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### The Subjugation of American Students

Different groups of oppressed students in the United States usually perceive education as an opportunity for liberation from their economic and social hardships, but most of them are unaware that school is the site of their oppression. As our education system continues to subjugate students of different cultures, languages, and skin colors, the problem also comprises a flawed method of instruction present from the beginning of a student's academic journey. It surrounds the teacher-student relationship and how the teacher's instruction is based on the domination of a student's identity and creativity. The result is the disempowerment of students of different races. The method of teaching in the United States has blindly developed a system of oppression that has not only produced a dehumanizing effect, but it has also caused racially defined groups to be targeted in a manner that silences and criminalizes them.

The major setback in the American education system emerges through the divided interaction and miscommunication between teacher and student, resulting in the oppressive practices this system is built on. Students discern the teacher as dominant and in complete control within the classroom setting. They must listen compliantly to the teacher's rules and instruction or else they fear discipline. Moreover, the method of teaching students to learn new information unquestionably through memorization and then through evaluation, leads to a fallacious system of education. Paulo Freire in chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* terms

this template for teaching as “the banking method of education” where the students are the “depositories” who file and store the deposits they receive from the teachers, the “depositors” (72). With this analogy, Freire conveys the idea that, “Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others” appeals to the ideals of oppression and as a result, “negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (72). The oppressors in this situation deprive the oppressed from their own thoughts and opinions, causing them to adopt those of others. As this applies to students in general, certain racial groups are affected in various ways as a consequence of this system.

One of the most destructive effects of oppression that American schools have fostered is the criminalization of their students, specifically African Americans. From a young age, students are identified as either a “good student” or a “troublemaker” and they are subjected to different methods of punishment, such as receiving a red card or losing points for bad behavior. While being identified as a “bad” student is discouraging and dehumanizing, it is especially a serious case among African Americans who are targeted for misconduct. For historical context, James Baldwin’s *A Talk to Teachers* describes the prejudice in the education system towards black students where they are fed information about their racial stereotypes and expectations. This goes back to the way the banking method works where students form a conception of their identity based on what they are told to know by their teachers. Baldwin states that he would assure any black child that their stereotypes “are the results of a criminal conspiracy to destroy him” (685). Knowing that African Americans make up the largest population in prisons poses the question on how the criminalization of black students has played a role in this effect. Apart from criminalizing students, our current education system has been successful in silencing them.

The silencing of students has also been a form of racial oppression that affects many throughout school, but has predominantly been observed in Asian American students. This observation was noted by Keith Osajima in his essay *Internalized Oppression and the Culture of Silence*, where it is noted that the stereotypes that characterize Asian American students involves their obligation in being silent, smart, obedient, and passive. He explains that the silent and passive behavior of Asian students is due to internalized oppression, a term meaning the oppressed eventually begin to “accept the myths and stereotypes about their group as a part of who they naturally are” (153). Again, this is a result of the banking system where students are “passive recipients” that are told to be “quiet, obedient, unquestioning, prompt, and attentive” (154). Although this applies to Asian American students, the silence of many races are interconnected. For example, in Baldwin’s essay, he also refers to “silent people” as porters and maids who never say “what they think of you”(683). Nevertheless, like criminalization, silence is also a dehumanizing byproduct.

The solutions to the criminalization, silence, and internalized oppression of students is dependent on the end of the banking system. Freire proposes that instead of utilizing the banking method, schools should replace it with “problem-posing education” that “regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (83). In this new method, communication is the foundation of the student-teacher relationship. It promotes critical thinking and creativity without the interference of a dominant figure. Accordingly, instead of being told what to think and believe, students will be able to truly reflect on their own and discover their identity without racial stereotypes defining who they are. As mentioned before, education has been deemed as a source of liberation, but rather has been a site of oppression that

criminalizes and silences them. Freire presents problem-posing education as a form of a liberation in schools because he states that “Authentic liberation- the process of humanization-...” is “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (79). If people are able to reflect on their own instead of through practices of memorization and one-way communication, they are eventually able to contribute to change in their society. This ties in with Baldwin’s view of our “backwards society” and how it is our responsibility to create a change where school promotes growth instead of hindrances for individuality.

The pedagogic institution established in the United States has devastating effects on the development of students where inadequacies in the teacher-student relationship and instruction causes oppression. There are many approaches that can be taken to tackle the repressive effects of the banking system with a purpose of liberation. For example, Baldwin proposes a change to the curriculum of all schools “so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture...”(683). In effect, African Americans would not be criminalized or silenced. He also adds that this change would not only liberate blacks, but would also liberate whites. In a similar manner, Osajima offers his own solutions to the problems of the banking method in his teachings by lessening the amount of time he lectures, encouraging critical thinking, and offering students the opportunity to openly discuss without the fear of ridicule (155). His strategy in attempting to diminish internalized oppression serves as a template for other instructors to discourage the notion that passiveness and silence constitutes the meaning of a “good student”. Furthermore, students of all races would stop being fed information in a manner that derogates inventiveness and will alternately be empowered to overcome their

hardships in society. In order for education to be a site of liberation, the end of banking system practices is necessary to inhibit the criminalization, silence, and internalized oppression of students of different races.

Works Cited

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