with art and the work of her students. She would enlist them after school to help her cut out shapes and words with the precision of a brain surgeon; Mama didn't like raggedy lines. She would make them use the same precision on their poster boards for science project presentations and World Book Encyclopedia reports (no Google, just libraries, microfiche, and the Dewey Decimal system). The same students she'd make me walk with her up and down those project stairs (infinity flights!!) to pick them up to spend a weekend at our house—just because. I remember their names too. Mama poured herself into everything.

"Poetry is Not a Luxury"

Mama leaned into her voice as a poet when she taught. She coached her students for local and national oratory competitions with her work, interlaced with classics such as "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou, "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Thayer, "The Creation" by James Weldon Johnson, and "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes. Mama equipped all her children to exert a full range of voice and encouraged us to speak multiple languages: home, school, street; you name it (Lyiscott, 2014). Love was her life's work, and she used Chicago Public Schools as her stage, leaning fully into bridging homeplaces and schools as sites of resistance (hooks, 1990.) In 1969, she wrote "What's Happening Baby." For context, she wrote this poem three days short of the first anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. No doubt, many literal fires had been extinguished from rages that burned across the country, but the upset and voids were still fresh. Mama was a newlywed wife (to a man who'd experienced trauma of serving in the Korean War) and mother of two sons who were 10 and 7 years old. I want to think that I couldn't imagine fearing for the future of both her sons and her husband in such a climate. However, in the wake of an incomplete list that includes Trayvon Martin, Hadiya Pendleton, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, George Floyd, and Ralph Yarl, I am intimately familiar with that fear. Thus, both my mother and I have leaned into our gifts to write and teach and heal.

Reminiscent of Chicago-based Civil Rights activist and poet Gwendolyn Brooks' (1960) *We Real Cool*, "What's Happening Baby" was Mama's contribution to the Black Arts aesthetic. It is an affirmation of agency and a call for accountability. These were staples of her pedagogy. And Mama was still teaching her students "What's Happening Baby" 20 years after she wrote it. With her permission, I share the poem here, maintaining the font styles and formatting as originally written.

What's happening baby! What's on your mind…

Can't you see you're wasting time…

Going to school every day … to the classes you choose

Ain't it never occurred to you that you're the one whose gonna lose.

You cut some classes, in others you chew gum

Gonna use four years and graduate (?) dumb.

You walk the halls and talk real loud

It makes you feel good to be a part of that crowd.

That crowd that defies all the rules and regulations,

That crowd that challenges the school's administration.

That crowd that roams the streets at will, and

cuss and fight and sometimes KILL.

What's happening baby! What's on your mind

Don't you know you're wasting time!

You seem to care little about a good education,

War or Peace or even integration.

And tho you're aware of a Black Revolution

Destruction, hostility and violence

Are your only contributions.

And you've got the nerve to sing long and loud

I'M A SISTER OR A BROTHER

I'M BLACK AND I'M PROUD!!

Proud of what? What others are doing

Well they aren't so proud

to see your ruin

Sure, getting equality means breaking some rules,

But integration, quality education isn't degradation of schools.

Tho we sometimes need to be militant … and fight

Even then there's a way to "do our thing," right.

And doing "Right" doesn't mean doing it "Whitey's way,"

Just stop, look and listen to what our leaders say.

Why … JESSE, ABERNATHY, YOUNG and many others

are doing great things for all the sisters and the brothers.

And if you feel it in your soul, that you really want to help,

Read those books, watch your looks,

Get the best out of yourself.

Then and only then, will you stand above the crowd

As a Black child, as a beauty, One who deserves to be Proud.

Sitting in her Tacoma apartment, 80+ years old, Mama could still roll the entire poem off her tongue.

After a while, with all of my academic pursuits and grown understandings as a Hip Hop baby and Black feminist, the poem began to feel weighted with the same politics that shamed young folx for both being and resisting. I found in Mama's poetry the same politics that have told us to cut our hair and speak properly so that we *may* survive and earn the carrot of an American dream. Mind you, I'm her child. I've felt her sacrifices physically, emotionally, spiritually—in all ways. Therefore, what I perceived as the condescending messaging of her poetry, troubled me a bit. Obviously, Mama was not race-neutral. However, her emphasis on self-reliance and professionalism sometimes felt rooted in anti-Blackness. Which begs the question: How do each of us navigate that?

Of my generation, we are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of *Brown v Board*'s 1954 decision to desegregate and are taught to tread lightly on the efforts of our Civil Rights and abolitionist Ancestors. (It's worth noting that 9 years after the *Brown* decision is the birth of Hip Hop.) One day, after I got grown, I listened to Hip Hop storyteller Slick Rick's (1988) open "Hey Young World," and began to revisit my mother's work with a different ear. Slick Rick spoke two generations later (Gen X) from a place rooted in local cultural movements of protest and art that borrowed from everything before him and connected the Black Diaspora through R&B, funk, reggae, and disco. I received "What's Happening Baby" a little differently when I heard the same language mirrored in the notepad and production reels of Rick the Ruler.

Times have changed. Hey, it's cool to look bummy

and be a dumb dummy and disrespect your mummy

Have you forgotten who put you on this Earth?

Who brought you up right and who loved you since your birth?

I worked to understand that while Mama was speaking from the discourse that shaped her politics around respect, discipline, and meritocracy (she was born of the Silent Generation, parents of the Boomers), her heart's intention was rooted in protection and agency.

Our chants, whether taken up from James Brown and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. "I'm Black and I'm Proud" or sounds of the streets, "whoop-whoop," often convey the same messaging of being seen, heard, and activated. This evolved understanding compels me to assert that rich, intergenerational dialogic exchanges are critical for each of us to interlace tongues, map strategies to thrive, value lived experiences, and foster holistic healing. Slick Rick goes on,

As a rule from a non-fool, your life don't drool

Don't be a fool like those that don't go to school

Get ahead and accomplish things

You'll see the wonder and the joy life brings…

And just like Mama never considered herself a feminist but did the work of communal mothering, she *initially* didn't consider herself a fan of rap either (except for MC Hammer, Heavy D, and Fresh Prince.) So I saw rap as an opportunity to engage with Mama around storytelling and examining social structures. Many times when we were together, I had her listen to Ms. Lauryn Hill, Mos Def, or Kendrick. We moved from playing "Honey chile," to marble solitaire, sudoku puzzles, screaming at *The Wheel* and Hip Hop listening sessions. I witnessed her shifts.

One afternoon, we had a whole special session just to listen to "Sing About Me, I'm Dyin of Thirst" (Kendrick Lamar, 2015). After running Saturday errands, we parked in the driveway of the home where she raised me. None of the groceries were frozen, so we had time. I let the track play.

…Tired of running, tired of hunting

> My own kind but retiring nothing
>
> Tires are steady screeching, the driver is rubbing
>
> Hands on the wheel, who said we wasn't
>
> Dying of thirst, dying of thirst, dying of thirst…

She sat still, fully engaged. After the first verse, I watched her lean in (and snapped a picture.)

> …Sometimes I look in a mirror and ask myself:
>
> Am I really scared of passing away? If it's today, I hope I hear a
>
> Cry out from heaven so loud it can water down a demon
>
> With the Holy Ghost 'til it drown in the blood of Jesus…

She leaned in a bit more. Then she started squinting her eyes to read the titles on the dashboard.

> "It's Kendrick Lamar, Mama. I've played him before."
>
> "Oh okay."
>
> "This time he's telling the story of two folx in his circle that got caught up. It's like a eulogized call to action."
>
> …I count lives all on these songs
>
> Look at the weak and cry, pray one day, you'll be strong
>
> Fighting for your rights even when you're wrong
>
> And hope that at least one of you sing about me when I'm gone
>
> Am I worth it?
>
> Did I put enough work in?…

"Oh, see, I can listen to this. Can you make me a tape?" she would often respond, and I'd chuckle with, "yea Ma, I'll make you a *CD*."

When Audre Lorde (1997/2007) told us that "poetry was not a luxury," her focus was on the ancient and deep powers of women's creativity. As the daughter of a poet, I feel this in my marrow. And as a Hip Hop baby, it has always been important to share the poetry of folx that I listen to with my mother, even the ones who didn't feel "safe" because they talked about multiple violences. When Mama couldn't relate to the experience, connection was difficult. I hear Lorde say,

> Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would have found intolerable or incomprehensive and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy, but a disciplined attention to the true meaning of 'it feels right to me.' We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared. (p. 37)

With this understanding, I eased Mama into listening to a lil Millennial nappy headed boy from Compton talk about his homie dying in his hands from gunshot wounds and a sister he'd heard about doing sex work dying from AIDS.

My goal was not to shock her, but to share a moment with someone completely different from what I thought she knew or experienced. But Mama *had* experienced loss. And gun violence. And domestic violence. And being a single mother. And even though she tried to protect me from these so-called ugly parts of herself, I watched her lean into Kendrick. I used these moments to collectively read different social worlds with her, in the ways that Elaine Richardson (2019), Yolie Sealey-Ruiz (2021), and Justin Coles (2023) assert the importance of racial literacies. These sessions moved us further into ways Black youth read their urban social worlds, while simultaneously mis/read by these same contexts, "to facilitate a pathway to more humanizing urban schooling environments" (pp. 1181–1182).

Poetry and rap helped me and Mama make bridges to better hear one another from a Silent Generation to ones marked with an X, Y, and Z. And when I questioned her with, "You talk about 'quality education and degradation', but what if the school is already broken—on purpose?" and she responds, "well, you don't need to make it worse." I don't recall Mama being overtly concerned with systems-level change, but I know that she offered herself as a shelter between the systems of the schools and the streets. Needing to be seen, heard, and held is timeless, and that's critical to the part she played. I also work to understand that Mama was not simply talking about making the school building "worse" but instead the importance of honoring our cultural legacies of excellence, which is (still in 2023) violently erased through the

anti-Black messaging of compulsory institutions. And we can't learn cultural legacy from the schools; we have to get/give that from/to each other.

Revisiting the Frame

I am aware that I easily apply terms and ideas that Mama may not been familiar with or maybe not have been completely comfortable: education abolitionist, co-conspirator, fugitivity, and futurism. Such is the prevailing terminology of my generation and the next coming. After all, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, and physical safety are not new topics for American education and its children; however, *safety* is markedly different than when Mama was in the classroom. For example, by 2009, New York City schools employed more than 5,000 safety agents and 191 armed police officers. The staggering number of law enforcement officials patrolling New York City Schools in 2009 made it the fifth-largest police district in the country (Kaba, 2021; Love, 2023, New York Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). A police district, within a *school system.* Mama didn't imagine this. Mama identified Civil Rights progress punctuated with cases such as *Brown v. Board* and still believed in the merit of good behaviors and that politics were meant for politicians; these beliefs can easily be attributed to her young Southern life at the edge of sharecropping and formative years through Jim Crow.

The route of her treasure map started at home and church, moved toward schools, then to work, then home ownership, then children in college, and finally retirement with a pension, preferably in a Lake Michigan condo. She narrowly imagined the carceral state of children in schools—the earliest part of that map—which continues to call for radical terms, ideas, and actions. And as Lani Guinier (2004) notes, the Supreme Court's "overly deferential" (p. 96) position toward the calculated interests of northern liberals, moderate southerners, and its changing guard beginning in the 1970s, marked "*Brown* from a clarion call to an excuse not to act" (p. 93) along with increased cynicism. Yes, there were several wins garnered from *Brown;* however, its impact rests largely with re/shaping the psyche of Black folx rather than dismantling interlocking structures of racialized hierarchy. In 2023, Black folx are still demanding justice for our holistic wellness, far beyond mortgages, pensions, and integration.

For sure, Mama's repeated phrases and actions have been a life template for me and I must acknowledge that I write of her bound by the ways that she wanted me to know her. As we grew together, she allowed me to see more textures, even though, there still wasn't much room for questioning her. However, as I became an educator, wife, and mother to a little Black boy, I understood her from different angles. I applied empathy in spots

of disappointment and historical context in spots of judgment. For this work, writing with Mama does not mean that I have negate or revise any of her ideas; instead, in this re/membering, I sit with both her wisdom and contradictions.

Implications

After much thought, journaling, meditating, and talking it out, at this present moment, I stand confidently in these four assignments (personal and professional-pedagogical tools) of my mother. These tools are not absolute or prescriptive; they are to be used in the ways that each of us need them.

Mama cultivated a Village that reflected and affirmed strong Black identities. She broke bread with everyone, from top to bottom, right to left. Several times a year, our home, backyard to basement, was filled with groups of folx who didn't necessarily seem to match but were all connected to Mama. Family members, neighbors, colleagues, supervisors, my friends' parents and church members. (When local politicians showed up, that was mainly because of Daddy.) All she had to do was extend an invitation and made sure she never ran out of ribs or potato salad. She led with her whole self and fostered a strong Black identity for me that went beyond cultural competence or humility. There were nuances of Black folx that I learned from—enough to know what to keep, what to save for later, what to dismiss. Within our home, I was immersed in paintings, books, music, magazines, and television programming, that looked like me. Framed photos of Harold Washington and Mary McLeod Bethune were prominently hung so that I thought they were my Uncle and Great Aunt. Mama used her resources and privileges in making deliberate choices for the inside and the outside of our home to be a seamless affirmation of Black love and brilliance—from invitations, to images, to community investments.

For K12 educators, I ask, how do you make the inside match the outside, or vice versa? What types of relationships do you cultivate? How do you amplify a variety of voices that support the growth of Black genius? How do you leverage resources of the neighborhood (and city) to build capital with Black children and families? Where and how often do they see themselves in learning spaces that you curate—and do they love what they see? How do you cultivate humanizing experiences for K12 learners?

Mama listened and served. She tithed her money into the church, but she also sowed her finances, time, and talents into our communities over and over and over again. As she worked with five generations beyond herself—Boomers, X, Y, Z, and Alpha—she had to yield to serve. She had to listen. She modeled this with me in several ways, mostly when

engaging with Hip Hop. I counted it a full win to include rap on her "tapes." I have to admit though, when it comes to my own streaming, trap and drill are not in rotation. I pride myself on having been fully present for the "Golden Age" of Hip Hop, and I've allowed the millennial emergence of Lil Wayne and nem to pause my timeline. So, when Dave Stovall talks about the importance of listening *with* youth—which is pretty much all the time! —I feel convicted. During an AERA Hip Hop talk in Chicago, Stovall (2023) shared stories of introducing his jazz-heavy dad to *Beat Street* (1984) and watching him rock with it. He also shared that even when he first heard a Chief Keef track, he initially skipped it. Until he recognized his younger self and that there are no throwaway people. He recognized the movement these young boys were creating in and beyond Chicago has always been about much more than street violence (which is an engineered response), but folx' basic needs for quality food, schools, housing, and healthcare. So yes, I am convicted. Stovall talks about retraining our ears. *And hearts.* Because the clear lesson here is that you can't serve the people if you refuse to hear the people. And you must be in a dialogic relationship with them to hear them.

For K12 educators, I reach back to Mama Audre (1977/2007) and ask, what ideas do you "find intolerable or incomprehensive and frightening" (p. 37) when it comes to working with Black children and families? In what ways are you complicit in these things that are harmful or "intolerable"? How often are folx with varying experiences provided space to speak in your learning spaces to engender community-grounded approaches? How do you move into dialogic spaces to build sturdy intersections that honor human experiences (and decenter yourself when necessary)? Who do you stand with and who stands with you?

Mama maintained her joy. She did so in ways that defied understanding. She made her way through Chicago as a primary parent of school-aged Black boys with no immediate support. I am unaware of her tactics for survival navigating those truly cold and early years in a foreign land—a neighbor gave her the coat off her back because she recognized the black leather jacket Mama had would not sustain her through the winter. Her joy was not free of struggles; nor was her joy shadowed by her struggles. She still had her softness when she labored me into this world. She sang many mornings after she awoke from a restless night. She loved buying new journals and writing carefully on each page the details of a trip or her prayers. She created art in everything—cooking, signing her checks, teaching, and even in the detailed ways she cleaned and arranged our home. I name these practices, not just as something she did to keep her bones from drying up, but to build internal clarity and justice (Dunn & Love, 2020).

Bettina Love (2019) reminds us that, Black joy is the radical imagination that has the power to expand antiracist pedagogies. *Mama's* joy created gold and she spread it out like Mansa Musa.

For K12 educators, I ask, what are your totems of joy? When and where do you take pause to rest and express gratitude? How often do write down your most radical dreams and do the work to see them manifest? What tools do you utilize to build internal clarity and sustain your praxis?

Mama looked beyond standardized metrics. She didn't use intellectual scores, attendance marks, and routine tests to affirm or condemn the young folx around her; rather, she applied a love ethic (hooks, 2000) and disrupted deficit expectations. Her metrics were: do you have the capacity to fully show up for yourself and if you don't, how can *we* mine the tools for you to do so. This was especially true when Mama knew that children coming from the surrounding project homes were conventionally seen as disposable, and the outcomes for their lives were predetermined by specific "at-risk for academic failure" factors that include family economic status, disinterest in school, and not having learned English as their primary language. "The term [at-risk] is regularly used in federal and state education policy discussions, as well as popular news articles and specialty trade journals. It is often applied to large groups of students with little regard for the stigmatizing effect that it can have on students" (Toldson, 2019).

So, Mama counted all her children as smart, both textually and racially (Hatt, 2016). "Black mothers' assert their children are *smart* by both teaching and living lessons of their respective communities and the world, toward the actualization of personal agency" (Sankofa Waters, 2016, p. 1224). When Mama invited children to our home, she didn't choose the ones with the best grades or even the best behaviors. I mostly remember them being the ones who stayed after school, were helpers, and wanted as much time being poured into as possible. Mama chose folx who wanted a weekend off the block and whose families trusted her enough to extend their Village. Mama understood the assignment: that the classroom is just one prism of learning and she offered up herself as a text. She knew her Black children were brilliant and treated them accordingly. Mama saw and sowed seeds.

For K12 educators, I ask, why do *you* show up? How do you examine power (e.g., internal leadership, curricula, local businesses, policy, parents, research data, law enforcement, funding sources, etc.) in your respective learning spaces? How does this power entangle itself with the humanity of Black children and families? Where do you sit in this circuitry of power and how do you leverage your position on behalf of those you show up to serve? How do you help K12 learners read the world they/we occupy?

Know Your Assignment(s)

A radical identity praxis for both our research inquiry and teaching practices prioritizes learning from our histories and possible futures. When we center Black mothers in this frame, we advance the work of community othermothers and political activism, which demands socially responsible uses of education (Hill-Collins, 1990/2009). Moreover, according to the model provided by Mwalimu J. Shujaa (1994), the possibility of education (rather than schooling) occurs when the achievement expectation is *greater* than the prescribed outcome. And I'm not simply referring to academic achievement, but a recognition and critique of social structures that elevate the entire life of a child's trajectory, so that the outcomes are boundless. It is then essential that teacher recruitment, preservice and in-service development efforts are anchored in ancestral knowledges, relational learning, community-grounded approaches, disruption/dismantling and healing.

Mama was aware that she was planting seeds for fruits that she may never see or taste; such is the work of mothers, co-conspirators, and abolitionists. But she occasionally smelled flowers and stayed focused. As my big-little sister Da'Ché A. Brooks stated at Mama's 2021 memorial:

> She knew the assignment! And from on the outside looking in at times, people got frustrated with her purpose because they didn't understand… Her willingness to share with other people, people she don't know. Why does she take in strangers? This is a dangerous world!… Even I could never understand how could this woman could just *care for me*. I'm like hell on wheels. Why do you want anything to do with me? But let me tell you something; she knew her assignments. And she knew that God said: I have a plan for you, with this young lady. And I need for you to get in the trenches, and I need for you to pray for her, I need for you to love on her, I need for you to be patient with her, I need you to show her the things that she hasn't been shown. I need you to show her that she *is* love.

For all the pedagogical tools that move through home, school, the block, church, headphones, and all the in-between places heard and unheard, I close (and open) with these assignments from Mrs. Mary M. Temple Rhodes: cultivate Village that reflects and affirms strong Black identities, listen and serve, maintain joy, and look beyond standardized metrics. Every educator does not have to be a Black other/mother to serve, but her assignments are readily available for each one of us to take up. These reflexive assignments center the lives and stories of Black youth and families as liberatory practices to dismantle and heal anti-Black practices, especially within our schools.

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Notes

1. I name Black children, learners, and students interchangeably, depending on the context/relationship.
2. Throughout this text, I capitalize Ancestors, Black, Mama, Village, and Hip Hop as proper nouns to honor the specificity of the people/groups I reference. Thank you, Beth Brant (1994) for this reminder.
3. Mr. and Mrs. John and Zola Temple began their culinary career in 1943 at the Old Blimp Base and Naval Air Station in Hitchcock, Texas. In 1952, they assumed ownership of the Gus Allen Café in Galveston Island, Texas and changed the name to Temple's Café, which they operated until Hurricane Carla destroyed the property in 1961. They were known for their pork roast, dressing and stuffed bell peppers (Samford et al, 2021).

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Author Biographies

M. Billye Sankofa Waters—daughter of Mary and William—is a Hip Hop generation Blackgirl from Chicago who uses several modalities with folx to co-construct, embody, and share knowledges. She is the author *We Can Speak for Ourselves: Parent Involvement and Ideologies of Black Mothers in Chicago*; co-editor of the *Lauryn Hill Reader* w/ Bettina Love and Venus Evans-Winters and *How We Got Here: The Role of Critical Mentoring and Social Justice Praxis* w/ the late Marta Sánchez. She is creator of the brand #BlackFolxAreRich and her work is grounded in Black storytelling, qualitative methods, liberatory education, Black feminism and critical race theory.

Mary M. Temple Rhodes was an artist and lifelong educator from Galveston, Texas. She claimed Chicago as her home and served in the Chicago Public Schools for over 30 years. She is the biological mother of Preston, Aaron, and Billye, and othermother to five generations of many more.